

Understanding the Game of Go: An Explorative Essay Through Culture

Joan Lluís i Rabassó

ABSTRACT

Not only does play constitute a human function as essential as reflection or work, but also the genesis and development of culture have a ludic character. For this reason, in this essay we will analyze the different existing relationships between the game of go and culture. In ancient China, go was born as a game. Its goal was on itself. It was played because its recreational element made the people who practiced it enjoy. Over time, it became a highly appreciated cultural tradition. Along with calligraphy, painting and music, go became one of the four arts that any intellectual had to master.

Cultivate is a word that means many things such as: promote, incubate, educate, encourage, practice, profess, etc. We can say that cultivating is that journey that each human being must end up taking to get to know themselves. There are numerous paths to make this trip. Each way of cultivating oneself through a book, a movie, music, etc. it challenges us and confronts us with ourselves. In short, it activates this journey that takes us towards what one is and the game of go is no exception

Go is an abstract game. When you look at a board full of black and white stones you are faced with something that seems really chaotic. However, due to its nature, one can approach go in different ways: through its ancient history, as an artistic form, its philosophical foundation or through its sociological and scientific aspect. For this reason, learning environments can approach the task of teaching and learning the game of go in a multifaceted and holistic manner, thus facilitating diverse entry points according to the interests of each individual. In this essay, we will explore the game of go through the various spheres of culture to obtain key elements that will help us better understand it and that will be useful for teaching it.

Keywords: Culture, history, philosophy, sociology, science, vital experience, learning environments.

1. Introduction

Go and life are similar. Like life, Go is simple and dynamic, yet profound and mysterious. It shows us that there is always something more to discover, something beyond what we can currently see. Those who play it experience life's laws firsthand, while simultaneously finding greater balance and harmony in their relationships. The most beautiful aspect of Go is that to win, one must live, but also allow the opponent to live. Life and death are merely consequences of good or bad actions, and the true goal is to always seek the best way to act. The game of go has no ultimate end; it's not subject to necessity or subordinate to a particular objective or utility. Its purpose lies within itself. Its glory resides in its sovereignty. Each game becomes a ritual where we put life on the line through a dialogue that

unfolds without words, establishing a genuine connection between the players. During this time, their lives, nourished (Jullien, 2007) by the contemplative and playful element of the game, become renewed and meaningful, as they experience life with wonder (Han, 2020). Every time we place a stone on the board, we reveal a part of ourselves. We entrust to it our feelings, our individuality, our power, and once it has been played, there's no turning back. Each stone carries a great responsibility in our name. All of this helps us know ourselves better, to recognize aspects of ourselves in others, and also allows us to manage our conflicts in a friendly manner. Ultimately, Go is a ritual that makes life's journey more bearable. For this reason, Go is considered the game of life (Jullien, 2007).

2. Historical and modern art approach

2.1.Introduction

On September 11, 1846, one of the most famous go games of all time took place in Edo. It has gone down in history as the Ear-reddening Game. The game was played between two players of theoretically very different levels: Genan Inseki, a 48-year-old 8-dan master and head of the Inoue school, and Kuwahara Shusaku, a young 4-dan player from the Honinbo school, who was only 17 years old and was, in theory, much weaker than his rival. The game developed as expected until move 126, with the old master Inseki taking the lead. Then, suddenly, the young Shusaku placed a stone on an unexpected point on the board (Figure 1). A doctor who was watching the game commented, “the master has just lost.” The other spectators, surprised and annoyed, asked him about his comment. “It is clear that the one who dominates the current position on the board is our master, so you don’t know what you are talking about. You don’t understand the

game of go,” they argued. “Well, you are right,” said the doctor. “I am not an expert in the game of go, I am just a simple amateur. But when the young Shusaku placed that stone on the board, the master Genan Inseki maintained, as always, an imperturbable expression, but he could not help but for his ears to turn terribly red, which indicates to what extent he was upset by the move of his young rival.”

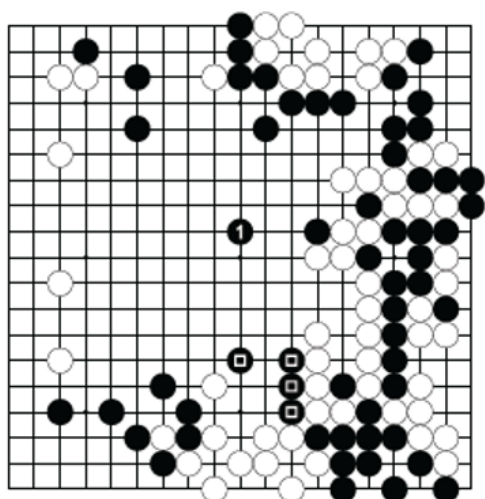


Figure 1

Black 1 has multiple objectives: it expands Black's moyo at the top, helps the four squared black stones, reduces the influence of White's strong position on the right and has an eye on White's moyo on the left

And the doctor was right, indeed. Shusaku's move was a masterpiece that no other spectator had realized, but the old master did. Despite his youth, Shusaku ended up winning the game, which would be recorded in the annals of go history. The *Ear-reddening Game* is an example of how intuition, creativity and the ability to read the game can overcome experience and conventional wisdom. It is a story that reminds us that greatness can arise in the most unexpected places and that age is not always a determining factor in success.

This game is perhaps one of the most iconic go games in history. Throughout the opening and early middle game, Shusaku made some seemingly good moves, but also some that appeared to be mistakes, allowing Inseki to take the lead. However, in the middlegame, Shusaku countered with a move that transformed

the entire state of the game. This single move revealed the true purpose behind his earlier “bad” moves, turning them into strategic advantages. Its impact resonated across the board, and go historians and commentators have revered it as a move one makes only once in a lifetime. In Japanese go terminology, this type of move is called 神の一手 – *Shin no Itte*, which literally translates to “God’s move.” Making a Divine Move is a lifelong aspiration for all go players, similar to an artist striving for perfection. Shusaku’s victory in this game marked the beginning of his outstanding go career.

2.2.Project “Reading History”

The game of go transcends the board, representing themes relevant to art and history. It symbolizes the ongoing process of tradition giving way to innovation, which then becomes part of the new tradition itself. This game suggests that certain historical events or artistic movements may not be fully understood until much later, when the bigger picture becomes clearer. The act of interpretation and reinterpretation is not passive; it’s an ongoing process as crucial as the creation itself, with each new “stone” placed on the board adding a layer of meaning. Of course, this deeper understanding becomes apparent to those who hone their skills in “reading” the game. As for those who choose to ignore these subtle clues, history continues its inevitable march, leaving them behind.

Contemporary artist Michal Martychowiec’s project, “Reading History” (Figure 2) uses the ancient game of go as a metaphor to explore the structures of history, artistic practices, and even individual lives. The similarities between the game’s structure and the flow of history create a fascinating parallel. For those unfamiliar with go, the large format photographs of chosen historical game

moments (Figure 3) might appear simply as geometric compositions. However, for those who understand the game, and especially the masters, these compositions reveal a wealth of information. They may be able to estimate the placement of the game within the historical timeline, infer the emotions or strategies of the players, reconstruct the order of moves (with some margin for error) and even make educated guesses about the game's outcome. This ability to “read” beyond the surface is similar to the skills of historians and those who have learned to interpret cultural symbols and relics.



Figure 2

*Michal Martychowiec's "Reading History" in
Rodriguez Gallery (ARCO 2019, Madrid)*

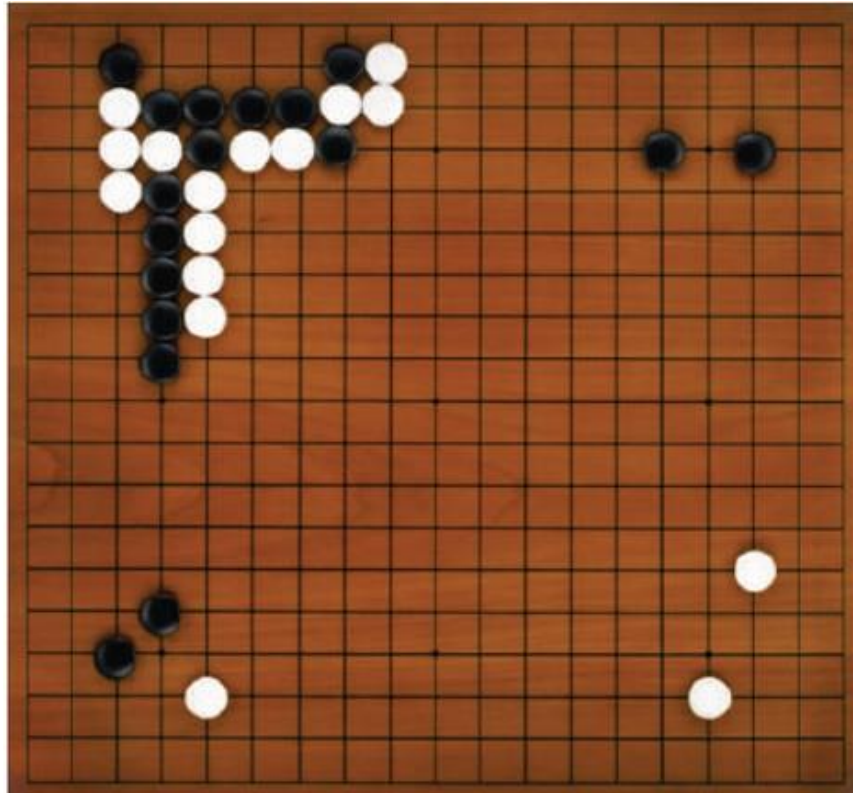


Figure 3
“Reading History” #2 (2018-1846)”, 2018,
print 130 x140 cm

The historical value of Go is unparalleled. While many historical documents in China have not been preserved, kifu records have been meticulously kept. The oldest documented games we have access to date back as early as 196 AD. As the title suggests, the project focuses on the re-enactment of historical go games rather than the creation of new game arrangements. It is divided into several key elements, including:

- *Full Reenactments*: these are actual, live re-creations of historical games played on a wooden board throughout the duration of exhibitions. They actively influence the context, meaning and framework of the surrounding artwork;

- *Large-Format Photographs of Game Moments*: these photographs depict chosen moments from significant games in go history;
- *Large-Format Photographs “Notes from the Board”*: these photographs document notes, images and objects placed within the context of historical games;
- *Historical Stones “Naming History”*: these are actual go stones presented as framed relics, each titled to reference a specific historical event.



Figure 4

Installation of “Reading History” at Jacob-und-Wilhelm-Grimm-Zentrum, Berlin, 2019

In the series of exhibitions presented at the Signum Foundation in 2018, the only element that persisted throughout all four presentations, or rather, developed and reached completion in the final one, was a wooden board re-depicting a game played in Japan in 1846 between the established master Genan Inseki and then 17-year-old Kuwahara Shusaku. The game held historical significance for two

reasons. Firstly, it features one of the most famous moves in Japanese go history. Secondly, it embodies the struggle between youth and experience, showcasing a changing of the guard.

The game highlights the brilliance of a young player, a brilliance that would never be replicated and a single move that transformed what were perceived as weak moves into strategic advantages. In the creation of an idea, whether within a game, artistic practice or even historical events, its meaning or significance may not be immediately clear to the spectator or even the creator. Sometimes, understanding a gesture's true meaning requires observing its impact on what follows. Of course, there are groundbreaking moves in games, artistic gestures or historical events that fundamentally alter the course of history and time. These events can shed light on the past, shape the future and redefine the meaning of everything the artist or society has accomplished up to that point.

The *Naming History* works function similarly to framed relics, with each historical stone serving as a tangible representation. This approach aligns with Martychowiec's initial statement: "The stone itself is nothing, but when placed on the board, it becomes the representation of an idea."

Each physical stone carries within it a potential history of ideas, representing countless games played throughout its existence. While the specific games remain unknown, the stones can be imbued with a sense of mythos (Figure 5). This process of mythologization individualizes each stone and assigns meaning in two ways: historical context, by placing the stone within a specific historical game, attributing it to a particular player and time as well as its historical significance, by associating the stone with a significant historical event. This "two-fold

contextualization” can be determined either by artistic choice or through a system devised by the artist. Ultimately, both methods contribute to the aesthetic transformation of the object. Interpreting history through an artistic lens allows for a mythological approach, resulting in objects that are neither purely archival nor archaeological. These stones become everyday objects transformed into art, imbued with a “relic-like aura.” This aura is created not only by the stone’s pre-artistic past but also by the specific role it plays within the exhibition context (as a work of art). The history surrounding the stone grows, even if the foundation might be an artistic creation. This is the essence of myth-making in art.

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Figure 5

*Installation view from “Above the Sea of
Fog” at Centro Parraga in Murcia, 2022*

3. Philosophical approach

In the West, the approach to the world is typically direct and head-on. The East, on the contrary, prefers a more oblique approach utilizing a surrounding style (Jullien, 2013). These differing mentalities are reflected in a well-known cultural manifestation: strategy games. Chess is a game in which two armies face off and deploy their different military forces, while go is a game in which a common territory is disputed and must be fenced in, using stones of equal force in a surrounding game. Let's look at the main differences that define these two cultures through these two games.

3.1.How is reality understood?

Chess is the progeny of a caste society, ancient India, where each piece has a well-defined role and a constant and invariable value. Its pieces are distinguished from each other by specific properties derived from their nature, giving each of them a fixed identity. The knight is always a knight, the bishop is always a bishop and the pawn is a pawn. From their identities are derived their positions, movements on the board and confrontations. For example, the pawns occupy the second row at the beginning, only the knight can “jump” over other pieces etc. Each piece is unique, has a well-defined role and a constant value. The complexity of the game is thanks to the variety of pieces and identities.

On the other hand, in Go the pieces are round, smooth and anonymous (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013). All are, in principle, “equal” at the start of the game, though the value of each stone is relative over the course of a game because its value is based on its relationship, at any given moment, to all the other stones, along with the general situation on the board. Their ability to move depends

exclusively on the space they occupy and when they do so. The complexity of the game comes from the fluid and changing relationship between the stones.

This feature illustrates one of the main differences between Western and Eastern thought. The Greek philosopher Aristotle considered that all elements composing reality are made up of an identity (that which is fixed and remains) and by accidents (that which is circumstantial and varies). For this reason, in chess what makes a piece, for example, a knight, is not its accidental properties such as color, material or size. It is its form, the place it occupies on the board, the movements it can make and its relative power over other pieces that define it. In other words, it is its nature and not its characteristics that make a knight on the chess board behave as a knight and not something else.

Aristotle conceived that all things have an unchanging “substance” that makes them unique, identifiable and which differentiates them from the rest (Aristotle & Lawson-Tancred, 1999). As they are solidly fixed in their substance, they inhabit and remain, preserving the identity that defines them. By having to assert themselves, and distinguish themselves from others, they necessarily face conflict. Power belongs to he who imposes his essence on the other. That is why, in the case of chess, the one who eliminates the opponent wins. Due to this configuration, a culture and mentality that is oriented towards identity and differentiation necessarily develops a firmness with respect to itself that is expressed in a human’s desire for possessions and the belief that nature is something moldable to human will.

While chess pieces are distinguished from each other by what they are, go stones are a commonality in the East. What makes one stone different from another

is not what Aristotle would consider “substance”. Their individuality and identity appear to have a specific relational value with respect to the whole. That is to say, we are always in front of groups of stones where one defines itself in relation to the whole. The crucial fact is that in the East the idea of identity is regulated by dependencies and reciprocal correspondences. In this way, the relationship to the whole makes up an element of reality. For this reason, Chinese logic conceives things by a process of interaction, and existence is further understood through absence (Han, 2023). In other words, the reality of things does not remain fixed. It flows following a path (Tao), which is the concept proposed by the Eastern thinker Lao Tse (Tzu, 2019). Conflicts appear when the flows that are possible based on established relationships cannot be developed, and therefore, the processes that they entail cannot be deployed, preventing the associated transformations. Power is held by the one who is able to maintain the existing balance or the one who achieves a new balance through new relationships. That is why, in the case of go, the one who is able to best preserve the balance wins. Due to this configuration, the culture and mentality that is oriented towards relationships necessarily develops a fluidity and a sense of permanent change that is manifested in detachment and does not cling to things. All this while feeling like a part of nature and seeking harmony with it, rather than control over it.

3.2.How is time understood?

In chess it comes down to distribution over a closed space. That is, to go from one point to another, to occupy a maximum of squares with a minimum of pieces. The different pieces have their own movement and this can be developed to the extent that space becomes available by the relocation of existing pieces or the elimination of those of the opponent, causing the perception of stasis despite the

movement of pieces. On the other hand, the relationships that are established are also very concrete. They are local, momentary and clearly identified. In a game of chess, the actions taken by the pieces on their own are conditioned by their nature (for example, the king can castle with a rook, but not with a bishop and can only do so in certain circumstances), and those actions taken in relation to the opponent's pieces have the purpose of confrontation and achieving, through the duration of the game, their disappearance from the game board. Every movement is directional. There is a beginning and an end.

In Go, however, the stones are static, since they occupy the same position throughout the game. It is a question of being distributed in an open space, of occupying the space, of conserving the possibility of appearing at any point: movement arises from the continuous interaction between the different stones that appear and disappear. It does not go from one point to another, but seems perpetual. Despite the stillness of the stones, the sensation of movement is permanent without knowing for sure where it begins and where it will go. In addition, stones develop all kinds of relationships with each other and with those of the opponent throughout the game. With the appearance of a stone on each move, these relationships change continuously and imperceptibly, so that the situation must be re-evaluated at all times. The board never stops transforming in a progressive, continuous, global and enveloping way. For example, we can have a group that surrounds another and that seems alive, which may gradually morph into a group surrounded and killed. In the same way, a single stone can capture a group of stones and achieve the momentary occupation of a territory in one fell swoop, becoming very valuable in an instant. But that same stone can also be expendable in another context if it lacks value, and might be captured by the

adversary without any problem. Its value is only known at the end of the game, in the same way that when we surround something in our reality, we only come to value it fully when we reach the end.

Western thought has formulated the concept of “time” in a very concrete way. That is to say, it has conceived of it abstractly as a course with a beginning and an end, in which events follow one another, leaving behind a before and announcing an after where the principle of cause governs an effect. In China, not only are verbs not conjugated temporally, but also temporal phenomena are not linked to movement and, therefore, neither to spatial ones. Instead of conceiving nature in terms of movement, it was conceived by relationships, which is why China has reflected more on the phenomena of process and transformation. Unlike action, transformation is not local, it is global. It cannot be momentary, but progressive and continuous and develops continuously in the form of a process. It does not refer to a subject in the same way an action might, but proceeds discreetly by influence in an enveloping way. For this reason, just as the action is seen while it is happening and the actor is known, the results of transformation are only seen once obtained, without knowing who carried it out.

In the West, life is understood as a linear itinerary that begins at birth and ends at death. The essence of this vision are these two events, since they are the ones that define all our actions in this world. This last encounter conditions our life, since it supposes our disappearance. Life is always the result of different confrontations, just as it happens in a game of chess. On the other hand, in the East the idea of transition prevails; these concepts have been developed in a different way and are understood as transformation. Growing up, we don't see children growing up. But one day, when we look at them again, we are surprised

that they are already taller than us. Aging: we do not see aging. Not only because we age constantly and aging is too progressive and continuous to be obvious, but also because everything in us ages. Everything: not only the hair turns white, but the body weakens, appearance ages – the smile and the timbre of the voice and the gesture of the hand, everything bends. As everything is modified and nothing is graspable, the manifestation of all this we do not see. Thus, death is not a destination, nor is it found. It is not an event to be feared or faced, but rather it is the result, the maturation of this silent transformation that is life (Jullien, 2011). For all these reasons, Go is known as the game of life.

3.3. How is space understood?

Chess takes place on a board that is symmetrical, but whose game position is fixed by having to place the first white square in the first row to the right of each player. The position of the board, then, is not arbitrary or relative, it is fixed and subject to this rule which acts as a keystone, a reference point. Chess takes place in a striated space, that is, closed and rigidly segmented in a binary way (black and white squares), determining the movements of the pieces according to their identities (the white king must initially be located on a black square; a bishop can only move on white or black squares, etc.). In chess, the game begins with all the pieces on the board. The player has all the resources at his disposal, and often the endgame is played on a nearly deserted battlefield.

On the other hand, the go board is symmetrical and can be placed in any orientation, there is no rule that fixes it, that holds it. Despite the grid that covers it, the go board constitutes, instead, a flat, open and non-hierarchical space in the distribution of its marks (the points on the grid do not respond to any binary or hierarchical pattern). In it, points and areas only exist as a function of the

territories defined by the entrances and exits of the stones, whose identity is only defined, in turn, by their variable appearances and disappearances. In go, the board begins empty. It starts from nothing, because this is the condition of the possibility of everything, and it is built up little by little, populated with structures, groups of stones, territories and conflicts on various “fronts”. Often, when neither opponent has managed to capture groups of the opponent’s stones, the endgame features boards almost completely full of life.

From this point of view we might consider that the West divides the space of reality into two: what is and what should be, according to the world view Plato bequeathed to us. The Western idea of efficacy is derived from this: it is about projecting onto reality what should be (Plato & Lane, 2007) (in the form of a Plan or Model), and then attempting to materialize it (put it into practice, execution), evaluating it, setting objectives, putting in the work to achieve such goals and, subsequently, developing actions that lead us to the expected results after making the necessary effort (Jullien, 2004). We can understand this in the case of chess where the space is relatively small and its use is a tactical or strategic means to kill the opponent. In chess, spaces arise as the different movements of each player’s pieces lead to their capture and later removal from the board. A player must approach the game in search of that confrontation leading them to obtain a positional advantage on the board, or allow them to reach a greater number or value of captured pieces than their opponent. To make each move a reality, it is necessary for each player to imagine it in their understanding and execute it with their will.

In Eastern thought, the space of reality is not divided in two. It is conceived of as the very course of the real. The real is not the formless or chaotic matter our

organization expects: it is already organized, according to the teachings of Lao Tzu. It has facilitating elements or potentialities that are nothing more than propensities, inclinations and tendencies that can be detected and taken advantage of. In Go we can understand these concepts through the notion of game direction, which provides us with a vision of where the game is headed, how it is progressing and which spaces it will tend to occupy. Also, via the term “influence” we can identify the space where the potential for our groups to live might be found. For all these reasons, it is not necessary to model and project first, and then apply later, but rather to listen, evaluate, accompany and develop the potential of the situation. Not to act, but to be acted upon. Do not force, but respond. Not by directly pursuing a goal, but exploiting a propensity – waiting for an effect, because the effects are contained in it. The initiative does not come from any subject, but from the situation: the background wave.

3.4. How is power understood?

In chess, the board is a battlefield where the two contenders have equal power because they have the same resources occupying similar positions at either end of the board. This board is made up of a set of 64 black and white squares on which the different pieces are located. It is these squares that give power to each piece. In fact, when a piece is threatened with capture, it is said to be in *check*. This indicates that a power is being exercised over it, since if it does not change squares, it can die. In this way, *square* and *check* become synonymous and lend the game its name. Power is exercised by limiting the possibilities of locating a piece on a given square, leaving it without space until it is captured if necessary. The end of the game is achieved when the opposing king is in checkmate: it cannot occupy either the square it is on, nor the adjacent ones without being captured.

Through a structure of coercion that leads to the oppression of the other, power approaches violence, and in this way the adversary is weakened. As the game progresses, the number of spaces increases along with the possibility of developing movement. It is then when power is more powerful and more stable, when it generates the sensation of freedom and does not need any violence. In the middlegame of chess, we find that the margin of freedom that a player has is nothing other than the factor of domination that the opposing player is exercising over them. The movements are exclusive and discriminative, never compensatory. Under these conditions, freedom may be a fact or an appearance, but it operates on power, stabilizing it and constituting it. This is stealth power. Conflicts are resolved, but through an encounter or confrontation in which the opponent has no place and, therefore, transformation is impossible. In the next step, one of the two players attains absolute power that manifests itself with total clarity. There is no need to point out, because such is their power that only they exist in the game, while the opponent has ceased to be. In this way, the game becomes a debating tool, in which the objective is to expose better arguments than the rival in order to reclaim the space of said arguments, to subdue and occupy it without leaving room for anything else. At this point the game ends, manifesting all the power for one, thanks to denying the existence of the other.

In Chinese, the term “power” is represented by the character (pronounced /quán/). Throughout history, wise people or figures who held some kinds of authority have always been represented with a large crook or scepter in their hands, indisputable symbols of power, which is what this ideograph symbolizes. As it could not be otherwise, it is not subject to any essence, but lacks any conclusive, absolute or immutable character. At first, the weight used on a

measuring scale (Roman-type scale) is called quán, with which we seek balance by moving the weights to the right or left, adjusting it until we find the correct medium. Therefore, quán means moving and weighing. It does not have a fixed or definitive position. Rather, it is shifting, displaceable and provisional, like the crux of a balance. It varies its position to find balance based on the weight on the opposite side (Han, 2018).

The go board can be considered like a scale and the two players as the plates or, if you prefer, its opposite ends. At the start of the game, everything must be balanced, which is why the concept of handicap exists. In this way, go is designed so that players of different levels can play it under equal conditions. From there the goal of the game can be understood as follows. Each player, by means of their moves, must achieve two tasks at the same time. On the one hand, they must seek their own balance between the different facets of their personality (strength–flexibility, reflection–impulsiveness, aggressive–peaceful, etc.) and try, while weighing the possibilities and alternatives of each move, not to opt too much for one extreme or the other, but to assess their options and toggle between them until they find a kind of balance that compensates both tendencies through quán. Additionally, and in parallel to the development of their personal proposal that they synthesize during the game, they must attend to their opponent’s proposal and analyze it alongside their own in order to identify their arguments and claims and respond correctly to them. Quán designates the ability to adapt to changing situations and benefit from them. If the opponent switches to a certain type of game, they must interpret the movement of the quán taking place in order to rebalance and, if possible, equalize the lost balances through their play. In the context of quán, nothing is definitive. In this way, the game becomes a tool for

improving each player and the game is nothing more than a work of art the two players have made together. The result, win or loss, does not matter, what matters is to keep playing and, in doing so, improve.

Finally, quán can also mean the capacity and ability that one has to achieve balance and harmony in each aspect of life. In ancient Chinese culture, “power” is not of a political nature nor does it manifest itself in the form of political skill as it does in the West, but in the form of “strategic” domination. The concept of “strategy” in China also differs from ours. In the West, strategy (etymologically it is the art of leading armies) is deployed to put the enemy out of action or leave them paralyzed. In China, on the contrary, it is deployed to generate in the “other” a constant and very subtle domination or relationship of dependency that, in turn, imprints a strong sense of order, control and harmony in society. In addition, it is a very unique and characteristic formula of their traditional thinking. It is an innate expression and it is also manifested constantly in the genius and instinct of the Chinese people, and therefore, in their philosophical and religious doctrines, since it is, and has been, the common foundation of the laws, customs and way of being of this civilization. This model of strategic domination has a relatively small cost and at the same time makes coercion or violence totally useless.

3.5.How are social changes understood?

Chess focuses on capturing a single piece in a linear battle to “kill” the “King”. This creates an approach based on action and confrontation. The two sides meet to dispute a hegemonic position that in no case can be shared by both parties, and the available occupied space can only belong to the one who achieves victory. Reality cannot be shared, and while the game is played, one power must succumb to the other, for only one supreme entity can inhabit and reign. There is only one

essence. The only way out is through the rival, to resist them until their complete and absolute elimination.

As a model of change, chess could be likened to a revolution, since there exists a centralized platform seeking to force the current situation to a breaking point, shatter the established order and impose another. This is where the etymology of the word revolution comes from, which means nothing more than turning the situation around, changing one order for another. In short, it is about eliminating an existing power and replacing it with a new one. The revolution itself is the visible and noisy manifestation, the event that finally illustrates the unseen and silent transformation that had been developing for a time. Revolution, as an extreme action, necessarily provokes a reaction, giving rise to a duality of forces who debate and become rivals. Every revolution is followed by restorations, which may take more or less time to arrive, but refuses to die since the revolution has been integrated into a new historical context. All of the above points assume that control of a social position, or person, is required to wield power in a society and claim, subdue and occupy the conquered space with new arguments.

Go is a strategy game whose objective is to enclose more open space than your opponent can surround by using stones. Invariably, the action starts in the corners, moving then to the sides, and finally focusing on the center of the board, since space is easier to close in this order. The game ends when there is no more possible space to be fenced. As a model of change, Go has a logic that is decentralized and does not depend on a single character or battle.

Go presupposes a more organic process, with change beginning in the corners of a society, with networks occurring between the corners, and eventually the

center of the board being surrounded and captured without the need for direct confrontation. An unexpected “overnight” success could be explained in this way. The game can be won even without control of the center of the board, if there is more space at the periphery. In this sense, it presents us with a paradigm of change different from that of the revolution: that of silent and unseen transformation. It doesn’t force anything, it doesn’t oppose anything, it doesn’t fight, but contorts itself like an oil stain. It allows itself to be assimilated by the reality it discovers while at the same time undoing that same reality that has assimilated it. As it does not generate any resistance, it does not make noise, neither its arrival nor its progress is heard. It does not provoke rejection. It spreads without warning. It cannot, therefore, be located or responded to. It influences the situation without being noticed, until it changes without being taken into account and even without being seen, despite its evidence and the fact that it is inexorable.

4. Social and Science approach

In his book “Give me a laboratory and I will Raise the World and I will move the world”, Bruno Latour, an academic who has studied the relationship between science and technology, explains how Louis Pasteur faced the anthrax epidemic of the late 19th century by finding a vaccine in his laboratory (Latour, 2009). Curiously, the first illustration in the book is a game of go. This story begins in 1881 in France after the Industrial Revolution, when the world was far from the idea of modern science as it was limited to scientists locked away in laboratories. One of the consequences of all this was the number of diseases that arose, especially due to the population explosion that occurred. Among the most outstanding threat was anthrax. This not only affected animals, but altered the

normal functioning of the agrarian society at the time. It is in this context that the genius of Louis Pasteur solved this difficult problem in one of the most notable scientific experiments in history. Next, we will explore the keys to understanding that success and its relationship to the fascinating game of go.

French society was desperate for something to counter the problem of anthrax, as they could not find any solution. Pasteur revolutionized both society and science by installing a rustic laboratory in one of the farms to study the disease. In other words, Pasteur took his laboratory to a farm, extending its reach and blurring the separation between what happens outside at a social level (the concern about an epidemic) with the internal processes of the laboratory (experiments with methods only known to scientists).

This also occurs in the course of a game of go. Often a circumstance occurs where it is not very clear who is surrounding whom, nor what is inside and what is outside of each player's territory (Figure 6). In each action that Pasteur and his team of scientists carried out, it was difficult to assess where the laboratory began and where it ended, since there was no clear border that defined this separation – the science-society border had become diluted and permeable. This also occurs in a game of go, where the process of determining the territories of each player becomes diffuse and occurs gradually through multiple interactions between the different groups.

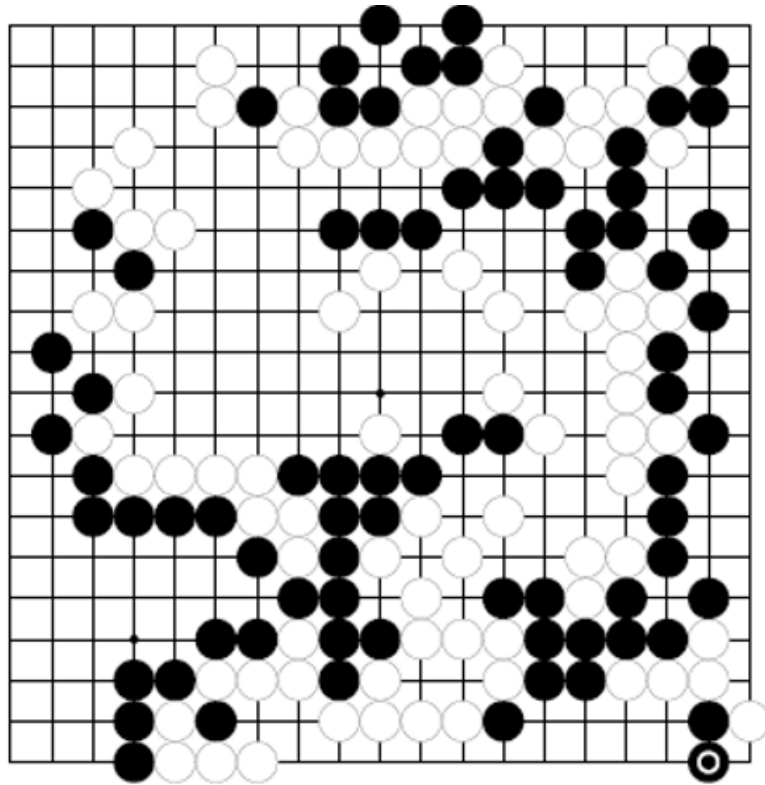


Figure 6

Ilya Shikshin 1p (Black) vs, Artem

Kachanovskiy 1p, Grand Slam 2016

Pasteur not only began to build knowledge in collaborating with his colleagues, but also with farmers, veterinarians and citizens in general. He showed the world that he could observe, understand, manipulate and predict something that few really understood, giving him the opportunity to create a vaccine. With all this he demonstrated that laboratories and science were not delimited by four walls. In a similar way, when you play a game of go you realize that the most important thing is not trying to surround your opponent's stones and eliminate them, but to keep your own groups alive. Living is easier than killing.

The second lesson that Pasteur gave us was about the scope of some of the problems that laboratories investigate and solve. That is, when solving a problem on a micro-scale we find that it will also be solved on a macroscale. Similarly,

what occurs in one corner of the board can end up having consequences on the center of it, because of the interdependencies inherent in the game (Figure 7).

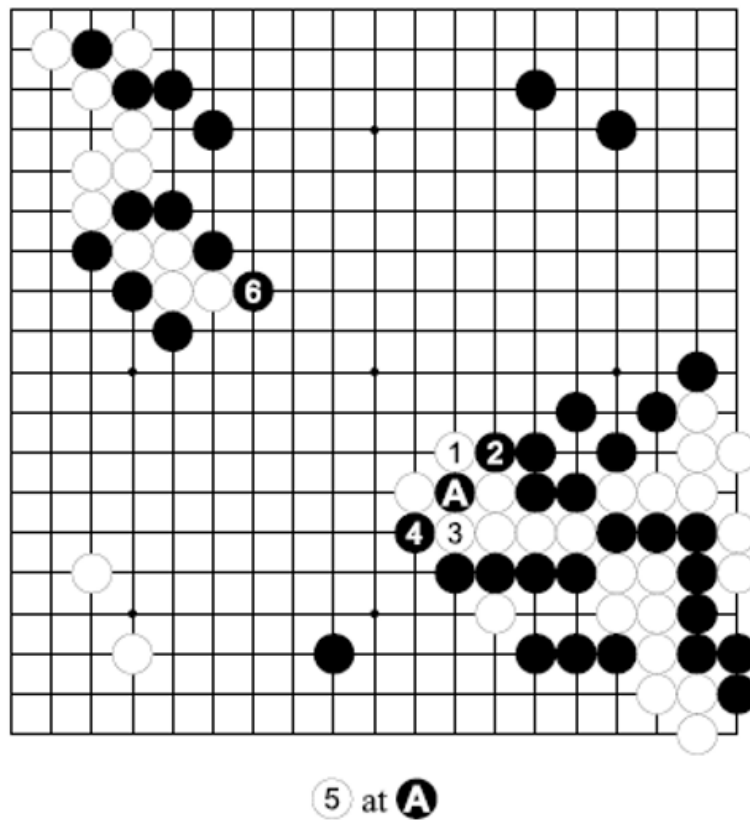


Figure 7

*A variation from the game between Lee
Sedol 6p (Black) and Hong Jansik 4p played
in 2003 in the 3rd KAT Cup*

In our story, what can be done in a laboratory at the micro-level, the manipulation of a microbe in a lab, can have a macro effect, as in disseminating a vaccine throughout France. It is this concept that gives the title to Bruno Latour's book, paraphrasing Archimedes. By changing the location of the laboratory, Pasteur changed his area of effect and, with it, the impact of his action. Due to this, Pasteur was able to "pasteurize" France. Pasteur couldn't fight the microbes directly, he couldn't wage a frontal war against them, instead he started a go style guerrilla warfare. He had to wage a "protracted war", manage boundary

conditions, occupy and create stable “islands”, gaining healthy territory incrementally (Latour, 2005).

Thanks to all this he was able to expand the effect of his influence from the local level to a victory on the entire board. Like the Archimedean lever, the go board can be understood as a laboratory where life is experienced and, depending on where it is located as a point of support, its force and impact can vary. Additionally, it is possible to understand that, to paraphrase Clausewitz, war is the continuation of politics by other means (Clausewitz, 2021),. With this action our protagonist shows that science is nothing more than the continuation of politics carried out with other means.

Pasteur succeeded because, like a good go player, he combined strategic, tactical and ethical skills in a holistic way. That is to say, in go, the ability to play the game is not limited to the technical skills of the game itself, as it also includes a certain holistic code of conduct while playing the game. For example, players should pick up the stones with their index and middle fingers, should not rest their heads on their elbows, should not hold the stones and make noise with them while thinking, and so on. They must not go against what is called “the spirit of go”, where respect for the opponent makes the players stronger. What is sought when playing is to understand and appreciate the possibilities of the game, not to triumph over the other. Satisfaction comes from the quality of the game, with individual wins and losses being the least significant. These rules of etiquette at the behavioral level of each player (micro-scale) are just as important in go as the purely technical mastery of the game’s skills (macro-scale). Additionally, the game of go does not represent or illustrate anything given its abstract essence, but, by its very nature, it is capable of transforming reality on all scales. Just as in the

game itself, by establishing relationships, the stones create a reality at the micro-level with specific shapes and characteristics. The very part of the game activity, by establishing relationships with players, spectators, fans at a distance, configures a reality at macro scale that impacts the community where it is played on a social, political and scientist level. For all these reasons, we could say that playing go is a continuation of life, just carried out in other ways.

Pasteur achieved not only a scientific solution, but also a social and political relevance that he did not have previously. In this sense, the go board and its stones can be understood as the whole of a society where the different groups (scientists, sociologists, politicians, etc.) compete and collaborate to have a greater territory or sphere of influence, or as the territory where they face each. It is important to highlight that, in political terms, the influence of Pasteurian laboratories reached further, was deeper and more irreversible because the researchers were able to intervene so much in the details of daily life at a micro-level through recommendations to the population (boiling milk, washing hands), as well as actions at the macro-level (improving sewage systems, reorganizing hospitals), without ever being seen as an established political power. As in the game of go, the key was a holistic combination of both approaches.

The third lesson that Pasteur left us for life and science is that every scientist has the duty to make a written translation of his ideas and discoveries, since this is the only way for their work to transcend and be implemented across time and cultures. In other words, scientific records are the mechanism through which everything that happens in a laboratory is synthesized into “scientific fact” and, in this way, these ideas endure.

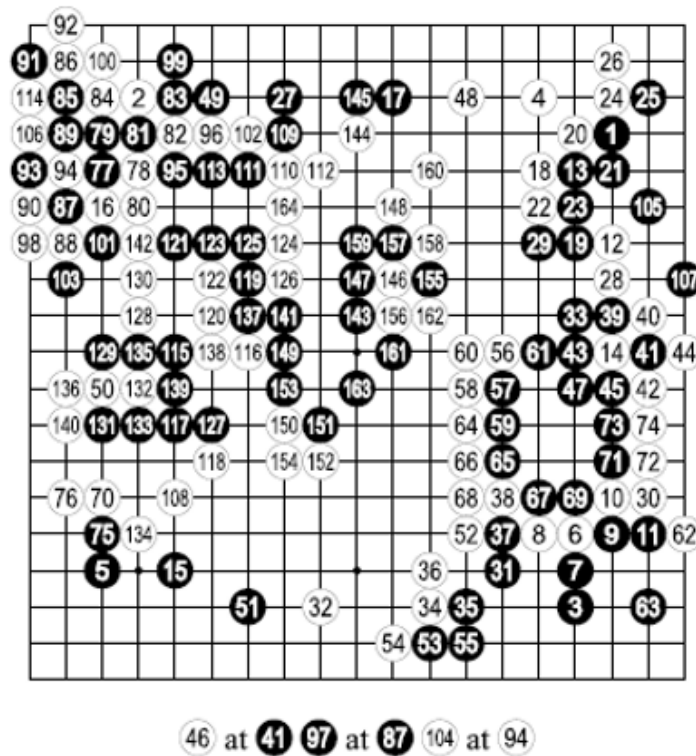


Figure 8

*A board position from page 3 of the book
 “Give me a laboratory and I will move the
 world” by Bruno Latour. It is the final
 position of the game played between Kitani
 Minoru 9p (black) and Go Seigen 9p in 1957*

Similarly, a game of go leaves a trace in the form of a record that can be reproduced in another place and time (Figure 8). Go is the oldest game still played with the same rules with which it was originally created and this provides it with enormous power. A game record is proof that those two players played that game and, for this reason, every time we replay it, we analyze, reinterpret and learn new things – this has ripples of effect in every go-playing society in the world.

5. Go Learning Environments: Three Ways to Play

Over time, each of us will seek different experiences in life. Some will be active, such as climbing a mountain, while others make us passive spectators, like watching a soccer game. Some experiences are immersive and we can lose ourselves in an invisible world, for example when watching a movie in a good cinema with a giant screen and surround sound, or when we are fully absorbed in the task at hand, losing track of time when we play a musical instrument. Could we think, then, of an experience that provides us with all these possibilities at the same time? In this sense, playing go can be considered a total life experience, since it is capable of encompassing all these possibilities and variables at the same time.

Go is an entertaining activity due to its great recreational components. On the other hand, it has a huge educational component that forces you to study and learn if you want to improve. Furthermore, when practiced as a sport, it provides large doses of absorption and immersion where one loses track of time. And finally, it promotes a contemplative and aesthetic experience as its practice can be considered a form of artistic expression. But what happens when we can't have the experience in person? Is it possible to experience activity, passivity, immersion or absorption in the same way as when we play live with another person in front of us?

One of the possibilities that the Internet and IT technologies have given us is to play go online through a computer, tablet or mobile phone. In this case, the playing experience is certainly different. Despite partially preserving the aforementioned characteristics, some substantially different aspects also appear

that are important to highlight. First of all, the opponent is invisible, since we do not know what they look like or what their reactions are to individual moves. Therefore, non-verbal communication, allowing us to identify whether they are calm and firm or nervous and worried about the evolution of the game, is not possible. As in the over-the-board format, the game takes place in silence, but you can communicate with the opponent through a chat. This tool is the one used for both the initial greeting and the closing of the game. Therefore, the rules of courtesy, which are essentially visual and tactile, become textual. The relationship of the players to the stones and the board occurs on a visual level, since the players don't come into contact with either. The stones, then, are not placed on the board, and the only interaction with them is a click of the mouse or the pressing of a touch screen with your finger. The tactile sensation is lost (Han, 2022).

The graphical features of a computer bring us closer to the beauty of the game by simulating three dimensions. It is even possible to hear the sound that the stones make when they come into contact with the board in a very similar way to the real thing. However, all the sounds generated at each move become equal and homogeneous, and the nuances of intensity and forcefulness that players use to signify the value of a certain action are lost. The tone is always the same, which means that the game of go loses its musicality. The rhythm of the game with time management is also perceived differently, since the clock is activated and deactivated automatically when placing a stone on the virtual board. In this way, the time that elapses from when we take a stone from the bowl until it hits the board passes immediately and uninterrupted by the usual sounds marking the rhythm of execution (Han, 2017). In short, it could be concluded that the experience of playing go online becomes something primarily visual, where speed

prevails. All of this, together with the fact that everything is represented in a two-dimensional space, causes a large part of the depth of playing go in person to be lost.

Recently, a new possibility of playing go has appeared, thanks to the contributions of artificial intelligence and robotics. We are presented with an innovative way to play go initially intended for young players. It works through a unique combination of advanced technology and humanlike interactions using a screen, camera, voice, board, bowls and robotic arm. The truth is that I was immediately captivated because the experience seemed very fun and interesting. On this occasion, the opponent is not human either, but it is visible and we can interact with it. We can see and recognize the different expressions on its face. We can hear the positive reinforcement in its voice encouraging us to play. Written language not only loses all prominence, but it disappears completely. Using a screen and a camera, it is possible to maintain nonverbal communication with our adversary. With this, the interaction between both players and the associated rules of courtesy are no longer textual and are once again visual, tactile and audible. Thanks to the fact that the components of the game really exist, interaction with all its elements can be carried out on all levels via the senses. The stones and the board can be seen, touched and heard in all their completeness. This allows players to move away from the electronic screen, omnipresent in the online version, and return to the physical board to enjoy an immersive playing experience. By being free from distractions, such as advertisements and other games, it is possible to promote and regain attention, concentration and protect our vision by reducing eye strain.

In this case, the only thing that is virtual is the opponent, but with a certain corporeality, mobility and capacity for interaction, it is possible to enjoy a more authentic gaming experience that is closer to the real thing. For these reasons, the player can improve in their spatial cognition, judgment, prediction and other perceptual skills. With all this, part of the depth that the game of go provides in all its dimensions is recovered. In short, it could be concluded that with this solution – humanizing robots, but not robotizing people – a balance is produced between culture and technology that makes it possible to be captivated by the beauty of this fascinating game, while enjoying the multiple functionalities that these technological advances bring to the world of go. It seems that it is basically designed for children, but I think that many of us who have long since left that age would like to try it. Well, deep down, playing a few games of go with this new opponent is the type of thing that the child in all of us yearns for.

6. Conclusion

As a child, my grandparents and I played many different games around the table. I hold these moments dear to me not only for their play and fun, but also for what I learned. As a father, I continue this tradition with my son and the process is repeating itself with me on the other side, giving me a sort of double-vision (Huizinga, 2024). Some games have been different, while others have stood the test of time, but the results and experiences have always been rewarding.

Today, entertainment has worked its way into every facet of our daily lives, bringing about a fundamental change in how we understand the world. This trend towards gamification clashes with Western tradition since leisure is related to

distraction, laziness and insignificance. The consequence of hedonism is a world destined for decadence and nullity. In our cultural tradition, work and effort, suffering and seriousness are praised. One sees proof of this is in our artistic traditions, which echo the idea that without suffering there is banality. Faced with such opposition, a reconciliation between our traditions and current trends seems impossible (Han, 2019). However, Go perfectly embraces this paradox as a form of moral entertainment. It reveals new unknowns every time it is played, leaving one to discover that without effort and hard work, it cannot be solved. Others are needed – the community – and that is its uniqueness. It is an individual game that becomes collective.

Go is a strategic game. It is common to associate strategy with war, and for this reason strategy games are often called “war games”. However, strategies can have multiple applications and be applied in all areas of life. Above all, in the case of go, which has a high degree of abstraction, the stones can be seen in many ways: as soldiers on a battlefield, as decisions one makes in implementing a plan or as words in a conversation. In fact, go is also called “shudan” in Japanese, which means “hand language” – a language in which words are unnecessary. In this way it can be said that in a game of go both players dialogue using the stones without needing to articulate any words (Yasuda, 2024).

Go is a game, but above all, it is a vital experience that shakes one up. What I mean by that is that the game reshapes one’s suppositions while playing by putting into play dynamics that reveal one’s contradictions. If there is anything exemplary of human nature, it is contradiction. But it is not the type of contradiction that can be resolved dialectically by reaching a conclusion. No, what we have in a game of Go is an irresolvable paradox, a coexistence with

complexity. Despite its simple rules, the game leads us to take a leap over a cliff and thus realize we are face to face with a problem we will never understand. In DeepMind's Documentary *AlphaGo – The Movie*, Frank Lantz, Director of the New York University Game Center, says, "There is a reason why people have been playing go and continue to play go for thousands of years, right? It's not just that they want to understand go. They want to understand what *understanding* is." And that is still unresolved. That mystery, that magic is what fills go with its fascination.

Go is a game of surrounding and enveloping territory. But we never quite enclose it completely, neither our territory nor that of our adversary. There is no solution that would guarantee that the developed game is "correct". In this sense, there is nothing solid, conclusive or closed, since it depends each time on the relations drawn and blurred on the board by the interaction of the stones. Through this dynamism, one is changed by each game because one's relationship to the complexity changes, similarly to life itself. Therefore, emotions appear that you cannot manage and this moves you. To live and to continue living, one must move. That which is already resolved is dead. It is precisely the knowledge of the cracks within us, those which are not fully under our control, that deeply bothers us. But, at the same time, it enables an experience of resonance, a communion of our interiority with that of all those who also play (Rosa, 2021).

Go is a hermeneutic device enabling endless interpretations and is therefore extremely useful in multiple contexts of life. This enormous ambivalence is because, like any good paradox, it does not solve anything – it does not resolve anything. On the contrary, at every moment it enables space for reflection, for misunderstanding and restlessness. As Takeo Kajiwara 9p (1923 – 2009), a great

professional player once said, “Every time you place a stone on the board you are showing something of yourself. It’s not just a piece of slate, shell or plastic. You have entrusted to this stone your feelings, your individuality, your power and once you have played it, there is no turning back. Each stone carries a great responsibility on your behalf.” In each new game, the player is transformed through each encounter, because one also confronts oneself during each encounter, ensuring that space for reflection. In the movie *The Hedgehog*, Paloma, a tremendously intelligent eleven-year-old girl emphasizes that, “The most beautiful thing about go is that to win you have to live, but also let your opponent live. Life or death are only the consequences of a good or bad action. And, in the end, what counts is building well.”

Finally, let us remember Yasunari Kawabata’s words, “If one chooses to look upon go as valueless, [...] then absolutely valueless it is; and if one chooses to upon it as a thing of value, then a thing of absolute value it is.” We can consider each game of go as a symbolic board where the players ritually recreate and reproduce the myth exposed in its rules. And what is that myth in the case of go? The mystery of life. When the rules are explained to a newcomer, the myth is told anew, and the players turn once again into the heroes of the adventure. By their actions on the board, the players are witness to and witnessed by the game itself. They end up becoming a part of it and the life of the other (Gabriel, 2020). No player can direct the destiny of the game, but we all become part of the work of art. This is none other than living a good life.

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