Unity of Play: Diversity of Games

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So varied and complex is the world of games that there are many ways in which a study of it can be approached. Psychology, sociology, anecdotal history, pedagogy, and mathematics all share a domain whose unity ends by ceasing any longer to be perceptible. Works like *Homo ludens* by Huizinga, *Jeu de l'enfant* by Jean Chateau, and *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* by J. von Neumann and O. Morgenstern are not addressed to the same readers, nor do they appear to deal with the same subject. Ultimately, this question arises: How much does one profit from the facilities or contingencies of vocabulary by continuing to act as though such different and almost incompatible inquiries are fundamentally concerned with a same specific activity? It is doubtful whether common characteristics permit one to define this specific activity and consequently whether it can legitimately constitute the object of a comprehensive study.

If, in the current experiment, the domain of dames preserves its autonomy despite everything, this has obviously been lost as regards scientific investigation. This is not alone due to different approaches resulting from the diversity of disciplines. The data studied under the category of

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games are so heterogeneous that one ends by presuming that the word "game" is perhaps only a snare which, because of its misleading generality, nurtures tenacious illusions regarding the supposed relationship between disparate lines of conduct.

There is some purpose in demonstrating what steps, what fortuitous chance, at times, have resulted in such a paradoxical division. In fact, this curious partition begins at the very outset. Whoever plays leapfrog or dominoes or flies a kite knows that in all three instances he is actually playing. But the child psychologist alone is interested in studying leapfrog (or in prisoner's base or marbles). Only the sociologist is interested in kites, and only the mathematician in dominoes (or in roulette or poker). I find it quite natural that the latter have no interest in blindman's buff or in tag, neither of which lends itself to equations. I find it less understandable that Jean Chateau neglects dominoes and kites, and I wonder in vain why historians and sociologists decline to study games of chance. To be more precise, in the latter case, while I but dimly perceive the reason that would justify such an exclusion, I readily suspect the motives that have led to this ostracism. As we shall see, they stem to a great extent from the biological and pedagogical preoccupations of scholars interested in the study of games. If we except anecdotal history, the study of play—which moreover concerns itself more with toys than with games—benefits in this way from the works of three independent disciplines: psychology, mathematics, and sociology, whose diverse contributions we will examine in turn.

I. HISTORICAL ANALYSES

For a long time the study of games was hardly more than a history of toys. Particular attention was paid to the tools or accessories of games rather than to the nature of the games themselves—their characteristics, their laws, the instincts they presuppose, the kind of satisfaction they procure. Generally speaking, they were considered simple and insignificant childish diversions. Therefore no cultural value whatsoever was attributed to them. Research into the origin of games or toys has only confirmed the initial impression that toys are tools, and games behavior, amusing and of no importance, relegated to children when adults have found better things to do. Thus, weapons that have fallen into disuse become toys: the bow, the shield, the peashooter, the slingshot. The cup and ball and the spinning top at first represented magical skills. Similarly,

many games are based upon discarded beliefs, or they vacuously imitate rites denuded of significance. Roundelays or *comptines* seem to be ancient incantations no longer in use.

"Everything degenerates into play," the reader of Hirn, Groos, Lady Gomme, Carrington Bolton, and many others is led to conclude.

However, in 1938, Huizinga, in his major work, *Homo ludens*, maintains a theory that is the exact opposite of this: culture emanates from play. Play is simultaneously freedom and invention, fantasy and discipline. All the important manifestations of culture are derived from it. They are indebted to the spirit of research, to the respect for rules, to the detachment that it creates and maintains. In certain respects the rules of the law, of prosody, counterpoint, and perspective, the rules for stage settings and liturgies, for military tactics and philosophical controversy, are so many rules for games. They constitute conventions that must be respected in a determined domain where they establish nothing less than civilization itself. "Has everything sprung from games?" the reader wonders in closing *Homo ludens*.

The two theses are in almost complete contradiction. I do not believe that they have ever been compared with the purpose of arbitrating or of distinguishing between them. It must be said, however, that they seem far from being easily reconcilable. In the one case games are systematically pictured as so many degradations of the discarded activities of adults which, having lost their purpose, descend to the level of meaningless diversions. In the other, the spirit of play is regarded as being at the origin of the fertile conventions which make possible the development of cultures. It stimulates ingenuity, greater delicacy, and inventiveness. At the same time it teaches fair play toward one's opponent and sets an example for competition, where rivalry disappears at the moment of encounter. Thanks to the nature of play, man is able to counteract monotony, determinism, nature's blindness, and brutality. Play teaches one to build an order, to conceive an economy, to establish fair dealing.

I myself, however, do not believe it is impossible to resolve this antinomy. The spirit of play is essential to culture, but, in the course of history, both games and toys are entirely the residue of culture. Misunderstood survivals of a past condition or borrowings from an alien culture which become meaningless in the culture into which they have been introduced, they always seem to be external to the function of the society in which they are observed. They are no longer tolerated, although in a preceding phase or in the society from which they sprang they were an integral part of its

basic institutions, sacred or profane. Of course they were not then games at all, in the sense of children's games, but nonetheless they already were part of the essence of play, as Huizinga defined it. Their social function altered but not their nature. The change, the debasement they suffered, stripped them of their practical or religious import. This dethronement merely revealed, or rather isolated, what they contained in themselves, which is nothing more than the structure of play.

At this point some examples are in order. The mask provides the principal and perhaps the most remarkable one: privileged example of a sacred object whose transition to the status of a toy signifies and determines a major change in the history of civilization. For the moment it will suffice to mention briefly the best-attested instances of a like displacement. The lofty greased pole (capped with prizes for the climbers) is connected with myths of heavenly conquest; the football, with the contest for the solar globe between two antagonistic phratries. In the same way rope games used to augur the pre-eminence of the seasons and of the social groups that corresponded with them. Before becoming a toy in Europe toward the end of the eighteenth century, the electrical kite represented, in the Far East, the external soul of its owner who remained on earth. It was magically linked (by the rope which held the engine) with the fragile sheath of paper at the mercy of the heavenly winds. In Korea the kite served as a scapegoat whose function was to draw off the evils of a sinful community. In China it was used to measure distances, to transmit simple messages like a rudimentary telegram, and, finally, to fling a rope over a waterway in order to throw a bridge across it. In New Guinea it was used to tow craft. Hopscotch was an attempt to imitate realistically the labyrinth in which the initiated first went astray. Beneath the childish innocence and movement of a game of tag the dreaded selection of a propitiatory victim was perceptible: singled out by a decree of fate, before he was so designated by the sonorous and empty syllables of the *comptine*, the victim would (or so we suppose, at least) rid himself of his taint by handing it on to whomever he tagged.

In pharaonic Egypt a draughtboard is often pictured on tombs. The five squares at the bottom and to the left are decorated with benefic hieroglyphics. Above, the player inscriptions refer to decrees of judgment of the dead, over which Osiris presides. The deceased gambles his fate in the hereafter and either wins or loses blissful eternity. In Vedic India the sacrificer balances himself on a swing to help the sun rise in the heavens. The motion of the swing is supposed to link the heavens with the earth. It is

comparable to the rainbow, another link between the heavens and the earth. Currently, the swing is associated with notions of rain, fertility, the renewal of nature. In the spring, Kama, the god of love, and Krishna, the patron of the herds, swing solemnly. The cosmic swing sweeps the universe away in an eternal coming and going in which beings and worlds are carried along.

The periodic games that take place in Greece are accompanied by sacrifices and processions. Dedicated to a divinity, they constitute in themselves an offering: a sacrifice of effort, skill, or favor. These athletic competitions were principally a kind of cult, the liturgy of a pious ceremony.

In a general way games of chance have constantly been associated with divination, just as games of strength or skill and puzzle tournaments have been genuinely valued as part of enthroning rituals in honor of a responsibility assumed or an important ministry. The actual game often remains scarcely separate from its sacred origins. Eskimos play cup and ball only during the spring equinox. Even then, they play only on condition that they do not go hunting the following day. This delay for the sake of purification is comprehensible only if the practice of playing the game initially had been more than a mere diversion. In fact, it was the occasion for all kinds of mnemonotechnical recitations. In England a fixed date for playing with a spinning top still persists, and it is legitimate to confiscate a top that is spun out of season. We know that in earlier days the villages, parishes, and cities owned gigantic tops which brotherhoods spun ritually at the time of certain festivals. Here, again, childish play seems to have sprung from a prehistory filled with significance.

Roundelays and pantomimes, for their part, seem to prolong or augment the forgotten liturgies; for example, in France, "La Tour prends garde," "Le Pont du Nord," or "Les Chevaliers du Guêt" and, in England, "Jenny Jones" or "Old Rogers." The fiancé and the girl friends of Jenny Jones come to visit her. Her mother answers that they cannot see her because she is busy washing linen, starching it, drying it, ironing it, etc. In the end she must admit that Jenny Jones is dead. A new dialogue ensues about the color of her shroud. Finally, it is to be white. Then two companions carry Jenny Jones to the tomb. The others follow, pretending to weep. At this moment Jenny Jones comes to life and runs after her companions. The girl she catches will be the Jenny Jones of the next round.[1]

An analogous plot is used in the pantomime of "Old Rogers": an old

1. Hirn (according to Chambers and Lady Gomme).

man is being buried, and a tree grows on his tomb and bears tempting apples. An old woman gathers them; death pursues her, catches her, and renders her limp.

We need no more than this to rediscover in games such as these reminiscences of marriage by rape, of various taboos, funerals rites, and many more forgotten customs. Finally, hardly a game exists that has not seemed to specialized historians to be the ultimate stage of the progressive dethronement of a solemn and decisive activity that involved the prosperity or the destiny of individuals or communities. Nonetheless, I wonder if such a doctrine, which regards every game as the ultimate and humiliated metamorphosis of a serious activity, is not fundamentally erroneous and, to put it bluntly, a pure and simple optical illusion which in no way resolves the problem.

It is quite true that the bow, the slingshot, and the peashooter survive as toys when more powerful weapons have replaced them. But children also play with water pistols and cap guns, with compressed air rifles, when neither revolvers nor guns are outmoded for adults. They also play with tanks, submarines, and miniature airplanes that drop imitation atomic bombs. No new weapon exists that is not quickly converted into a toy. Inversely, it is by no means certain that prehistoric children were not already playing with chance bows, peashooters, and slingshots at a time when their fathers were using them "for real," as the very revealing language of children puts it. It is doubtful that children waited until automobiles were invented before playing stagecoach. The game of "Monopoly" reproduces the function of capitalism; it was not capitalism's successor.

These remarks are no less valid for the sacred than for the profane. The katcinas are semidivinities, the principal objects of worship among the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico; this does not prevent the same adults who worship them and incarnate them in their masked dances from making dolls resembling them for the amusement of their sons. Similarly, in Catholic countries, children currently play at going to Mass, at being confirmed, at marriage and funerals. Parents permit this at least as long as the imitation remains a respectful one. In black Africa the children make masks and rhombs in the same way and are punished for the same reasons, if the imitation goes too far and becomes too much of a parody or a sacrilege.

In a word, tools, symbols, and rituals of religious life, conduct and gestures pertaining to military life, are currently imitated by children. They enjoy behaving like adults, pretending for a moment that they are

adults. This is why all ceremony, and more generally, all regulated activity, however striking or solemn it might be, and particularly if the person officiating wears a special attire, normally serves as a model for a game that copies it endlessly. Hence the popularity of toy weapons and suits of armor, which, thanks to a few characteristic accessories and to the elements of a rudimentary disguise, enable the child to transform himself into a policeman, an aviator, a sailor, a cowboy, a bus driver, or any other person who has attracted his attention. The same is true of the doll, which, in all latitudes, enables the little girl to imitate her mother, to be her mother.

We are led to suspect that there is no degradation of a serious activity in childish amusements but rather the simultaneous presence of two different ranges of activity. The Indian child was already enjoying himself in a swing at a time when the officiating priest piously swung Kama or Krishna in the liturgical swing sumptuously ornamented with stones and garlands. The children of today play soldiers even though the toy weapons they use are not outmoded. And can one conceive that some day girls might stop playing dolls?

To go on to adult diversions, the tournament is a game, but war is not. One dies little or much, depending upon the times. Of course one can be killed accidentally in a tournament, in an automobile race, or in a boxing match, or by a fencing thrust, because a tournament is more regulated, more isolated from real life, more circumscribed than war. Moreover, it is by nature without consequence outside of the arena: a simple occasion for fascinating feats of prowess which the next exploit obliterates in the same way that a new record erases a prior performance. Similarly, roulette is a game, but speculation is not, although the risk is no less; the difference is that in the one case one is not protected from chance and in the other, on the contrary, one tries to influence the ultimate decision, without any restriction save the fear of scandal, if we are to believe public opinion and, we must admit, the invariable and scarcely refutable evidence.

From this standpoint we see that play is in no sense the meaningless residue of a discarded adult occupation, although eventually it perpetuates the imitation even when the occupation has become outmoded. Play appears principally as a parallel, independent activity, with traits of its own, and is in direct contrast to the gestures and decisions of ordinary life. It is these specific characteristics that I have attempted to define and analyze.

Thus, children's games consist in part and quite naturally in mimicking adults, just as the purpose of their education is to prepare them to become

adults, in turn. But we must not forget that adults, for their part, do not stop playing complicated, varied, and sometimes dangerous games, but which, nonetheless, remain games because they are experienced as such. Although one's life and fortune are just as much involved in games as in the so-called serious activities, each of us readily makes distinctions among the latter, even if they seem to be more important to the person than the game which fascinates him. In effect, play remains separate, inclosed, in principle devoid of important repercussions upon the solidity and continuity of collective and institutional life.

The numerous writers who insist upon viewing games, particularly children's games, as pleasing and insignificant degradations of activities that were at one time full of meaning and supposedly decisive have failed to observe that play and daily life are constantly and everywhere antagonistic and simultaneous. Such an error in perspective, however, is not devoid of significance. It certainly would seem that the vertical history of play, I mean the transformation of games from one age to the next—the fate of a liturgy that ends up as a roundelay, of the magical instrument or object of a cult that becomes a toy—is far from teaching us as much about the nature of play as the scholars who discovered these time-worn and uncertain filiations imagine. On the other hand, these filiations establish, somewhat indirectly, that play is coessential to the culture. Their most remarkable and complex manifestations seem to be closly related to the structures of games, or to the structures of games that are taken seriously, that are built into institutions, into legislation, that have become imperious, compelling, irreplaceable, progressive structures—in a word, the rules for social play, the norms of a game that is no longer a game.

Ultimately, the matter of ascertaining which came first, play or a serious structure, seems to be a rather idle one. To explain games by laws, customs, and liturgies, and inversely to explain jurisprudence, liturgy, the rules of strategy, logic, or aesthetics by the spirit of play, are complementary operations, equally fruitful if they do not claim to be exclusive. The structure of play and utilitarian structures are often identical, but the respective activities which they govern are irreducible one to the other in a given time and place. In any case they function in incompatible domains.

However, what is expressed in games is not different from what a culture expresses. Both have the same appeal. Of course in time, as a culture evolves, an institution doubtless can deteriorate. A contract that once was essential becomes a purely formal convention which everyone respects or ignores, as he sees fit, because to submit to it from now on is

superfluous and unnecessary, a magical survival without repercussions on the actual functioning of the society under consideration. Little by little this outmoded reverence sinks to the level of a simple rule for play. But the very fact that one can recognize an ancient, important element of the social mechanism in a game reveals an extraordinary interdependence and surprising possibilities of interchange between these two domains.

Every institution functions in part like a game, appearing at the same time as a game of another kind, based upon different principles, that drives out and replaces the old. This new game responds to other needs, favors other norms and legislation, calls for other virtues and aptitudes. From this viewpoint, a revolution seems to be a change in the rules of the game. For example, the advantages and responsibilities formerly assumed by a person because he was born into them must henceforth be acquired by merit, through competition or examinations. In other words, the principle of games likewise manifests itself outside the inclosed universe of play. But one must remember that it controls the latter absolutely, without resistance, as if it were a fictitious world devoid of matter or gravity, whereas in the confused, inextricable universe of human relationships its action is never isolated or useless. This action entails inevitable consequences; it is by nature pregnant with both good and evil.

However, it is possible in the two cases to identify the same elements: the need for self-assertion, the ambition to prove one's superiority, an inclination to challenge, to break a record, or merely to overcome difficulties; expectancy, the cultivation of pretense, of disguise; the pleasure of being afraid or of causing fear; the search for repetition and symmetry or, inversely, the joy of improvising, inventing, or diversifying solutions infinitely; the joy of solving a mystery, a puzzle; exuberance, calculation, irresistible passion; the satisfactions procured by all combinatory art; the desire to test one's self in a match of strength, skill, speed, endurance, balance, ingenuity; clarification of the rules, of jurisprudence, the duty of respecting them, the temptation to distort them; finally, dizziness and intoxication, nostalgia for ecstasy, the desire for a voluptuous terror. Virtually all these attitudes or impulses, often mutually incompatible, are to be found in the marginal and abstract world of play as well as in the non-protected world of social existence in which actions usually possess their full effectiveness. But they are not equally necessary; they do not play identical roles, and they do not have the same acceptance.

Moreover, it is impossible to maintain an equal balance between them. To a large extent they are mutually exclusive. Where some are favored,

others are necessarily decried. Depending upon the case, one either obeys the lawmaker or listens to the madman; one puts one's trust in arithmetic or in inspiration; one respects violence or diplomacy; one gives preference to merit or to experience, to wisdom or to some unverifiable but unquestionable knowledge that supposedly emanates from the gods. An implicit, inexact, incomplete distribution is thus effectuated in every culture between those values that are acknowledged to possess a social efficacy and others. The same distribution is then applied to the remaining secondary domains in which the realm of play occupies an important place. That is why it becomes possible to wonder whether the diversity of cultures and the particular traits which give each culture its original physiognomy are not somehow related to the nature of certain games that prosper in that culture and do not enjoy the same popularity elsewhere.

It goes without saying that to attempt to define a culture solely in terms of these games would be a bold and probably misleading undertaking. Actually, every culture knows and practises a great variety of games. Above all, without a prior analysis it is not possible to determine which games tally with the culture's institutional values, confirm and reinforce them, and which, inversely, contradict and flout them and thus represent, in the society under consideration, compensations or safety valves. To take one example, it is plain that stadium games in classical Greece illustrated the ideal of a city and contributed to its establishment, while in many modern states national lotteries and betting on the horses (I have stressed this point in passing) run counter to the proclaimed ideal. The role they play is no less significant; perhaps it is even indispensable to the exact extent that they offer a counterpart of an aleatory nature in the recompense that, in principle, work or merit alone should bring.

In any case, since play occupies a domain of its own whose content is variable and at times even interchangeable with that of daily life, it is important, first of all, to determine as precisely as possible the specific traits of pastimes which are considered suitable for children but which in other forms have an unfailing fascination for adults. Free, voluntary, unconstrained, in actuality they always divert the adult and bring him a respite from an existence filled with fatigue, worries, and responsibilities.

However, this relaxation, while he is practicing it, absorbs him no less than his professional activity. Often it interests him more, and sometimes it calls for a greater expenditure of energy, skill, intelligence, and concentration. This freedom and intensity, and the fact that one's conduct under the spell evolves in a separate, ideal world, safeguarded from dire conse-

quences, explain, in my opinion, the cultural fruitfulness of games; they also help one to understand how the choice of games sheds light on the countenance, characteristics, and values of each society.

Moreover, convinced as I am that close relationships of compensation or co-operation necessarily exist among games, customs, and institutions, I have not regarded as outside the realm of reasonable conjecture the notion that the very destiny of unequally fertile civilizations, their chance of success or their danger of stagnation, may be bound up with their predilection for one or another of the basic categories of games which I feel able to distinguish.

II. PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSES

For a long time the interest devoted to games was stimulated by Schiller's reflections in his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters*. For the first time, perhaps, play is taken seriously. The poet conceives of it as a vain expenditure of superfluous activity which gratuitously imitates true activity. It lies at the origin of the arts: "The disordered leaps of joy become the dance." This surplus of energy freely spent creates aesthetic values by freeing man from concern with utility. But games of chance require no energy and scarcely contribute to the creation of the fine arts. This in fact is an initial reason for eliminating them.

The notion of freedom, of superfluity, of play, was taken up again by Karl Groos in *Die Spiele der Tiere* (Jena, 1896) (English ed., *The Play of Animals* [New York: Appleton, 1911]). The author perceives in play mainly the joy of being and remaining the agent. In the end he defines play as a pure enterprise, without past or future, freed from the pressures and restraints of the world. The game is a creation of which the player remains as master. Detached from strict reality, it appears as a universe that has its end in itself and that exists only insofar as it is voluntarily accepted. But, since Groos began by studying animals (although he already had man in mind), when he went on to study human games some years later in *Die Spiele der Menschen* (Jena, 1899) (English ed., *The Play of Man* [New York: Appleton, 1912]), he was inclined to emphasize their intuitive and spontaneous aspects and to neglect the purely intellectual combinations which, in many instances, are present.

Furthermore, he conceived of the play of young animals as a kind of joyous preparation for their adult life. In fact, Groos attempted to demonstrate how play activity insures the young animals to a greater mastery of

their bodies, makes them more supple, swifter, stronger; how it teaches them to pursue their prey or to escape from their enemies; and, finally, how it accustoms them to do battle among themselves in anticipation of the moment when they will really be confronted with rivalry for the female. From this study of play he derived an ingenious classification very suitably adapted to his object, the first consequence of which, unfortunately, was to incline him toward a parallel breakdown of categories in a study of human games. He differentiates, thus, between play activity (*a*) of the sensory apparatus (touch, temperature, smell, hearing, perception of colors, forms, movements, etc.); (*b*) of the motor apparatus (groping, destruction and analysis, construction and synthesis, games of patience, simple throwing, throwing while hitting or pushing, the impulse to roll something, to twirl or slide, to throw toward a target, to catch moving objects); and (*c*) of the intelligence, feeling, and will (games of reconnoitering, memory, imagination, concentration, reasoning, surprise, fear, etc.). Then he goes on to what he calls "secondary tendencies"—those that arise from the instinct to fight, the sexual instinct, and the instinct for imitation.

This long catalogue demonstrates wonderfully well how all the sensations or emotions that man might experience, the gestures that he might make, the mental operations that he is capable of effectuating, give rise to games. But Groos casts no light on these games; he gives no information either about their nature or their structure. He is not concerned with grouping them according to their own affinities; he does not seem to realize that, for the most part, they refer to several senses and functions simultaneously. Actually, he is content to classify games according to the chapter headings of psychological treatises that were in vogue in his day; or, rather, he confines himself to demonstrating that man's senses and his faculties also include a disinterested mode of behavior, of no immediate usefulness, which, by virtue of this fact, belongs to the domain of play and whose sole function is to prepare the individual for his future tasks. Once again, games of chance are eliminated, and this is done without the author even realizing that he is excluding them. He neither came across them among animals, nor do they prepare one for any serious task.

Having read the works of Groos, one still might be unaware, or scarcely aware, that play frequently, perhaps necessarily, comprises rules and even rules of a very special nature: arbitrary, imperious, valid for a time and place that are determined in advance. We should bear in mind that Huizinga deserves credit for having stressed this point and for having shown the exceptional fruitfulness of this fact for the development of cul-

ture. Before him, in two lectures delivered at the Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Geneva in 1930, Jean Piaget strongly emphasized the contrast for the child between games that are improvised and those that have rules. We must also recall the importance he attributes, quite rightly, to respect for the rules of a game in the moral development of the child.

But, once again, neither Piaget nor Huizinga pays any heed to games of chance, which are also omitted from Jean Chateau's remarkable inquiries.[2] Of course, Piaget and Chateau deal only with children's games, and, to be even more precise, with the games of certain children of Western Europe during the first half of the twentieth century, principally those played at school during their recreation periods. We see that a kind of fatality continues to operate over games of chance, which, of course, are not encouraged by educators. However, even if we except dice, teetotum, dominoes, and cards, excluded by Chateau as being adult games into which children would be drawn only through the family, there still remain marble games which are not always games of skill. The special characteristic of marbles is that they are both instrument and stake. The players win or lose them, so that they quickly become an actual coin of exchange. They can be traded for all kinds of valuable considerations—sweets, penknives, stones,[3] whistles, school materials, help with homework, an errand to be run. Marbles even have a varying value depending upon whether they are made of steel, stone, or glass. And children gamble them in different games of odd and even, like the Italian game of *morra*, which, in a child's scale of values, offers the opportunity for a complete reversal of fortune. The author cites at least one of these games,[4] although this does not prevent him from almost completely eliminating chance—that is to say, risk, *alea*, betting, which is the child's way of playing—in order to further stress the essentially active quality of the pleasure the child experiences when playing.

This prejudice would have had no grave consequences if, at the end of his book, Chateau had not attempted to draw up a classification of games that was marred by such a serious omission. The deliberate ignoring of

2. *Le Réel et l'imaginaire dan le jeu de l'enfant* (2d ed.; Paris, 1955); *Le Jeu de l'enfant: Introduction à la pédagogie* (rev. ed.; Paris, 1955).

3. Throwing-stones are not included in Chateau's works; perhaps he confiscated them instead of observing the psychology of the manner in which they are handled. Nor are the children studied by Chateau familiar with croquet or kites, for these require both space and accessories and do not serve as a means of disguise. Once again they were observed only on school playgrounds.

4. *Le Jeu le l'enfant*, pp. 18–22.

games of chance resolves an important question by the very omission: whether or not the child is attracted to games of chance, or whether he plays so few of them at school merely because they are forbidden there. In my opinion there can be no doubt about the answer: at a very early age the child is responsive to the element of chance.[5] It remains to be seen at what age and how he reconciles the verdict of luck, iniquitous in itself, with his very keen concern for justice.

Chateau's purpose is both genetic and pedagogical. He is interested, first of all, in the periods of emergence and the popularity of each type of game. At the same time he tries to determine the positive contribution made by different kinds of games. He endeavors to show the extent to which they contribute to the formation of the future adult's personality. From this point of view, he has no difficulty in demonstrating, in contrast to Karl Groos's theory, that play is a test rather than an exercise. The child is not trained for any definite task. Thanks to play, he acquires a greater capacity to overcome obstacles or to meet difficulties. For example, nothing in life reminds us of the game of flying pigeon, but there is something to be gained from the possession of both rapid and disciplined reflexes.

In a general way, play seems to consist in training the body, the character, or the intelligence, without any predetermined end. Thus, the more the game is removed from reality, the greater is its educational value, for play does not teach formulas; it develops attitudes.

But in the player who remains essentially passive games of chance do not develop any physical or intellectual aptitude. And their consequences in regard to morality are feared because, by presenting the glittering prospect of a sudden and considerable profit, they distract from work and effort. This, if you will, is reason enough to banish games of chance from school (but not from a classification).

I wonder, moreover, if it might not be a good thing to push this reasoning to its extreme. Play is exercise; it is testing or performance due solely to increase. Faculties thus developed certainly profit by this supplementary training which is free, intense, pleasurable, inventive, and secure. But it is never the function of play itself to develop these faculties. The purpose of play is play. It is true that the aptitudes that it encourages are the same as

5. I will cite but one example: the popularity of miniature lotteries seen near schools and in the bakeries that are available to pupils when they come out of class. At varying prices, the children draw lots which include the winning number; it is good for a piece of cake or candy. Needless to say, the tradesman waits until the last minute to add to the lots the one that wins the big prize—an enticing sweet.

those that figure in study and in the serious activities of the adult. If these capacities are dormant or feeble, the child knows neither how to study nor how to play because then he does not know how to adapt himself to a new situation, to be attentive, or to accept discipline. A. Brauner's observations[6] are most convincing in this regard. Play is in no sense a refuge for defective or abnormal children. They have toward it the same attitude as they do toward work. These handicapped children or adolescents prove to be as incapable of applying themselves with continuity or persistence to a play activity as to any real learning process. Play, for them, is a mere occasional extension of movement or intelligence (rolling a marble or a ball with which others play, obstructing, pushing, shoving, etc.). Their cure is effected when a teacher is able to convey to them respect for rules or, better still, a desire to invent games.

There is no doubt that, in this respect, the inclination willingly to respect an accepted rule is essential. Actually, Chateau, after Piaget, acknowledges the importance of this fact so completely that he gives first place to a rough evaluation of games with rules as compared to unregulated games. He summarizes Groos's study of this first category without adding anything new and proves a much more instructive guide in regard to games with rules. The distinction that he establishes between figurative games (imitation and illusion), objective games (construction and work), and abstract games (with arbitrary rules—games of skill and mainly competitive games) corresponds without any doubt to reality. We can also agree with him that figurative games result in art, that objective games anticipate work, and that games of competition foreshadow sports.

Chateau rounds out his classification with a category that links these competitive games, in which a certain co-operation is required, with imaginary dances and ceremonies in which the participants' movements must be in harmony. A grouping such as this does not seem homogeneous and entirely contradicts the earlier established principle which contrasts inventive games with those that have rules. To play at being a laundress, a grocer, an aviator, or a cowboy calls for continuous improvisation. To play prisoner's base or tag, to say nothing of football, checkers, or chess, presupposes a respect for the kind of precise rules that determine the winner. To classify under a same heading representational and competitive games because both require co-operation from team participants can be explained only by the author's anxiety to differentiate between levels of

6. *Pour en faire des hommes*, studies on play and language among socially maladjusted children (Paris: S.A.B.R.I., 1956), pp. 15–75.

play—a kind of age classification. The latter case is, of course, a matter of the intricacy of games of mere rivalry, based upon competition—the former, a symmetrical intricacy of figurative games, based upon pretense. Both of these intricacies result in the intervention of team spirit, which forces the players to co-operate, to concert their movements, and to play their part in an over-all maneuver. The true relationship nonetheless remains obviously a vertical one. Chateau goes from the simple to the complex each time because he is attempting primarily to establish stratifications that tally with the ages of children. But these complicate, in a parallel fashion, structures that remain independent.

Both figurative and competitive games correspond almost precisely to the games which I have grouped under the respective rubrics of *mimicry* and *agôn* in the classification of games that I myself have worked out.[7] I also made a distinction between games of chance (*alea*) and games that induce giddiness (*ilinx*). I have explained why there is no mention of games of chance in Chateau's catalogue, although one can find therein some indication of games that induce giddiness under the heading of games that transport and illustrated by the following examples: playing at teetotum, running (until breathless).[8] Certainly in these activities there is a glimmering, if you will, of games that induce giddiness; but, really to merit such a classification, these games must be presented more precisely and clearly, in a way that is more appropriate to their own purpose, which is to induce a slight, fleeting, and therefore pleasant confusion of perception and equilibrium; for example, toboganning, swinging, or even the Haitian game, "golden corn," in which two children holding hands face each other at arms' length, feet touching, and twirl for the sheer pleasure of staggering after they stop. Chateau alludes to the swing (p. 298) but only to interpret it as an exercise of will over fear. Of course, giddiness presupposes fear, or, more exactly, a feeling of panic, but this attracts, fascinates, and represents pleasure. The question is less one of overcoming fear than of voluptuously experiencing fear, a shudder, a state of stupor that momentarily causes one to lose self-control.

And so games based upon the pursuit of vertigo fare no better at the

7. Cf. *Diogenes*, No. 12 (Fall, 1955), pp. 72–88.

8. I am giving examples cited in the final summary (pp. 386–87). On the other hand, in the corresponding chapter (pp. 194–217) the author uses the two meanings of the word "transport" (bewildered behavior and temper) principally to study the disorders that excessive enthusiasm, passion, intensity, or mere acceleration in the tempo produces during the course of play. The game ends in disorganization. Thus, while analysis defines a modality of play or rather a danger which, in certain instances, threatens it, it in no way tends to determine a specific category of games.

hands of psychologists than games of chance. Nor does Huizinga, who reflects about games played by adults, pay them the slightest heed. Doubtless he disdains them because he does not think it is possible to attribute any pedagogical or cultural value to them. From invention and a respect for the rules of fair competition Huizinga derives all or almost all of civilization, and Chateau sees in them the essential virtues necessary to man in building his personality. The ethical value of a regulated and limited battle, the cultural fertility of imaginary games, are questioned by no one. But the pursuit of giddiness and of luck is in ill-repute. These seem to be sterile if not disastrous games, tainted with an obscure and contagious malediction. They are considered the ruination of our morals. According to popular opinion, civilization consists in protecting one's self against their seduction rather than in profiting by their debatable contributions.

III. MATHEMATICAL ANALYSES

Games of chance and games that produce dizziness seem to be implicitly quarantined by sociologists and educators. The study of vertigo is left to the physician; the reckoning of luck, to the mathematician.

These researches of a new genre are certainly indispensable, but both of them distract one's attention from the nature of play. The study of the function of the semicircular canals does not adequately explain the popularity of swings, toboggans, skis, and machines that produce dizziness in amusement parks—to say nothing of exercises of a different order but which presuppose the same kind of "play" with the same capacity to induce panic, like the whirling dervishes of the Middle East or the spiral descents of the Mexican *voladores*. On the other hand, the development of mathematics in regard to the law of probabilities in no way replaces a sociology of lotteries, gambling houses, or circuses. Nor do mathematical studies inform one about the psychology of the gambler; yet they owe it to themselves to examine all the possible responses to a given situation. Sometimes arithmetic is used to determine the banker's margin of security, sometimes to show a player the best way of gambling, sometimes to make clear to him in advance the risks that he runs in each instance. We recall that a problem of this kind is at the origin of the law of probability. Chevalier de Méré figured that in a game of dice, in a series of twenty-four throws, in which there are only twenty-one possible combinations, the double-six had more chance of showing than of not showing. But experience proved the contrary. He turned to Pascal. Hence the latter's long

correspondence with Fermat, who was to open up a new way for mathematics. Another result of this correspondence was to demonstrate to Méré that it was actually scientifically advantageous to bet against the double-six showing in a series of twenty-four throws.

Paralleling their studies on games of chance, the mathematicians have long undertaken researches of an entirely different nature. They put their minds to calculations about numbers in which chance plays no part but which might constitute the object of a complete theory that could be generalized—notably those numerous brain-twisters known as "mathematical diversions." A study of these have more than once set scholars upon the scent of important discoveries. Such brain-twisters include, for example, the (unresolved) problem of the four colors, the problem of the Koenigsberg bridges, the three houses and three springs (insoluble on a plane surface but soluble on an inclosed surface like that of a ring), the problem of the fifteen young girls taking a walk. Certain traditional games like teaser and ring-puzzle, moreover, are based upon difficulties and combinations of the same order, the theory stemming from topology as it was constituted by Janirewski at the end of the nineteenth century. Recently, mathematicians, combining the law of probability with topology, have founded a new science, the application of which seems to be extremely varied: the theory of strategic games.[9]

In this instance the games are ones in which the players are "enemies" called upon to "defend themselves"; in each new situation there is a logical choice and an appropriate decision to be made. This kind of game is one that lends itself to use as a model for problems that generally arise in economic, commercial, political, or military domains. The scholars sought to find a necessary, scientific, and indisputable solution for concrete but at least approximately decipherable difficulties. They began with the simplest of situations: heads or tails, the game of paper-stone-scissors (paper beats stone by enveloping it, stone beats scissors by shattering them, scissors beat paper by cutting it), poker in its most simplified form, airplane duels, etc. Psychological elements like "guile" or "bluff" were introduced into the calculations. Guile was termed "the player's perspicacity in anticipating his enemies' line of conduct"; bluff was the response to this guile: in other words, "at times the art of disguising our information from an enemy, at times the art of fooling him about our intentions, and finally,

9. J. von Neumann and O. Morgenstern, *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1944); Claude Berge, *Théorie des jeux alternatifs* (Paris, 1952).

at other times, the art of making him underestimate our skill."[10]

Nonetheless there is some doubt about the practical bearing and even the solid basis of such speculations outside of pure mathematics. These speculations are founded upon two postulates that are indispensable for rigorous deduction and which, hypothetically, are never encountered in the continuous and infinite universe of reality: the first postulate is the possibility of total information, I mean one that exhausts the usual facts; the second is competition among enemies who always take the initiative with a full knowledge of the facts, who expect an exact result, and who supposedly choose the best solution. But, in reality, useful facts are not for one thing always decipherable premises; for another, one cannot eliminate in the opponent the part that error, a whim, a foolish notion, almost any arbitrary and inexplicable decision, might play—a ridiculous superstition or even the deliberate desire to lose. In our absurd human universe there is no absolute motive that can be excluded.

Theoretically, in a pistol duel where two opponents walk toward each other, knowledge of the range and accuracy of the weapons, the distance, the visibility, the relative skill of the gunmen, their presence of mind or their nervousness, provided that these different elements are measurable, should enable one to figure out what would be the best moment for each of them to cock his pistol. And even this is a matter of chance speculation in which the realities, moreover, are limited by convention. But in practice it is plain that a mathematical calculation is impossible because it requires the complete analysis of an inexhaustible situation. One of the adversaries might be nearsighted or astigmatic. He might be absent-minded or neurasthenic, a bee might sting him, a tree root might cause him to stumble. The analysis bears only upon the skeletal form of a problem; as soon as one discovers its original complexity, reasoning becomes false.

In certain American shops at sale season articles are sold on the first day at a reduction of 20 per cent of the marked price, on the second day at a reduction of 30 per cent, and on the third day at a reduction of 50 per cent. The longer a customer waits, the more advantageous is the purchase. But his choice decreases at the same time, and he runs the risk of losing the article that appeals to him. In principle, if one were able to limit the data that must be taken into consideration, one could figure out on what day it would be best to buy such-and-such an article, according to one's estimate of its general desirability. However, it is very likely that each customer makes his purchase according to his own personality traits: with-

10. Claude Berge.

out waiting, if he wants above all to be sure of getting the desired object; at the last moment if he wants to spend as little as possible.

The irreducible element of play resides and persists in this: mathematics, which is never more than algebra *about* play, does not penetrate it. When, achieving the impossible, mathematics becomes algebra *of* play, then play itself immediately disappears. For one does not play in order to be sure of winning. The pleasure of a game is inseparable from the risk of losing. Each time that combinatorial reflection (which the science of games consists of) achieves a successful theory about a situation, the player's interest disappears with the certainty of the result. The fate of all the variations is known. Every player would know where the consequences of every conceivable play might lead or the consequences of the consequences. In cards the game is over as soon as there is no uncertainty about the tricks to win or concede, and every player lays his hand down. In chess the intelligent player gives up as soon as he realizes that the situation or the position of both sides makes his defeat inevitable. African Negroes, who are very fond of games, figure out the progression in a game with the same precision that Neumann and Morgenstern employ for structures that may require a far more complex mathematical apparatus, but which they do not treat any differently.

In Sudan the game of "Bolotoudan," similar to windmill, is very popular. It is played with twelve tipcats and twelve stones, which each player places in turn on thirty squares in five rows of six. Every time a player is able to place three of his pawns in a straight line, he "eats" one of the opponents' pawns. The combatants have sticks that belong to them and which, being part of the family legacy, are transmitted from father to son. The initial placing of the pawns is very important. The possible combinations are not infinite; therefore, an experienced player will frequently stop the game by acknowledging his virtual defeat long before it is apparent to the uninitiated.[11] He knows not only that his opponent must defeat him but also how he should proceed in order to do so. Nobody enjoys taking advantage of the inexperience of a mediocre player. On the contrary, everyone is anxious to show him the invincible maneuver, if he does not know it. For play, above all, is a demonstration of superiority, and pleasure arises from pitting one's strength against that of someone else. One must feel one's self to be in danger.

Mathematical theories that attempt to determine with certainty, in

11. A. Prost, "Jeux dans le monde noir," *Le Monde noir* (Nos. 8–9 of *Présence africaine*), pp. 241–48.

every possible situation, the pawn that should be moved or the card that should be thrown, far from encouraging the spirit of play, ruin it by ridding it of its true purpose. "Wolf and Sheep," which is played on an ordinary chessboard of sixty-four squares with one black pawn and four white ones, is a simple game for which one can easily enumerate all the possible combinations. The theory of the game presents no difficulty. The "sheep" (the four white pawns) must necessarily win. What pleasure will a player experience in playing "Wolf" if he knows this theory? These analyses, which become destructive as soon as they are perfected, apply to other games as well—to teaser and ring-puzzle, for instance, which I have already mentioned.

It is not likely but it is possible, perhaps it is theoretically necessary, that an absolute game of chess should exist—one in which, from the first play to the last, no parry is efficacious, the best being automatically neutralized at every move. It is not unreasonable to suppose that an electronic machine, exhausting all the conceivable bifurcations, might establish this ideal game. But then no one would play chess any more. Merely to make the first move would result in winning or perhaps in losing[12] the game.

Thus, mathematical analysis of games seems to constitute something that has only a circumstantial relationship to them. It would exist even if games did not. It can and must evolve beyond the realm of games, inventing increasingly complex situations and rules at will. But it could not have the slightest repercussion in regard to the very nature of play. Indeed, either analysis results in certainty, and play loses all interest, or it establishes a coefficient of probability and merely leads to a more rational evaluation of a risk that the player either assumes or does not assume, depending upon whether his personality is cautious or bold.

IV. SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSES

Reprehensible or not, games of chance are pre-eminently human. Animals are familiar with competitive, imitative, and vertigo-producing games. Groos, in particular, gives us striking examples of each of these categories. On the other hand, too involved in the immediate, too enslaved by their impulses, animals would not be able to conceive of an abstract and insensitive power whose verdict they would have to submit to in advance and without reaction in the name of play. To await the decision of

12. It is generally acknowledged, although it has not been proved, that the advantage of playing first is a real one.

fate passively and deliberately, to risk something of value on the chance of either losing or multiplying it proportionally, is an attitude that requires the ability to anticipate, to imagine, and to speculate, of which man alone is capable. Perhaps, to the extent that the child is close to the animal level, games of chance do not have the same importance for him as they do for the adult. For the child, to play is to be active. Furthermore, lacking economic independence, having no money of his own, games of chance do not offer him what is really their main attraction. They cannot make him shiver with excitement. Of course, as I have stressed earlier, marbles are a coin of exchange for the child. However, he relies on his skill more than on luck to win.

In an industrial civilization, based upon the value of work, the instinct for play is extremely powerful, because it suggest an entirely contrary way of making money; or, according to Th. Ribot's formula, "the fascination of an acquisition at one fell swoop, without effort, in an instant." Hence the permanent seduction of lotteries, gambling houses, horse races, or betting on soccer matches. For patience and effort that bring small but sure returns, it substitutes the mirage of an immediate fortune, the sudden possibility of leisure, wealth, and luxury. For the multitude who work hard without acquiring more than a relative sense of well-being, luck, the big prize, seems the only means of ever emerging from a humiliating and lowly condition. Play flouts work; it has a competitive appeal which, at least in certain instances, assumes enough importance to determine in part the way of life of an entire society.

While these considerations lead one at times to attribute an economic or social function to games of chance, they do not, however, attest to their cultural fertility. One suspects them of engendering laziness, fatalism, and superstition. Admittedly, they have contributed to the creation of the law of probability, to topology, to the theory of strategic games. But that is no reason to believe that they are capable of offering the model for an image of the world or providing, in a rudimentary way, a kind of embryonic, encyclopedic knowledge. Yet fatalism, rigid determinism, to the extent that it denies free will and responsibility, portrays the entire universe as a gigantic generalized, compulsory, and continuous lottery in which every destiny—inevitable—brings only the possibility, or rather the necessity, of participating in subsequent lottery drawings and so on ad infinitum.[13] Moreover, among relatively unoccupied populations, where, in any case,

13. This is what emerges with a good deal of evidence from the parable of Jorge Luis Borgès entitled "La Loterie de Babylone," in *Fictions*, French trans. (Paris, 1951), pp. 82–93.

work neither absorbs all the available energy nor regulates the whole of daily existence, games of chance frequently acquire an unexpected cultural importance, influencing art, ethics, economics, and even knowledge.

I wonder whether such a phenomenon is not characteristic even of intermediate societies which have ceased to be governed by the combined forces of the mask and possession, or, if you prefer, by pantomime and ecstasy (*mimicry* and *ilinx*); societies that have not yet attained a collective existence based upon institutions in which regulated and organized competition plays an essential role. Specifically, it happens that populations are suddenly wrested from the dominion of pretense and terror by contact with or the domination of peoples who, thanks to a slow and difficult evolution, long ago freed themselves from the infernal mortgage. The populations that these peoples force to comply to their unwritten laws are in no way prepared to adopt them. The change is too sudden. In this instance it is not *agôn* but *alea* that imposes its own pattern upon the changing society. To place one's self at the mercy of fate conforms to the indolence and the impatience of those beings whose fundamental values no longer enjoy the freedom of the city. Better still, through the intermediary of superstition and witchcraft, which guarantee luck and the favor of the powers that be, this unquestionable and simple norm links them to their traditions and gives them back part of their original world.

Also, under the circumstances, games of chance suddenly acquire an unexpected importance. They tend to take the place of work, if the climate favors this, and also if the responsibility for feeding, clothing, and sheltering one's self does not, as it would elsewhere, oblige the most impoverished to seek regular employment. A floating population that has no pressing needs, that lives from day to day, and that is taken care of by an administration in which it plays no part gives itself up to play instead of yielding to the discipline of monotonous and tedious labor. In the end play rules over the beliefs and the knowledge, the habits and the ambitions, of nonchalant and lively peoples who no longer have the task of governing themselves. It remains extremely difficult for them to join a different kind of society in which they are left to vegetate like eternal children.

I will quickly give two examples of the curious way games of chance thrive when they become a habit, a rule—second nature. They establish a pattern of life for an entire population, for nobody can resist the contagion. By ricochet, the very people who introduce games of chance as a diversion themselves succumb to their epidemic growth which alters their very personalities and customs.

I will begin with a case in which the population is not mixed and in which the culture under consideration is entirely imbued with ancient values. There is a game of dice that is very widespread in the southern Cameroons and in the north of Gabon. It is played with cubes that are carved with a knife from the exceptionally hard, bonelike wood of a tree which provides an oil more cherished than that of the palm (*Baillonella toxisperma* Stone, sun. *Mimusops djave*). The dice are only two-sided. On one of these a symbol is carved whose strength must vanquish that of the competing emblems. These symbols are many and varied, constituting a sort of pictorial encyclopedia. Some represent persons in a priestly posture, in a highly dramatic pose, or in the midst of the many activities of daily life: a child teaching a parrot to talk, a woman snaring a bird for her dinner, a man attacked by a typhoon, another loading a gun, three women cultivating the land, etc. Sculptured on other dice are ideograms portraying diverse plants, the female genital organs, a nocturnal sky with moon and stars. The animals—mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, and insects—are abundantly represented. Still other symbols suggest things coveted by the player: hatchets, guns, mirrors, drums, watches, or dance masks.

These ornamented dice are also amulets which can help their owner realize his slightest desires. Generally, the dice are kept not at home but in the bush, in a bag hung from a tree. Occasionally, they serve as the means of conveying a message or as a code agreed upon in advance. As for the game itself, it could not be simpler. The principle is the same as heads or tails. Each player puts up an equal stake: fate decides through the intermediary of fragments of calabash that are thrown with the dice. If the smallest number of such fragments should show tails, the players whose dice also show tails win the pot (and inversely). This game came to have such a fascination that the authorities were obliged to ban it. It caused the gravest disorders: husbands pawned their wives, leaders gambled their commands, brawls were frequent, and even clan warfare broke out as a consequence of disputes.[14]

The game is rudimentary and neither complicated nor continuous. However, one can easily understand the importance of its repercussions on the culture and the collective social life where it is popular. The symbolic

14. Simone Delarozière and Gertrude Luc, "Une Forme peu connue de l'expression artistique africaine: L'Abbia," *Études camerounaises*, Nos. 49–50 (September–December, 1955), pp. 3–52. Similarly, in the Sudan, in the S'onraï country, where little shells are used both as dice and as money; each player throws four of them, and, if they all fall on the same side, he wins 2,500. Fortunes, lands, and wives are gambled (cf. A. Prost, "Jeux et jouets," *LeMonde noir* [Nos. 8–9 of *Présence africaine*], p. 245).

and encyclopedic richness of the emblems is somewhat comparable to that of the Roman columns. At the very least, it serves an analogous function. Moreover, it sprang from the need to carve different bas-reliefs on one side of the dice; for tribes interested in the plastic arts this might be the principal mode of expression. Nor is it a matter of indifference that a magical attribute is associated with dice that binds them closely to the beliefs and concerns of the owners. What should be stressed above all is the havoc which the passion for this game wrought and which, at times, seems to have reached disastrous proportions.

This kind of havoc is not at all rare. It occurs in connection with far more complex games of chance which, in mixed societies, possess an analogous fascination and entail consequences that are just as dire. The success of "Chinese Charade" (*Rifa Chiffá*) in Cuba offers a striking example. This lottery, which Lydia Cabrera calls "the incurable cancer of the popular economy," is played with a Chinese figurine divided into thirty-six sections to which an equal number of symbols portraying human beings, animals, or various allegories are assigned: a butterfly, a sailor, a nun, a tortoise, a snail, death, a steamboat, a precious stone (which can be interpreted as a pretty woman), a shrimp (which may also be the male sex), a goat (which represents a disreputable affair as well as the female sexual organ), a monkey, a spider, a pipe, etc.[15] The banker has a corresponding series of cardboard or wooden pictures at his disposal. He draws, or he has someone draw at random. Then he wraps the object in a piece of material which he displays to the players. This is called "hanging the beast." He then proceeds to sell tickets, each of which has the Chinese letter on it that denotes this or that figurine. Meanwhile, supernumeraries go about the streets taking bets. At a specified time the emblem enveloped in the cloth is uncovered, and the winners get thirty times the amount of their bet. The banker gives 10 per cent of his profits to his agents.

As we see, the game seems to be a more pictorial variation of roulette. But, while in roulette one can combine the various numbers in many different ways, the symbols of the *Rifa Chiffá* are assembled according to mysterious affinities. In effect, each of them possesses, or does not possess, one or many companions or valets. For example, the horse has the precious stone for companion and the monkey for valet. The butterfly has no companion but does have the tortoise for valet. The stag has three companions—the shrimp, the goat, and the spider—but it has no valet. Naturally, one is supposed to play both the chosen symbol, its companion, and its valet.

15. The same symbols are to be found in a game of cards played in Mexico for money, the principle of which is similar to lotto.

Furthermore, the thirty-six emblems of the lottery are grouped into seven unequal series (*quadrillas*): businessmen, dandies, drunkards, priests, beggars, horsemen, and women. Once again the principles that govern this distribution seem most obscure: the series of priests, for example, is composed of a large fish, a tortoise, a pipe, an eel, a rooster, a nun, and a cat; the series of drunkards, death, a snail, a peacock, a little fish. The universe of play is ruled by this strange classification. At the beginning of each game, after "hanging the beast," the banker announces a riddle (*charada*) that is supposed to guide (or confuse) the participants. He makes deliberately equivocal remarks something like this: "A man on horseback slowly wends his way. He is not stupid but drunk, and he and his companion earn a lot of money."[16] The player then guesses that he must play the series of drunkards or the series of horsemen. He might also bet on the animal that controls one or the other series. But it is doubtless some other, less clearly emphasized word that gives the key to the charade.

In another instance the banker says: "I want to do you a favor. The Elephant is killing the pig. The Tiger suggests it. The Stag is going to sell it, and the Stag takes the bundle away." An experienced player explains that one has but to think: "The Toad is a sorcerer. The Stag is the sorcerer's assistant. It carries off the harmful bundle which contains the witchcraft that an enemy practiced upon someone. If this is so, then it is the Tiger who is the enemy of the Elephant. The Stag leaves with the bundle. He will deposit it where the sorcerer told him to. Isn't it very plain? A fine play! Number thirty-one, the Stag, wins because the Stag leaves, running."

A knowledge of all the beliefs of Cuban Negroes is necessary in order to interpret these charades correctly. The banker announces: "A bird pecks and flies off." Nothing is more transparent: the dead fly; the soul of a dead man is comparable to a bird because it can travel wherever it wishes in the form of an owl; souls in torment, starved and embittered, exist. "Pecks and flies off" would signify to cause the unexpected death of a living thing that was not on its guard. One should therefore lay the eight, death.

The "dog that bites everything" is the tongue that attacks and utters calumnies; the "light that clarifies everything" is number eleven, the rooster that sings at sunrise; the "king who can do anything" is number two, the butterfly, which also represents money; the "clown who makes up his face in seclusion" is number eight, which is death covered with a white sheet. This time the explanation is valid only for the profane. In reality,

16. Rafael Roche, *La Policia y sus misterios en Cuba* (Havana, 1914), pp. 287–93.

it concerns the initiated (*ñampe* or *ñañigo muerto*), during the course of a secret ceremony the priest, in effect, draws ritualistic signs with a piece of white chalk on the face, hands, chest, arms, and legs of the initiated.[17]

A key to complicated dreams also helps to forecast the lucky number. The combinations are infinite. The data of the experience are distributed among prophetic numbers. These numbers go up to one hundred, thanks to a book deposited in the Charade's bank and which can be consulted by telephone. This list of orthodox communications creates a symbolic language that is considered "very useful to know for penetration of the mysteries of life." In any case, in the end an image frequently takes the place of the number. At the home of his wife's uncle, Alejo Carpentier sees a Negro youth adding: two plus nine plus four plus eight plus three plus five equals thirty-one. The young man does not state the number but he says: "Butterfly plus Elephant plus Cat plus Death plus Sailor plus Nun equals Stag." Similarly, to explain that twelve divided by two equals six, he says: "Whore divided by Butterfly equals Tortoise." The symbols and relationships of the game are projected upon the whole of knowledge.

Chinese Charade is very widespread although forbidden by Article 355 of the penal code of Cuba. Since 1879 many protests have been voiced against its viciousness. It is mainly the working people who gamble the little money they have and, as one writer comments, who even lose the money they need to feed their families. They do not gamble large sums because they do not have them, but they play incessantly, since the "hanging of the beast" takes place four to six times daily. This is a game in which it is relatively easy to commit fraud. If the banker who sees the betting list is clever, there is nothing to prevent him, at the moment of uncovering the symbol, from replacing a heavily underwritten one with some other that has been entirely ignored.[18]

However, whether honest or not, bankers are known to make quick fortunes. During the last century, it has been said, they made as much as 40,000 pesos a day; one returned to his own country with a capital of 200,000 golden pesos. Today in Havana there are supposed to be five large Charade organizations and over twelve small ones. More than $100,000 are gambled every day.[19]

This is not a unique case. There are more remarkable and more complete games, like the Brazilian *Jogo do Bicho*.[20] The main point is that sufficient proof exists to show that games of chance sometimes possess a cul-

17. From a communication of Lydia Cabrera's.

18. Roche, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

19. From a communication of Alejo Carpentier's and documents which he provided.

tural importance usually monopolized by games of competition. We must realize, as well, that, even in societies where merit is supposed to reign supreme, the seduction of luck is no less evident. Although stigmatized, games of chance nonetheless preserve an important role, more spectacular, it is true, than decisive. In any case, at this level, luck, rivaling competition and often combined with it, gives rise to large-scale manifestations. It balances the *Tour de France* with the National Lottery, it builds gambling houses just as sports events build stadiums, it inspires associations and clubs, the free-masonry of the initiated and the devotees, it maintains a specialized press, and it stimulates investments that are no less important.

Moreover, a curious symmetry emerges: while sports often receive governmental subsidies, games of chance, to the extent that the state controls them, help to fill the state treasury. Sometimes they are even the principal source of revenue. Luck, the permanent camouflage of work, of merit, and of effort, even though regarded with suspicion and held in contempt, thus preserves the freedom of the city in the most rational and administrative societies—those that are farthest removed from the coupling of prestige with pretense and vertigo. It is very easy to understand the reason for this. Vertigo and pretense are absolutely, and by their very nature, resistant to any kind of code, moderation, or organization. *Alea*, on the contrary, as well as *agôn*, calls for calculation and rules. However, they are not at all on the same plane. Their essential solidarity does not preclude rivalry. The principles which they represent are entirely too contradictory for them not to tend to be mutually exclusive. Work is obviously incompatible with the passive anticipation of one's lot, the capricious whim of fortune with the legitimate claims of effort and merit. To forsake pretense and giddiness, the mask and ecstasy, is to signalize emergence from a visceral and incantational universe and entry into the cold and rational world of distributive justice. The ideal of societies that have entered this new phase is thus defined by the equality of all citizens, if not an effective, absolute, universal equality—at least by a juridical one and, as far as possible, by an approximate equality of opportunity at the outset.

V. CONCLUSION

These examples suffice to clarify, on the one hand, the profound impression that games of chance may come to leave on a culture and, on the

20. I have described this game and analyzed its economic repercussions in my article, "Économie quotidienne et jeux de hasard en Amérique ibérique," *Quatre essais de sociologie contemporaine* (Paris, 1951), pp. 27–46.

other hand, their irreducible tenacity even in societies that are the most hostile to them. Certain people, it is true, deny that we are dealing with games, per se, claiming this to be a misapplication of the term. They contend that so-called games of chance have nothing in common with the meaningless diversions that leave the players in the same situation as they were when the game began. These theorists do not perceive in games involving money the gratuitousness which they consider to be part of the essence of play. They refuse to recognize as diversions anything which either ruins or enriches. It is true that the essence of play is to be unproductive, to create neither wealth, as does work, nor a work, as does art. But games of chance do not create anything either; they merely transfer the wealth of the players, and only to the extent that the players themselves freely accept the eventuality of this transfer. None of the charcteristics that legitimately defines games fails to apply both to games of chance and to the others. Just this once, in effect, one must admit that language is right and the scholars are wrong, provided he agrees, as I have suggested, that games are:

1. *Free:* something which the player is not forced to engage in, in which event play will immediately lose the characteristic of an attractive and happy diversion.

2. *Isolated:* circumscribed within the limitations of a precise time and place and agreed upon in advance.

3. *Uncertain:* whose progress and result cannot be determined in advance, a certain latitude in the necessity of improvising being inevitably left to the initiative of the players.

4. *Unproductive:* creating neither commodities, wealth, nor any kind of new element and, with the exception of a transfer of property among the circle of players, ending in a situation identical with that which prevailed when the game began.

5. *Unregulated:* subject to the conventions that suspend ordinary laws and temporarily institute new rules that alone count.

6. *Fictitious:* accompanied by a specific awareness of a second reality or of a frank unreality in contrast to daily life.

Games of chance truly belong to the domain of play. Doubtless, they seem, when comparisons are made, the very opposite of competitive games. But it is precisely this oppositeness which demonstrates a solidarity, an identity in their natures. *Agôn* is desire and effort for victory; *alea*

is trust in destiny. These are two symmetrical ways of attempting to experience triumph: the one, by expecting everything of one's self under conditions that are perfectly fair for all the competitors; the other, by abandoning any expectancy of self under conditions that impose a no less rigid or mathematical justice. These are both games of will whose purpose is to manifest excellence in performance.

Thus two procedures are pitted against each other. The rule consists, in the one instance, in bending all one's efforts toward success; in the other, in constraining one's self to absolute passivity; the former involves the display of a very human superiority; the latter relates to the good fortune of powers that are inaccessible to man. These contrasting attitudes do not prevent the combatants from arming themselves with fetiches or the gamblers from believing in double or quits. Basically, they represent a challenge to each other, and one cannot incline to one side without attributing a kind of shameful counterpart to the other.

It is remarkable that an identical polarity can be observed in games of personality. Such games consist either in portraying a second personality (*mimicry*) while not losing sight of one's own or in losing one's own (*ilinx*)—letting it go adrift and savoring the sensation of its guidance, domination, and possession by alien forces until one decides to put an end to the voluntary confusion. Just as in games of chance the danger lies in not being able to limit the stakes, so in these games it lies in the inability to limit the duration of the bewilderment.

Perhaps only certain categories of games are fruitful: those whose province is competition or pretense. The others, built on chance or vertigo, perhaps are simply inexpiable and devastating. It would be rash to decide. In any case, the associations, the symmetries, and the contrasts which articulate such games seem too exact and too impressive for them to be viewed as a disparate series of unrelated patterns of behavior. One finds a specific trait in games whose very laws are valid for all the subdivisions even though, extremely variable, they seem at first to be contradictory.

In this relatively new domain we perceive how dangerous it would be to abandon to the different disciplines—from psychology or pedagogy to mathematics—the privilege of qualified research. No matter what conclusions they might reach, these would remain devoid of their true meaning and significance. They would, in effect, lack the advantage of being read in the perspective of the central problem which the indivisible universe of games raises and from which, at the outset, games derive whatever interest they might possess.