

Zyzygy

A Glass Bead Game

It is my intension to offer a Board Game worthy of consideration to those who aspire to be "*Players of the Game*". This internet Game is designed in sympathy with the detailed and contemplative descriptions of the rules, conduct and spirit of the Glass Bead Game, as described by Herman Hesse in his novel, "Magister Ludi The Glass Bead Game".

The following are the inspiring elements selected and quoted verbatim*. These serve as the guiding principles of Zyzygy. These elements are taken mainly from the prologue of the novel. My commentary makes my point of view known, and the elements which have been incorporated into the Game are discussed.

- "It is an old idea that the more pointedly and logically we formulate a thesis, the more irresistibly it cries out for its antithesis." Page 3
* *Even our thoughts are Yoked Together.*
- "But a glance at the early history of that life of the mind we now lead, namely, a glance at the development of the Glass Bead Game, shows us irrefutably that every phase of its development, every extension, every change, every essential segment of its history, whether it be seen as progressive or conservative, bears the plain imprint of the person who introduced the change." Page 4
* *This certainly applies to me.*
- "These rules, the sign language and grammar of the Game, constitute a kind of highly developed *secret* * language drawing upon several sciences and arts, but especially mathematics and music (and/or musicology), and capable of expressing and establishing interrelationships between the content and conclusions of nearly all scholarly disciplines." Page 6
* *I disagree with the use of the word, secret; I do not think there needs to be anything secret about this process.*
- "Even if it should so happen that two players by chance were to choose precisely the same small assortment of themes for the content of their Game, these two Games could present an entirely different appearance and run an entirely different course, depending on the qualities of mind, character, mood, and virtuosity of the players." Page 7

** Since everything is related to everything else, this makes perfect Game sense to me. The combination of beads and symbols gives a vast number of possibilities, fostering individual uniqueness.*

- “But furthermore the mind also measures symbolically, by comparison, as when it employs numerals and geometric figures and equates other things with them.” Page 8
** There will be many symbols for the beads to play upon, all of which shall be approved and archived.*
- Quoted from Lu Bu We’s, Spring and Autumn by Herman Hesse, “The origins of music lie far back in the past. Music arises from Measure and is rooted in the great Oneness. The great Oneness begets the two poles; the two poles beget the power of Darkness and of Light.” Page 19
** We need music and musical Games. I will need help with this.*
- “The Game was at first nothing more than a witty method for developing memory and ingenuity among students and musicians.” Page 21
** It still is, however the audience is larger.*
- “One would call out, in the standardized abbreviations of their science, motifs or initial bars of classical compositions, whereupon the other had to respond with the continuation of the piece, or better still with a higher or lower voice, a contrasting theme, and so forth. It was an exercise in memory and improvisation....” Pages 21-22
** This is another example of a Game type. Others include parallel play, counterpoint/synthesis and free scripted Games.*
- “Given these interests, it was perhaps only natural that he... [Bastian Perrot]... should have constructed a frame, modeled on a child’s abacus, a frame with several dozen wires on which could be strung glass beads of various sizes, shapes, and colors. The wires corresponded to the lines of the musical staff, the beads to the time-values of the notes, and so on.” Page 22
**Help wanted: A musician to construct this summation instrument, and help with the musical piece for which I am ill equipped.*
- “For a long while, indeed, a characteristic feature in the Game’s history was that it was constantly preferred, used, and further elaborated by whatever branch of learning happened to be experiencing a period of high development or renaissance. The mathematicians brought the Game to a high degree of flexibility and capacity for sublimation, so that it began to acquire something approaching a consciousness of itself and its possibilities.” Pages 22-23
** This applies to so many branches of learning today, they shall all be included.*

- “At various times the Game was taken up and imitated by nearly all the scientific and scholarly disciplines, that is, adapted to the special fields. There is documented evidence for its application to the fields of classical philology and logic. The analytical study of musical values had led to the reduction of musical events to physical and mathematical formulas. Soon afterward philology borrowed this method and began to measure linguistic configurations as physics measured processes in nature. The visual arts soon followed suit, architecture having already led the way in establishing the links between visual art and mathematics. Thereafter more and more new relations, analogies, and correspondences were discovered among the abstract formulas obtained in this way. Each discipline which seized upon the Game created its own language of formulas, abbreviations, and possible combinations.” Page 23
** We shall start with the field of education. Zyzygy's structure and direction of play conform to Formal Logic.*
- “The Game was not mere practice and mere recreation; it became a form of concentrated self-awareness for intellectuals.” Page 24
** In Zyzygy, artistic creativity, emotional intelligence, religious contemplation and social cooperation all have equal standing along with intellectuality. This is one function of the "Realizing Doors".*
- “To return now to the Glass Bead Game: what it lacked in those days was the capacity for universality, for rising above all the disciplines. The astronomers, the classicists, the scholastics, the music students all played their Games according to their ingenious rules, but the Game had a special language and set of rules for every discipline and sub discipline.” Page 26
** So does Zyzygy.*
- “It was the achievement of one individual which brought the Glass Bead Game almost in one leap to an awareness of its potentialities, and thus to the verge of its capacity for universal elaboration.... This great man's name in civil life can no longer be ascertained; by his time the cult of personality in intellectual fields had already been dispensed with. He lives on in history as Lusor (or also, Joculator) Basiliensis.*.... Although his invention, like all inventions, was the product of his own personal merit and grace, it in no way sprang solely from personal needs and ambitions, but was impelled by a more powerful motive.” Page 26
** This character is my personal favorite, and the cult of non-personality applies to all players.*
- “After Joculator Basiliensis' grand accomplishment, the Game, rapidly evolved into what it is today; the quintessence of intellectuality and art, the sublime cult, the *unio mystica* of all separate members of the *Universitas Litterarum*.” Page 28
** I do not think of it as a cult; I think of it as unifying human endeavor, but otherwise this is Zyzygy , "The Holy Grail of Games"!*

- “That name,... [the Glass Bead Game]... which for many a prophetic spirit in those days embodied a visionary ideal, was: Magic Theater.” Page 28
* *Magic Theatre appears in the interaction between Symbols, Beads, and Board.*
- “It could be played alone, by pairs, or by many, although unusually brilliant, well-composed, and successful Games were sometimes written down and circulated from city to city and country to country for admiration or criticism.” Page 29
* *Zyzygy will accomplish this through the Game Archives. This is the lifeblood of the Game.*
- “Throughout its history, the Game was closely allied with music and usually proceeded according to musical or mathematical rules. One theme, two themes, or three themes were stated, elaborated, varied, and underwent a development quite similar to that of the theme in a Bach fugue or a concerto movement. A Game, for example, might start from a given astronomical configuration, or from the actual theme of a Bach fugue, or from a sentence out of Leibniz or the Upanishads, and from this theme, depending on the intentions and talent of the player, it could either further explore and elaborate the initial motif or else enrich its expressiveness by allusions to kindred concepts. Beginners learned how to establish parallels, by means of the Game’s symbols, between a piece of classical music and the formula for some law of nature. Experts and Masters of the Game freely wove the initial theme into unlimited combinations. For a long time one school of players favored the technique of stating side by side, developing in counterpoint, and finally harmoniously combining two hostile themes or ideas, such as law and freedom, individual and community. In such a Game the goal was to develop both themes or theses with complete equality and impartiality, to evolve out of thesis and antithesis the purest possible synthesis. In general, aside from certain brilliant exceptions, Games with discordant, negative, or skeptical conclusions were unpopular and at times actually forbidden.” Page 30
* *Here are some of the Game types and Game conduct which have been incorporated into Zyzygy.*
- “Similarly, the symbols and formulas of the Glass Bead Game combined structurally, musically, and philosophically within the framework of a universal language, were nourished by all the sciences and arts, and strove in play to achieve perfection, pure being, the fullness of reality. Thus, “realizing” was a favorite expression among the players. They considered their Games a path from Becoming to Being, from potentiality to reality.” Pages 30-31
* *This describes one of the functions of the Realizing Doors. Another is to retrieve one's beads from Limbo.*
- “Thus one of the principles of the Creed, a passage from the Bible, a phrase from one of the Church Fathers, or from the Latin text of the Mass could be expressed and

taken into the Game just as easily and aptly as an axiom of geometry or a melody of Mozart.” Page 31

** In Zyzygy every creed is treated in a similar fashion.*

- “Above all, however, the Magister had to keep strict watch over the further elaboration of the Game.” Page 32
** This structure is incorporated into Zyzygy.*

The above concludes quotes from the prologue. The following are quoted verbatim from the body of the book:

- “The whole of both physical and mental life is a dynamic phenomenon, of which the Glass Bead Game basically comprehends only the aesthetic side, and does so predominantly as an image of rhythmic processes.” Page 95
** Zyzygy offers non-aesthetic opportunities as well.*
- “In the symbols, ciphers, signatures, and abbreviations of the Game language an astronomical formula, the principles of form underlying an old sonata, an utterance of Confucius, and so on, were written down.
A reader who chanced to be ignorant of the Glass Bead Game might imagine such a Game pattern as rather similar to the pattern of a chess Game, except that the significances of the pieces and the potentialities of their relationships to one another and their effect upon one another multiplied manifold and an actual content must be ascribed to each piece, each constellation, each chess move, of which this move, configuration, and so on is the symbol.” Page 110
** Another principle which is incorporated into Zyzygy.*
- “The true and ultimate finesse in the private Games of advanced players consists, of course, in their developing such mastery over the expressive, nomenclatural, and formative factors of the Game that they can inject individual and original ideas into any given Game played with objective historical materials.” Page 124
** Players who accomplish this will have their Games archived.*
- “Probably you too sometimes incline, as most good Glass Bead Game players do in their youth, to use our Game as a kind of instrument for philosophizing. My words alone will not cure you of that, but nevertheless I shall say them: Philosophizing should be done only with legitimate tools, those of philosophy. Our Game is neither philosophy nor religion; it is a discipline of its own, in character most akin to art.” Pages 125-126
** Zyzygy is only a Game.*
- “The foremost players distinguished two principal types of Game, the formal and the psychological.... In the formal Game the player sought to compose out of the objective content of every Game, out of the mathematical, linguistic, musical, and

other elements, as dense, coherent, and formally perfect a unity and harmony as possible. In the psychological Game, on the other hand, the object was to create unity and harmony, cosmic roundedness and perfection, not so much in the choice, arrangement, interweaving, association, and contrast of the contents as in the meditation which followed every stage of the Game." Page 178

** Zyzygy integrates both types of Games.*

I apologize to the book for "cherry-picking" its contents. I recommend to everyone that the book be read in its entirety. Having read the book myself, many other ideas about the Game were embraced, and they played an important organizational role in the design and development of Zyzygy. For you who are familiar with this great work, it is apparent that details pursuant to rules of the Game, structure of play, etc., are not elaborated upon. Therefore the particulars have been invented to create an internet Game that is consistent with Hesse's concepts and is also formulated for play online.

I hope that this clarifies how closely Zyzygy is inspired by our beloved "Glass Bead Game".¹

Robert McCracken MD

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¹ The entire list of quotes above are taken verbatim from "Magister Ludi, The Glass Bead Game, published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 383 Madison Avenue, NY York NY 10017, in 1969, ISBN 0-553-26237-8. Page numbers are indicated at the end of each quote. Used with the kind permission of the Hesse Estate.