their enjoyment lies primarily in the specific performances of the games, as Gerstmyer and others have opined. If the children are right, the self rhetoric should be not so much about personal experience as about personal performance (Peterson and McCabe, 1983, p. xvi)

Intrinsic theories include Csikszentmihalyi's flow characteristics; Rubin and colleagues' intrinsic motivation characteristics; emphasis on states of mind and on freedom; existential phenomenology; and enactive, dramatistic, metaperformance theory, which I have couched as an ontology of referential and ludic dialectics.

Extrinsic theories include Freudian play mechanisms (compensation and so on), and neurological arousal modulation theories.

The major rhetorical ambiguity in this chapter has to do with the multiple meanings of the self, which is supposed to be at the center of the play experience, through which play is to be defined. The shift from epistemological to ontological definitions is also a source of considerable perplexity to most social scientists. More profoundly, however, the present conceptualization of a structural and performance theory of play in terms of referential and ludic dialectics between mundane and virtual worlds, and involving both play and playfulness, puts incongruity and ambiguity at the very center of the ludic experience.

11

Rhetorics of Frivolity

> Don't be afraid of talking nonsense, but you must pay attention to your nonsense.
>
> *Ludwig Wittgenstein*

Play is fun
Sex is fun.
Jokes are fun.
Writing is fun.
Being funny is fun.
So what is fun?
after Mrs. Huizinga

This, the seventh and final rhetoric, is another ancient one, belonging with fate, power, and identity. But it has its own particular place as an opponent to the seriousness of all the other rhetorics, ancient or modern. The essences of play from this viewpoint are nonsense and inversion, hence their position at the end of this work. This chapter could be entitled "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (Weber, 1930) and be about the role of both religion and the work ethic in the denigration of play as a waste of time, as idleness, as triviality, and as frivolity. But that oft-told tale need not be retold here, except to indicate that the Puritan ethic of play has been the strongest and most long lasting of all the rhetorics of play in the past four hundred years. It is the antithesis to all the other rhetorics. None of their assertions makes much sense unless seen as a denial of the proposition that play is essentially useless. Typically the work ethic view of play rests on making an absolutely fundamental distinction between play and

work. Work is obligatory, sober, serious, and not fun, and play is the opposite of these. This distinction, while influenced by Protestant religion, derives its major impetus from the urban industrial view of time and work. In the Middle Ages in Europe, the temporal organization of the calendar was still largely agricultural. Festival time fit the interstices of agricultural time. There were as many festivals then (sacred, profane, or both) as there are weekends now (Endrei and Zolnay, 1986). With the growth of urban life, these miscellaneous intrusions on the work week became intolerable. Historically the festival play cycle was the enemy of the organized factory work week. So when play is opposed to work and is said to be optional, fun, nonserious, and nonproductive, this can be from the point of view of factory work and other forms of economic discipline. Play is obviously very serious to its participants; they strive very earnestly and with great effort at their play and sports, and their efforts produce important personal and social outcomes that cannot be gotten easily in any other way. In addition, there are many societies in which play is an integral part of religious and work ceremonies; where the duality of work versus play, so often taken for granted in Western eyes, is simply not valid (Lancy and Tindall, 1976).

Prime credit in play-theory terms for denying the puritanical and work contentions about play in modern times must go to Huizinga, who, in *Homo Ludens* (1955), argues that play is a most fundamental human function and has permeated all cultures from the beginning. Furthermore he says that social play, particularly contest, underlies and contributes to the characteristics of human culture as found in law, war, philosophy, poetry, religion, and art. In play, man creates a poetic world alongside the original world of nature. "Primitive society performs its sacred rites and sacrifices, consecrations and mysteries, all of which serve to guarantee the well-being of the world in a spirit of pure play, truly understood" (p. 5). Nobody has claimed as much for play before or since, nor has anyone had as much effect on humanistic play scholars in the twentieth century. Huizinga also shows that he knows play is often nasty, brutish, and short, and at times obligatory, not free, irrational and bloody. So in putting down the Puritan alternative, he does not at first appear to commit the mistake of making play the opposite of "triviality" by overidealizing its character.

And yet, on further analysis, it appears that in his efforts to state what the universals of play are, and how play must be "truly understood," he has actually adopted a quite rarified view of play and has indeed set it severely apart from everyday existence. The analyses of Ehrmann (1968), Gruneau (1983), and Duncan (1988) reflect that Huizinga has essentially adopted the aristocratic rhetoric of the late nineteenth century, which sought to see games as being played for the games' sake, just as it saw art as being practiced for art's sake, a point of view that can be sustained in practical terms only by a wealthy elite, or in modern terms by closely supervised schoolchildren. Thus by saying, as he did, that play is outside of ordinary life, that it is immaterial, disinterested, nonutilitarian, voluntary, spatially and temporally separate, childlike, nonprofane, governed by rules, and utterly involving, he idealizes and sacralizes play. These "essentialistic" statements not only contradict many of his own exemplars of play as nasty, brutish, and short but are also themselves conditions of play only in limited circumstances. There are some conditions of play life that approximate these specifications, but many that do not. If one substitutes the words *music* or *painting* or *novel writing* for *play* in the above statements, the one-sidedness of the supposed defining characteristics becomes even more apparent. By making the "truly understood" conditions of play so pure, Huizinga has, in effect, confirmed its puerility and triviality. He has countered the view that play is frivolous, but in his opposition he has so idealized it that he has vitiated its regular broad functioning in human life. But perhaps it should be said on Huizinga's behalf that in play's intellectual evolution from being despised to being idealized is a dialectical step on the way to a more adequate synthesis.

Given the view that play's frivolity continues and has its own history apart from the work ethic, I can now consider the ways in which play is frivolity, versus play as progress, fate, power, identity, and the self. The important issue is whether play's frivolity is necessary for the existence of all of these rhetorics. Children's own spontaneous play is still thought to be fairly useless by many educators and most parents who pursue the rhetoric of progress. Furthermore the behemoth of adult play, such as gambling, on which billions are spent, is seldom even acknowledged to exist as play but has a thousand other names, all of which serve to disguise its potential commonality with

the "frivolity" of children's play. It can be ventured that the denigration of frivolous play actually subdivides itself into six different kinds of devalued play, each of which, in its own way, helps to sustain the six types of play that are lauded by these rhetorics: developmental play, fateful play, contestive play, festival play, imaginative play, and personal play. In these terms, when one form of play is emphasized, some other form of play is implicitly devalued. Each rhetoric involves an internal polarity between good play and bad play and uses the term *frivolous* for whatever kind is chosen as bad play. Such a line of thought would certainly make greater sense, however, if one could show that the rhetorics in this work exist largely because they serve the political posturing of some cultural groups against other cultural groups.

I noted earlier that the whole of Spariosu's remarkable work *Dionysus Reborn* (1989) is about the fight that has taken place, since ancient Greek society, between the Apollonian views of play as rational and the Dionysian views of play as irrational. What can now be added is that, if each of the present rhetorics does indeed contain a binary relationship between strong and weak play, and is thus in different ways a repeat of Spariosu's struggle, then the six forms of weak play may be seen to be the irrational, frivolous, and feeble opposites of progress, fate, power, identity, the imaginary, and the self. Showing that each rhetoric not only is a persuasive discourse but also implies a cultural hegemony of one group over others would provide the theory of rhetorics with much more substance than their mere description as value systems has done to this point. Each of the seven rhetorics can be examined as a representation of the way people value some kind of play, and also as a representation of the way these same people use play to maintain their control by denigrating other kinds of play.

Hegemonies

Of all the rhetorics, progress is the most explicit in terms of hegemony, and the organization of children's play in terms of the educational and psychological beliefs of adults has been discussed at length. The very point of the progress rhetoric has been to constrain child play in the service of growth, education, and progress (see

Chapters 2 and 3). The data on the paradigms of childhood, and on human and animal adaptation, reveal the great power and disciplining effects over children of these progress myths about play, as exercised by educators and play therapists, and indeed by adults in general. Most adults show great anxiety and fear that children's play behavior, if not rationalized in these ways, will escape their control and become frivolous or become an irrational representation of child power, child community, phantasmagoria, and childish ecstasies. Play as progress is an ideology for the conquest of children's behavior through organizing their play. What is put to one side, forgotten, neglected, denied, trivialized, or suppressed are all the other ways in which children play by themselves or together with other children. Treating all of this play as frivolousness, as something to be put aside, illustrates and adds momentum to the idea that adults should organize the kind of play through which children are believed to develop properly.

In general in Western history, other rhetorical play stances have dismissed the play of fate as frivolous and worse. There has in recent history been no hegemony of chance and gambling over other forms of play, except in covert terms among some of the very affluent. But in many other cultures, and within the underclass in our own, gambling has long had a priority over other forms of play. And in the past decade or so, the institution of gambling through government-sponsored lotteries and casinos, as a form of taxation, has allowed this form of play into the overt center of the entertainment culture. From a gambling addict's point of view, and in a world where money is central, all forms of play that are not for high stakes are trivial pursuits. Gambling is to play what the stock market is to economics. They are both the most serious concern in either area.

Much of the discussion in Chapters 6 through 8 on power and identity is about the use of games, sports, and festivals as an exercise of power by the potentates in charge of such games—by kings, princes, politicians, colonizing administrators, aristocracies, ethnic groups, heterosexuals, and men. What is important is that the games of the less powerful groups are implicitly excluded and even ridiculed. For example, much of the older sports data are about martial or war groups, and play was rationalized as being important to the training of such powerful groups, and what is clear in recent analyses

is that women have generally been the most excluded group in the practice of these martial games. Throughout much of history, and in most cultures, women simply have not played a part in the most popular sports and contests. Women have sometimes, not always, been a part of community celebrations and spectacles, but not of contestive play. In the twentieth century, however, they have been creeping gradually into the picture, as their representation in the Olympics and some professional sports indicates. The "politically correct" rhetorical fight for members of excluded groups (women, homosexuals, minorities, the poor) to be included in larger community celebrations is a continuing one and one that is only sometimes successful. It is not possible, therefore, to think of these two rhetorics, power and identity, without recognizing that they have been and still are political homelands for the manifestation of the political power of the controlling communities. Gradually the games of girls, and the folklore and folk play of minority groups, are beginning to escape, at least partially in social science theory, and in publicly acceptable practices, from the diminished status that has for so long been an essential part of the power and identity rhetorics—remembering, of course, that with such encroachment the reigning powers and communities continually shift their focus to other forms of play from which those with less power and wealth can be excluded anew. As presently arranged, the divisions between the powerful and the powerless are also manifested by divisions between private and public play. In recent decades, the play of the more powerful and wealthy has been marked as much by inconspicuous play consumption as by conspicuous consumption (see Veblen, 1899), though the latter also continues robustly.

Those who have lauded the imaginary kinds of play are the social and intellectual elites, always concerned to differentiate their own sophisticated social or solitary playfulness from that of the masses. They often condemn organized sports for children (Little League) and nearly always condemn mass-market toys in contradistinction to homemade toys or wooden toys, which, according to Roland Barthes, in a romantic mood, carry ecological values that commercial plastic cannot (1972). There is a heightened attention in this group to the literature of the fanciful imagination, particularly the relatively nonviolent kinds, especially in opposition to the violent kinds of fantasy

to be found on television and in movies. It begins to look as if the concepts of the imagination and pretense will gradually take the high ground in relation to the concepts of fantasy or phantasmagoria, which will be used for the low ground.

With respect to the experience of self in play, there is already a movement to distinguish the kinds of higher-level or peak experiences from the merely mundane or routine. We hear of play as peak experience, as flow, as autotelic, as authentic experience, as spiritual experience, as the well-played game (De Koven, 1978); as infinite games, not finite games; as playing with boundaries, not within boundaries; as being playful but not serious (Carse, 1986); as playing by heart (Donaldson, 1993). These are increasingly said to be better ways of playing for oneself. But it is probable that that self will have to be somewhat fortunate in having wealth, education, special training, or spiritual guidance, in order to have access to these "better" forms of play. We are living at a time when the concept of the "good" player, one who was probably a member of the new games movement (Fluegelman, 1976) and has subsequently participated endlessly in group-process play, is beginning to emerge as a person of higher ethical status. She or he can "flow" and can get others to flow, and in so doing help them evolve into ever more complex and sensitive beings as suggested in *The Evolving Self* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993).

Frivolous Play Scholarship

Speculation about the different ways in which the grandiose rhetorics are rifted by their own implicit rhetorics of power leads to the conclusion that play is declared frivolous not only because of neglect or because frivolous play is the abstract opposite of some higher-level form of serious ludic activity. The label "frivolity" is, rather, an abuse of some kinds of play on behalf of other kinds of play, because that is what is politically suitable for some dominating groups. Not only are all players not the same but some are much more equal than others. So the issue of the equality of other people's pastimes comes to the forefront of our attention.

The frivolity of playfulness, which seemed at first to be just a mildly amusing relic of Puritanism, takes on a much more serious purpose when we view it as an implicit form of political or scholarly denigra-

tion. Much of the time most of us continue unwittingly with our frivolous play pursuits, unaware that we are despised by others except when the hegemony of those others suddenly makes itself felt as forms of rudeness, censorship, banishment, annulment, or cancellation. In scholarship the denigration of play in intellectual terms is shown by the absence of the key term *play* from the index of almost every book about the behavior of human beings. It is true that increased research attention has been given to play within psychology in recent decades, and within biology throughout this century, but there is still much more resistance to the subject than is justified, given its universal role in human behavior. From my point of view, regarding play as frivolous is itself a frivolous gesture. When one comes to deal with what has been treated as trivial or frivolous by the major six rhetorical groups—that is, the spontaneous play of children, women, minority groups, mass-media devotees, couch potatoes, and the folk wherever you find them—then suddenly this worm of frivolity takes yet another turn. All of these denigrated groups are generally as deadly serious and righteous about their own play as are those who denigrate them. They are not frivolous in their own eyes, they are seriously at play.

The academic discipline of folklore is a good example of a discipline that though dismissed by academia in general for its frivolousness, nevertheless pursues its own serious study of the playful goings-on of the folk. Its scholars spend their lives studying such "trivia" as folklore, humor, ethnopoetics, entertainment, oratory, ethnomusicology, oral history, oral culture, folktales, proverbs, riddles, speech play, insults, gossip, oratory, folk music, masks, mime, gesture, dance, artifacts, clothing, food, drama, puppetry, spectacles, rituals, festivals, and tourism (Bauman, 1992). There are only a few major academic programs in folklore in this country, at, for example, Indiana University, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Texas at Austin, and the University of California at Berkeley and Los Angeles. These and other smaller folklore programs have generated a most serious and relatively coherent group of scholars and folk custodians, devotees of the "trivial" play habits of the world.

Perhaps a little further down the academic tree is the discipline of popular culture, itself a latter-day playful offshoot of folklore. This

group, founded by Ray Browne at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, studies anything that is contemporary and interesting to ordinary people, including detective mysteries, box office hits, how much you can swallow, new legends, the cabinet of Dr. Seuss, songs of the unseen road, morality tales, myths of success, the myth of romantic love, Barbie dolls, soap operas, monster movies, and westerns, to take just a few items from a popular culture textbook (Nachbar and Lause, 1992). There are, in addition, a number of play associations throughout the world that study play as a serious scholarly or pragmatic subject. After all, in the United Nations Charter for Childhood, the child's right to play is one of the accepted articles. The Association for the Study of Play (TASP/USA) and the International Council for Children's Play (ICCP/Europe) are groups that study play in a scholarly manner. But even larger are the groups concerned with the practice of play, such as the Toy Library Association, the Association for the Child's Right to Play (formerly called the International Playground Association), the Association for Play Therapy, and the World Organization for Preschool Education. Finally, there are also innumerable scholarly and practical groups that study games, game simulation, sports, physical education, sports psychology, and sports sociology. All of these associations and societies consider their concerns to be most serious. But to the rest of the scholarly world, this array of interests is hardly to be taken with much seriousness. The focus is still seen as frivolous.

These groups that study play have their own minority rhetorics and academic journals of importance. Indeed they have their own hegemonies, from which it should follow that they themselves will treat something else as frivolous. But if they are not to be the lowest in the scholarly hierarchy being established here, who is to be the bottom dog? In folklore, the bottom dog is children's folklore. That's the easiest answer. Among scholarly associations for the study of play, the bottom dogs are the associations for the applied or practical study of play. And these attitudes are reversed and reciprocated by the latter groups. But perhaps there is yet some more general and playful frivolity that unites all the groups, both high and low, in their opposition. Putting aside adaptive play, agonistic play, territorial play, creative play, earnest play, and even play of low folk status, what kind of play is the least valued? A choice for the lowest of all forms might

be dilettantist play, the form of play defined not as the play but as trifling with play. The dilettante is a dabbler, one who pursues his play just for amusement or in a desultory way. He or she plays with play itself. He is the personification of playfulness. I propose now to pursue this greatest folly.

The Festival as Frivolity

At this point I wish to shift focus from the way in which playfulness can be trivialized in Western society to examples from other societies that suggest that such "folly" can have a more central place than we have given it in modern times. A most excellent example is to be found in *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (1992) by Margaret Drewal, in which Drewal shows how fundamental improvisation or play is in this group's very serious collective ceremonies, such as burial, birth, and initiation rites. She makes the point that the most ritualistic and sacred parts of these festivals are not anywhere near as ritualistic and consistent as Westerners, with their biblical and liturgical backgrounds written down in books, typically expect. There is variability even in the most conservative aspects of the ceremonies. In addition, times are set aside for out-and-out improvisation, theater, or play, even in the burial celebrations. The Yoruba believe that the more people who participate and the better the improvisational play, the more power is passed to the departing spirit. Here play and ritual are deeply united in a way that is difficult for Westerners, with their traditions of work versus play, or sacred versus profane, to imagine. I have already discussed this fusion of play and ritual illustrated by children (Chapter 9).

In recent years many have written of festivals as rites of inversion, as in Barbara Babock's edited collection, *The Reversible World* (1978), the title coming from a notion introduced by Victor Turner in his earlier book, *The Ritual Process* (1969). Turner says: "One aspect of symbolic inversion maybe to break people out of their culturally defined, even biologically ascribed roles by making them play precisely the opposite roles . . . breaking down barriers of age, sex, status, family, clan, and so on to teach the meaning of the generic humanity; so that each person becomes the joker in the pack, the card who can be all cards, the method actor" (Turner, 1978, pp. 287–278). Others have argued that the folk character called the "trickster" need not be a rebel as some have claimed (although he can be); rather, he incorporates both the good and the bad, the sobriety and the insobriety, the body conventional and the body uncontrollable, and as such he occupies a dialectical status in culture (Koepping, 1985). He stands both for order and disorder at the same time. He is, in short, a truly dialectical being in the terms used to describe play in Chapters 8 and 9.

Contemporary modern examples of festival folly are still to be found in Europe, and among those much studied are the carnivals of Germany (Tokofsky, 1992). Many of these festivals are oriented around a season beginning in November and finishing with Fat Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the season of Lenten restrictions. Hundreds of masked and costumed citizens parade, and the costumed are often various kinds of fools, all of whom play tricks on each other and the public. Some are mildly benevolent while others make a play of their malevolence. On the private occasions when the guilds, which have run these affairs for centuries, meet for periodic celebrations, there is a also a premium on folly. Apart from the typical cross-dressing nonsense where burly half-clad men simulate ballerinas, belly dancers, and Polynesian women—which is nonsense enough (or *Wahnsinn*)—there are kitchen bands in which the members simulate playing on various kitchen utensils, but without even a hint at either rhythm or melody, in an effort to bring nonsense into the most domestic of family realms. One listens in dismay and then suddenly realizes they are not making any kind of music but are in a realm of total folly (or *Unsinn*).

In many cultures and subcultures, the person known as fool, trickster, Frech, leprechaun, clown, harlequin, or comedian is held to be quite central to the theatric side of public affairs. All of the seriousness of regular play, or of regular play rhetoric or regular play theory, is susceptible to being made ludicrous by this inversively playful person, who trivializes all things most devastatingly, including trivialization itself. The true trickster is so frivolous he can invert frivolity. While in modern society one can still find the "official" fool in various places on the fringe of society, there have been times and there still are places where the fool has almost the position of the wisest person.

For example Barton Wright, in his work *Clowns of the Hopi: Tradition Keepers and Delight Makers* (1994), says of the Zuni sacred trickster:

> They found a little boy who was so full of life
> That he was never still. He laughed and joked
> And mimicked everyone and everything
> Around him, even the most sacred rituals.
> He said and did anything that came into
> His mind without regard for its effects. (p. 58)

Enid Welsford, in her classic of 1935, *The Fool,* struggles to explain why the most frivolous of modern persons, the fool or the comedian, though the "lowest" of us all, is yet in some way inversely the most serious of us all. She says that unlike the rest of us, who are all losers in most of the conventional senses, and most surely in the mortal sense, the fool transcends triviality.

> For the genius of the Fool is manifested by his power of deluding us into the belief that he can draw the sting of pain; by his power of surrounding us with an atmosphere of make-believe, in which nothing is serious, nothing is solid, nothing has abiding consequences. Under the dissolvent influence of his personality, the iron network of physical, social, and moral law, which enmeshes us from the cradle to the grave, seems—for the moment—negligible as a web of gossamer. The Fool does not lead a revolt against the law, he lures us into a region of the spirit where, as Lamb would put it, the writ does not run. (p. 321)

Both the fool and the playful person live in the place where the "writ does not run": a world where bad people are harmless, where stupid people are merry, where Fate is transformed into "Puck-like Chance" (ibid., p. 325). Perhaps the spirit of playfulness, never entirely foreign to all kinds of serious play, is ultimately the guarantee that all forms of play potentially promise that one can never quite lose while still at play. The promise is that the greater the frivolity, the greater the transcendence of the common writ. Which is to say that frivolity is potentially the most sacred play of all, a condition once recognized by the appointment of sacred tricksters and holy fools. But this is a play form that now must take up a more disguised and

secular existence, in e-mail perhaps, where a surgency of spirit is all that is left of what once was the sacred message that only in the transformation that becomes a transgression is the immortal to be emulated (Makarius, 1970). This last remark sounds something like the discussion of games of chance and the way in which they are also challenges to fate. Apparently fate and frivolity share most closely the power to make players feel that they can transcend reality and indeed mortality.

Validations and Definitions

No theory of play would be adequate if it did not leave scope for its own deconstruction and distortion into nonsense. Any earnest definition of play has to be haunted by the possibility that playful enjoinders will render it invalid. And considering the regal role of some tricksters, who take the place of the vested power on festival days, the reverse can happen. Play is the fool that might become king, as once happened in legend when the king died in the brief festival period during which the fool was supposed to rule.

In the rhetoric of frivolity, we inherit the ambiguity of reversing all the other rhetorics and then calling that, too, a form of playfulness. But in so doing we find that such folly has had a sacred past and may indeed still today be a mirror of the desires for earthly transcendence that one finds in all other kinds of play. This mode of transcendence or transformation is most extreme in the way in which games of fate and games of frivolity deny both reality and mortality.