

Man, Play and Games

✻ ROGER CAILLOIS

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
Meyer Barash

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☞ Caillois' dedication, *Secundum Secundatum*, is a tribute to Charles de Secondat, Baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu, and means, roughly, "according to the rules of Montesquieu." Montesquieu was part of an inherited title, and the man himself was referred to in Latin discussions and scholarly works as "Secondatur." Caillois edited a definitive French edition of Montesquieu's *Oeuvres Complètes*, Librairie Gallimard, Paris, 1949-1951. ☞

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4. *Unproductive*: creating neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind; and, except for the exchange of property among the players, ending in a situation identical to that prevailing at the beginning of the game;

5. *Governed by rules*: under conventions that suspend ordinary laws, and for the moment establish new legislation, which alone counts;

6. *Make-believe*: accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life.

These diverse qualities are purely formal. They do not pre-judge the content of games. Also, the fact that the two last qualities—rules and make-believe—may be related, shows that the intimate nature of the facts that they seek to define implies, perhaps requires, that the latter in their turn be subdivided. This would attempt to take account not of the qualities that are opposed to reality, but of those that are clustered in groups of games with unique, irreducible characteristics.

The Classification of Games

The multitude and infinite variety of games at first causes one to despair of discovering a principle of classification capable of subsuming them under a small number of well-defined categories. Games also possess so many different characteristics that many approaches are possible. Current usage sufficiently demonstrates the degree of hesitance and uncertainty: indeed, several classifications are employed concurrently. To oppose card games to games of skill, or to oppose parlor games to those played in a stadium is meaningless. In effect, the implement used in the game is chosen as a classificatory instrument in the one case; in the other, the qualifications required; in a third the number of players and the atmosphere of the game, and lastly the place in which the contest is waged. An additional over-all complication is that the same game can be played alone or with others. A particular game may require several skills simultaneously, or none.

Very different games can be played in the same place. Merry-

go-rounds and the diablo are both open-air amusements. But the child who passively enjoys the pleasure of riding by means of the movement of the carousel is not in the same state of mind as the one who tries as best he can to correctly whirl his diablo. On the other hand, many games are played without implements or accessories. Also, the same implement can fulfill different functions, depending on the game played. Marbles are generally the equipment for a game of skill, but one of the players can try to guess whether the marbles held in his opponent's hand are an odd or even number. They thus become part of a game of chance.

This last expression must be clarified. For one thing, it alludes to the fundamental characteristic of a very special kind of game. Whether it be a bet, lottery, roulette, or baccara, it is clear that the player's attitude is the same. He does nothing, he merely awaits the outcome. The boxer, the runner, and the player of chess or hopscotch, on the contrary, work as hard as they can to win. It matters little that some games are athletic and others intellectual. The player's attitude is the same: he tries to vanquish a rival operating under the same conditions as himself. It would thus appear justified to contrast games of chance with competitive games. Above all, it becomes tempting to investigate the possibility of discovering other attitudes, no less fundamental, so that the categories for a systematic classification of games can eventually be provided.



After examining different possibilities, I am proposing a division into four main rubrics, depending upon whether, in the games under consideration, the role of competition, chance, simulation, or vertigo is dominant. I call these *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx*, respectively. All four indeed belong to the domain of play. One plays football, billiards, or chess (*agôn*); roulette or a lottery (*alea*); pirate, Nero, or Hamlet (*mimicry*); or one produces in oneself, by a rapid whirling or falling movement, a state of dizziness and disorder (*ilinx*). Even these designations do not

cover the entire universe of play. It is divided into quadrants, each governed by an original principle. Each section contains games of the same kind. But inside each section, the different games are arranged in a rank order of progression. They can also be placed on a continuum between two opposite poles. At one extreme an almost indivisible principle, common to diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety is dominant. It manifests a kind of uncontrolled fantasy that can be designated by the term *paidia*. At the opposite extreme, this frolicsome and impulsive exuberance is almost entirely absorbed or disciplined by a complementary, and in some respects inverse, tendency to its anarchic and capricious nature: there is a growing tendency to bind it with arbitrary, imperative, and purposely tedious conventions, to oppose it still more by ceaselessly practicing the most embarrassing chicanery upon it, in order to make it more uncertain of attaining its desired effect. This latter principle is completely impractical, even though it requires an ever greater amount of effort, patience, skill, or ingenuity. I call this second component *ludus*.

I do not intend, in resorting to these strange concepts, to set up some kind of pedantic, totally meaningless mythology. However, obligated as I am to classify diverse games under the same general category, it seemed to me that the most economical means of doing so was to borrow, from one language or another, the most meaningful and comprehensive term possible, so that each category examined should avoid the possibility of lacking the particular quality on the basis of which the unifying concept was chosen. Also, to the degree that I will try to establish the classification to which I am committed, each concept chosen will not relate too directly to concrete experience, which in turn is to be divided according to an as yet untested principle.

In the same spirit, I am compelled to subsume the games most varied in appearance under the same rubric, in order to better demonstrate their fundamental kinship. I have mixed physical and mental games, those dependent upon force with those requiring skill or reasoning. Within each class, I have not dis-

tinguished between children's and adults' games, and wherever possible I have sought instances of homologous behavior in the animal world. The point in doing this was to stress the very principle of the proposed classification. It would be less burdensome if it were perceived that the divisions set up correspond to essential and irreducible impulses.

1. *Fundamental Categories*

Agôn. A whole group of games would seem to be competitive, that is to say, like a combat in which equality of chances is artificially created, in order that the adversaries should confront each other under ideal conditions, susceptible of giving precise and incontestable value to the winner's triumph. It is therefore always a question of a rivalry which hinges on a single quality (speed, endurance, strength, memory, skill, ingenuity, etc.), exercised, within defined limits and without outside assistance, in such a way that the winner appears to be better than the loser in a certain category of exploits. Such is the case with sports contests and the reason for their very many subdivisions. Two individuals or two teams are in opposition (polo, tennis, football, boxing, fencing, etc.), or there may be a varying number of contestants (courses of every kind, shooting matches, golf, athletics, etc.). In the same class belong the games in which, at the outset, the adversaries divide the elements into equal parts and value. The games of checkers, chess, and billiards are perfect examples. The search for equality is so obviously essential to the rivalry that it is re-established by a handicap for players of different classes; that is, within the equality of chances originally established, a secondary inequality, proportionate to the relative powers of the participants, is dealt with. It is significant that such a usage exists in the *agôn* of a physical character (sports) just as in the more cerebral type (chess games for example, in which the weaker player is given the advantage of a pawn, knight, castle, etc.).

As carefully as one tries to bring it about, absolute equality does not seem to be realizable. Sometimes, as in checkers or chess, the fact of moving first is an advantage, for this priority permits the favored player to occupy key positions or to impose a special strategy. Conversely, in bidding games, such as bridge, the last bidder profits from the clues afforded by the bids of his opponents. Again, at croquet, to be last multiplies the player's resources. In sports contests, the exposure, the fact of having the sun in front or in back; the wind which aids or hinders one or the other side; the fact, in disputing for positions on a circular track, of finding oneself in the inside or outside lane constitutes a crucial test, a trump or disadvantage whose influence may be considerable. These inevitable imbalances are negated or modified by drawing lots at the beginning, then by strict alternation of favored positions.

The point of the game is for each player to have his superiority in a given area recognized. That is why the practice of *agôn* presupposes sustained attention, appropriate training, assiduous application, and the desire to win. It implies discipline and perseverance. It leaves the champion to his own devices, to evoke the best possible game of which he is capable, and it obliges him to play the game within the fixed limits, and according to the rules applied equally to all, so that in return the victor's superiority will be beyond dispute.

In addition to games, the spirit of *agôn* is found in other cultural phenomena conforming to the game code: in the duel, in the tournament, and in certain constant and noteworthy aspects of so-called courtly war.

In principle, it would seem that *agôn* is unknown among animals, which have no conception of limits or rules, only seeking a brutal victory in merciless combat. It is clear that horse races and cock fights are an exception, for these are conflicts in which men make animals compete in terms of norms that the former alone have set up. Yet, in considering certain facts, it seems that animals already have the competitive urge during encounters where limits are at least implicitly accepted and spontaneously

respected, even if rules are lacking. This is notably the case in kittens, puppies, and bear cubs, which take pleasure in knocking each other down yet not hurting each other.

Still more convincing are the habits of bovines, which, standing face to face with heads lowered, try to force each other back. Horses engage in the same kind of friendly dueling: to test their strength, they rear up on their hind legs and press down upon each other with all their vigor and weight, in order to throw their adversaries off balance. In addition, observers have noted numerous games of pursuit that result from a challenge or invitation. The animal that is overtaken has nothing to fear from the victor. The most impressive example is without doubt that of the little ferocious "fighting" willow wrens. "A moist elevation covered with short grass and about two meters in diameter is chosen for the arena," says Karl Groos.³ The males gather there daily. The first to arrive waits for an adversary, and then the fight begins. The contenders tremble and bow their heads several times. Their feathers bristle. They hurl themselves at each other, beaks advanced, and striking at one another. *Never is there any pursuit or conflict outside the space delimited for the journey.* That is why it seems legitimate for me to use the term *agôn* for these cases, for the goal of the encounters is not for the antagonist to cause serious injury to his rival, but rather to demonstrate his own superiority. Man merely adds refinement and precision by devising rules.

In children, as soon as the personality begins to assert itself, and before the emergence of regulated competition, unusual challenges are frequent, in which the adversaries try to prove their greater endurance. They are observed competing to see which can stare at the sun, endure tickling, stop breathing, not wink his eye, etc., the longest. Sometimes the stakes are more serious, where it is a question of enduring hunger or else pain in the form of whipping, pinching, stinging, or burning. Then these ascetic games, as they have been called, involve severe ordeals. They anticipate the cruelty and hazing which adolescents must undergo during their initiation. This is a departure

from *agôn*, which soon finds its perfect form, be it in legitimately competitive games and sports, or in those involving feats of prowess (hunting, mountain climbing, crossword puzzles, chess problems, etc.) in which champions, without directly confronting each other, are involved in ceaseless and diffuse competition.

Alea. This is the Latin name for the game of dice. I have borrowed it to designate, in contrast to *agôn*, all games that are based on a decision independent of the player, an outcome over which he has no control, and in which winning is the result of fate rather than triumphing over an adversary. More properly, destiny is the sole artisan of victory, and where there is rivalry, what is meant is that the winner has been more favored by fortune than the loser. Perfect examples of this type are provided by the games of dice, roulette, heads or tails, baccara, lotteries, etc. Here, not only does one refrain from trying to eliminate the injustice of chance, but rather it is the very capriciousness of chance that constitutes the unique appeal of the game.

Alea signifies and reveals the favor of destiny. The player is entirely passive; he does not deploy his resources, skill, muscles, or intelligence. All he need do is await, in hope and trembling, the cast of the die. He risks his stake. Fair play, also sought but now taking place under ideal conditions, lies in being compensated exactly in proportion to the risk involved. Every device intended to equalize the competitors' chances is here employed to scrupulously equate risk and profit.

In contrast to *agôn*, *alea* negates work, patience, experience, and qualifications. Professionalization, application, and training are eliminated. In one instant, winnings may be wiped out. *Alea* is total disgrace or absolute favor. It grants the lucky player infinitely more than he could procure by a lifetime of labor, discipline, and fatigue. It seems an insolent and sovereign insult to merit. It supposes on the player's part an attitude exactly opposite to that reflected in *agôn*. In the latter, his only reliance is upon himself; in the former, he counts on everything, even the vaguest sign, the slightest outside occurrence, which he immedi-

ately takes to be an omen or token—in short, he depends on everything except himself.

Agôn is a vindication of personal responsibility; *alea* is a negation of the will, a surrender to destiny. Some games, such as dominoes, backgammon, and most card games, combine the two. Chance determines the distribution of the hands dealt to each player, and the players then play the hands that blind luck has assigned to them as best they can. In a game like bridge, it is knowledge and reasoning that constitute the player's defense, permitting him to play a better game with the cards that he has been given. In games such as poker, it is the qualities of psychological acumen and character that count.

The role of money is also generally more impressive than the role of chance, and therefore is the recourse of the weaker player. The reason for this is clear: *Alea* does not have the function of causing the more intelligent to win money, but tends rather to abolish natural or acquired individual differences, so that all can be placed on an absolutely equal footing to await the blind verdict of chance.

Since the result of *agôn* is necessarily uncertain and paradoxically must approximate the effect of pure chance, assuming that the chances of the competitors are as equal as possible, it follows that every encounter with competitive characteristics and ideal rules can become the object of betting, or *alea*, e.g. horse or greyhound races, football, basketball, and cock fights. It even happens that table stakes vary unceasingly during the game, according to the vicissitudes of *agôn*.⁴

Games of chance would seem to be peculiarly human. Animals play games involving competition, stimulation, and excess. K. Groos, especially, offers striking examples of these. In sum, animals, which are very much involved in the immediate and enslaved by their impulses, cannot conceive of an abstract and inanimate power, to whose verdict they would passively submit in advance of the game. To await the decision of destiny passively and deliberately, to risk upon it wealth proportionate to the risk of losing, is an attitude that requires the possibility of

foresight, vision, and speculation, for which objective and calculating reflection is needed. Perhaps it is in the degree to which a child approximates an animal that games of chance are not as important to children as to adults. For the child, play is active. In addition, the child is immune to the main attraction of games of chance, deprived as he is of economic independence, since he has no money of his own. Games of chance have no power to thrill him. To be sure, marbles are money to him. However, he counts on his skill rather than on chance to win them.

Agôn and *alea* imply opposite and somewhat complementary attitudes, but they both obey the same law—the creation for the players of conditions of pure equality denied them in real life. For nothing in life is clear, since everything is confused from the very beginning, luck and merit too. Play, whether *agôn* or *alea*, is thus an attempt to substitute perfect situations for the normal confusion of contemporary life. In games, the role of merit or chance is clear and indisputable. It is also implied that all must play with exactly the same possibility of proving their superiority or, on another scale, exactly the same chances of winning. In one way or another, one escapes the real world and creates another. One can also escape himself and become another. This is *mimicry*.

Mimicry. All play presupposes the temporary acceptance, if not of an illusion (indeed this last word means nothing less than beginning a game: *in-lusio*), then at least of a closed, conventional, and, in certain respects, imaginary universe. Play can consist not only of deploying actions or submitting to one's fate in an imaginary milieu, but of becoming an illusory character oneself, and of so behaving. One is thus confronted with a diverse series of manifestations, the common element of which is that the subject makes believe or makes others believe that he is someone other than himself. He forgets, disguises, or temporarily sheds his personality in order to feign another. I prefer to designate these phenomena by the term *mimicry*, the English word

for mimetism, notably of insects, so that the fundamental, elementary, and quasi-organic nature of the impulse that stimulates it can be stressed.

The insect world, compared to the human world, seems like the most divergent of solutions provided by nature. This world is in contrast in all respects to that of man, but it is no less elaborate, complex, and surprising. Also, it seems legitimate to me at this point to take account of mimetic phenomena of which insects provide most perplexing examples. In fact, corresponding to the free, versatile, arbitrary, imperfect, and extremely diversified behavior of man, there is in animals, especially in insects, the organic, fixed, and absolute adaptation which characterizes the species and is infinitely and exactly reproduced from generation to generation in billions of individuals: e.g. the caste system of ants and termites as against class conflict, and the designs on butterflies' wings as compared to the history of painting. Reluctant as one may be to accept this hypothesis, the temerity of which I recognize, the inexplicable mimetism of insects immediately affords an extraordinary parallel to man's penchant for disguising himself, wearing a mask, or *playing a part*—except that in the insect's case the mask or guise becomes part of the body instead of a contrived accessory. But it serves the same purposes in both cases, viz. to change the wearer's appearance and to inspire fear in others.⁵

Among vertebrates, the tendency to imitate first appears as an entirely physical, quasi-irresistible contagion, analogous to the contagion of yawning, running, limping, smiling, or almost any movement. Hudson seems to have proved that a young animal "follows any object that is going away, and flees any approaching object." Just as a lamb is startled and runs if its mother turns around and moves toward the lamb without warning, the lamb trails the man, dog, or horse that it sees moving away. Contagion and imitation are not the same as simulation, but they make possible and give rise to the idea or the taste for mimicry. In birds, this tendency leads to nuptial parades, ceremonies, and exhibitions of vanity in which males or females, as the case may

be, indulge with rare application and evident pleasure. As for the oxyrhinous crabs, which plant upon their carapaces any alga or polyp that they can catch, their aptitude for disguise leaves no room for doubt, whatever explanation for the phenomenon may be advanced.

Mimicry and travesty are therefore complementary acts in this kind of play. For children, the aim is to imitate adults. This explains the success of the toy weapons and miniatures which copy the tools, engines, arms, and machines used by adults. The little girl plays her mother's role as cook, laundress, and ironer. The boy makes believe he is a soldier, musketeer, policeman, pirate, cowboy, Martian,⁶ etc. An airplane is made by waving his arms and making the noise of a motor. However, acts of mimicry tend to cross the border between childhood and adulthood. They cover to the same degree any distraction, mask, or travesty, in which one participates, and which stresses the very fact that the play is masked or otherwise disguised, and such consequences as ensue. Lastly it is clear that theatrical presentations and dramatic interpretations rightly belong in this category.

The pleasure lies in being or passing for another. But in games the basic intention is not that of deceiving the spectators. The child who is playing train may well refuse to kiss his father while saying to him that one does not embrace locomotives, but he is not trying to persuade his father that he is a real locomotive. At a carnival, the masquerader does not try to make one believe that he is really a marquis, toreador, or Indian, but rather tries to inspire fear and take advantage of the surrounding license, a result of the fact that the mask disguises the conventional self and liberates the true personality. The actor does not try to make believe that he is "really" King Lear or Charles V. It is only the spy and the fugitive who disguise themselves to really deceive because they are not playing.

Activity, imagination, interpretation, and *mimicry* have hardly any relationship to *alea*, which requires immobility and the thrill of expectation from the player, but *agôn* is not excluded. I am not thinking of the masqueraders' competition, in which the

relationship is obvious. A much more subtle complicity is revealed. For nonparticipants, every *agôn* is a spectacle. Only it is a spectacle which, to be valid, excludes simulation. Great sports events are nevertheless special occasions for *mimicry*, but it must be recalled that the simulation is now transferred from the participants to the audience. It is not the athletes who mimic, but the spectators. Identification with the champion in itself constitutes *mimicry* related to that of the reader with the hero of the novel and that of the moviegoer with the film star. To be convinced of this, it is merely necessary to consider the perfectly symmetrical functions of the champion and the stage or screen star. Champions, winners at *agôn*, are the stars of sports contests. Conversely, stars are winners in a more diffuse competition in which the stakes are popular favor. Both receive a large fan-mail, give interviews to an avid press, and sign autographs.

In fact, bicycle races, boxing or wrestling matches, football, tennis, or polo games are intrinsic spectacles, with costumes, solemn overture, appropriate liturgy, and regulated procedures. In a word, these are dramas whose vicissitudes keep the public breathless, and lead to denouements which exalt some and depress others. The nature of these spectacles remains that of an *agôn*, but their outward aspect is that of an exhibition. The audience are not content to encourage the efforts of the athletes or horses of their choice merely by voice and gesture. A physical contagion leads them to assume the position of the men or animals in order to help them, just as the bowler is known to unconsciously incline his body in the direction that he would like the bowling ball to take at the end of its course. Under these conditions, paralleling the spectacle, a competitive *mimicry* is born in the public, which doubles the true *agôn* of the field or track.

With one exception, *mimicry* exhibits all the characteristics of play: liberty, convention, suspension of reality, and delimitation of space and time. However, the continuous submission to imperative and precise rules cannot be observed—rules for the dissimulation of reality and the substitution of a second reality.

Mimicry is incessant invention. The rule of the game is unique: it consists in the actor's fascinating the spectator, while avoiding an error that might lead the spectator to break the spell. The spectator must lend himself to the illusion without first challenging the décor, mask, or artifice which for a given time he is asked to believe in as more real than reality itself.

Ilinx. The last kind of game includes those which are based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind. In all cases, it is a question of surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality with sovereign brusqueness.

The disturbance that provokes vertigo is commonly sought for its own sake. I need only cite as examples the actions of whirling dervishes and the Mexican *voladores*. I choose these purposely, for the former, in technique employed, can be related to certain children's games, while the latter rather recall the elaborate maneuvers of high-wire acrobatics. They thus touch the two poles of games of vertigo. Dervishes seek ecstasy by whirling about with movements accelerating as the drumbeats become ever more precipitate. Panic and hypnosis are attained by the paroxysm of frenetic, contagious, and shared rotation.⁷ In Mexico, the *voladores*—Huastec or Totonac—climb to the top of a mast sixty-five to one hundred feet high. They are disguised as eagles with false wings hanging from their wrists. The end of a rope is attached to their waists. The rope then passes between their toes in such a way that they can manage their entire descent with head down and arms outstretched. Before reaching the ground, they make many complete turns, thirty according to Torquemada, describing an ever-widening spiral in their downward flight. The ceremony, comprising several flights and beginning at noon, is readily interpreted as a dance of the setting sun, associated with birds, the deified dead. The frequency of accidents has led the Mexican authorities to ban this dangerous exercise.⁸

It is scarcely necessary to invoke these rare and fascinating examples. Every child very well knows that by whirling rapidly he reaches a centrifugal state of flight from which he regains bodily stability and clarity of perception only with difficulty. The child engages in this activity playfully and finds pleasure thereby. An example is the game of teetotum⁹ in which the player pivots on one foot as quickly as he is able. Analogously, in the Haitian game of *maïs d'or* two children hold hands, face to face, their arms extended. With their bodies stiffened and bent backward, and with their feet joined, they turn until they are breathless, so that they will have the pleasure of staggering about after they stop. Comparable sensations are provided by screaming as loud as one can, racing downhill, and tobogganing; in horsemanship, provided that one turns quickly; and in swinging.

Various physical activities also provoke these sensations, such as the tightrope, falling or being projected into space, rapid rotation, sliding, speeding, and acceleration of vertilinear movement, separately or in combination with gyrating movement. In parallel fashion, there is a vertigo of a moral order, a transport that suddenly seizes the individual. This vertigo is readily linked to the desire for disorder and destruction, a drive which is normally repressed. It is reflected in crude and brutal forms of personality expression. In children, it is especially observed in the games of hot cockles, "winner-take-all," and leapfrog in which they rush and spin pell-mell. In adults, nothing is more revealing of vertigo than the strange excitement that is felt in cutting down the tall prairie flowers with a switch, or in creating an avalanche of the snow on a rooftop, or, better, the intoxication that is experienced in military barracks—for example, in noisily banging garbage cans.

To cover the many varieties of such transport, for a disorder that may take organic or psychological form, I propose using the term *ilinx*, the Greek term for whirlpool, from which is also derived the Greek word for vertigo (*ilingos*).

This pleasure is not unique to man. To begin with, it is appropriate to recall the gyrations of certain mammals, sheep in par-

ticular. Even if these are pathological manifestations, they are too significant to be passed over in silence. In addition, examples in which the play element is certain are not lacking. In order to catch their tails dogs will spin around until they fall down. At other times they are seized by a fever for running until they are exhausted. Antelopes, gazelles, and wild horses are often panic-stricken when there is no real danger in the slightest degree to account for it; the impression is of an overbearing contagion to which they surrender in instant compliance.¹⁰

Water rats divert themselves by spinning as if they were being drawn by an eddy in a stream. The case of the chamois is even more remarkable. According to Karl Groos, they ascend the glaciers, and with a leap, each in turn slides down a steep slope, while the other chamois watch.

The gibbon chooses a flexible branch and weighs it down until it unbends, thus projecting him into the air. He lands catch as catch can, and he endlessly repeats this useless exercise, inexplicable except in terms of its seductive quality. Birds especially love games of vertigo. They let themselves fall like stones from a great height, then open their wings when they are only a few feet from the ground, thus giving the impression that they are going to be crushed. In the mating season they utilize this heroic flight in order to attract the female. The American nighthawk, described by Audubon, is a virtuoso at these impressive acrobatics.¹¹

Following the teetotum, *maïs d'or*, sliding, horsemanship, and swinging of their childhood, men surrender to the intoxication of many kinds of dance, from the common but insidious giddiness of the waltz to the many mad, tremendous, and convulsive movements of other dances. They derive the same kind of pleasure from the intoxication stimulated by high speed on skis, motorcycles, or in driving sports cars. In order to give this kind of sensation the intensity and brutality capable of shocking adults, powerful machines have had to be invented. Thus it is not surprising that the Industrial Revolution had to take place before vertigo could really become a kind of game. It is now provided

for the avid masses by thousands of stimulating contraptions installed at fairs and amusement parks.

These machines would obviously surpass their goals if it were only a question of assaulting the organs of the inner ear, upon which the sense of equilibrium is dependent. But it is the whole body which must submit to such treatment as anyone would fear undergoing, were it not that everybody else was seen struggling to do the same. In fact, it is worth watching people leaving these vertigo-inducing machines. The contraptions turn people pale and dizzy to the point of nausea. They shriek with fright, gasp for breath, and have the terrifying impression of visceral fear and shrinking as if to escape a horrible attack. Moreover the majority of them, before even recovering, are already hastening to the ticket booth in order to buy the right to again experience the same pleasurable torture.

It is necessary to use the word "pleasure," because one hesitates to call such a transport a mere distraction, corresponding as it does more to a spasm than to an entertainment. In addition, it is important to note that the violence of the shock felt is such that the concessionaires try, in extreme cases, to lure the naive by offering free rides. They deceitfully announce that "this time only" the ride is free, when this is the usual practice. To compensate, the spectators are made to pay for the privilege of calmly observing from a high balcony the terrors of the cooperating or surprised victims, exposed to fearful forces or strange caprices.

It would be rash to draw very precise conclusions on the subject of this curious and cruel assignment of roles. This last is not characteristic of a kind of game, such as is found in boxing, wrestling, and in gladiatorial combat. Essential is the pursuit of this special disorder or sudden panic, which defines the term vertigo, and in the true characteristics of the games associated with it: viz. the freedom to accept or refuse the experience, strict and fixed limits, and separation from the rest of reality. What the experience adds to the spectacle does not diminish but reinforces its character as play.

2. From Turbulence to Rules

Rules are inseparable from play as soon as the latter becomes institutionalized. From this moment on they become part of its nature. They transform it into an instrument of fecund and decisive culture. But a basic freedom is central to play in order to stimulate distraction and fantasy. This liberty is its indispensable motive power and is basic to the most complex and carefully organized forms of play. Such a primary power of improvisation and joy, which I call *paidia*, is allied to the taste for gratuitous difficulty that I propose to call *ludus*, in order to encompass the various games to which, without exaggeration, a civilizing quality can be attributed. In fact, they reflect the moral and intellectual values of a culture, as well as contribute to their refinement and development.

I have chosen the term *paidia* because its root is the word for child, and also because of a desire not to needlessly disconcert the reader by resorting to a term borrowed from an antipodal language. However, the Sanskrit *kredati* and the Chinese *wan* seem both richer and more expressive through the variety and nature of their connotations. It is true that they also present the disadvantages of overabundance—a certain danger of confusion, for one. *Kredati* designates the play of adults, children, and animals. It applies more specifically to gamboling, i.e. to the sudden and capricious movements provoked by a superabundance of gaiety and vitality. It applies equally to illicit sex relationships, the rise and fall of waves, and anything that undulates with the wind. The word *wan* is even more explicit, as much for what it defines as for what it avoids defining, i.e. specifying games of skill, competition, simulation, and chance. It manifests many refinements of meaning to which I will have occasion to return.

In view of these relationships and semantic qualifications, what can be the connotations and denotations of the term *paidia*? I shall define it, for my purposes, as a word covering the

spontaneous manifestations of the play instinct: a cat entangled in a ball of wool, a dog sniffing, and an infant laughing at his rattle represent the first identifiable examples of this type of activity. It intervenes in every happy exuberance which effects an immediate and disordered agitation, an impulsive and easy recreation, but readily carried to excess, whose impromptu and unruly character remains its essential if not unique reason for being. From somersaults to scribbling, from squabble to uproar, perfectly clear illustrations are not lacking of the comparable symptoms of movements, colors, or noises.

This elementary need for disturbance and tumult first appears as an impulse to touch, grasp, taste, smell, and then drop any accessible object. It readily can become a taste for destruction and breaking things. It explains the pleasure in endlessly cutting up paper with a pair of scissors, pulling cloth into thread, breaking up a gathering, holding up a queue, disturbing the play or work of others, etc. Soon comes the desire to mystify or to defy by sticking out the tongue or grimacing while seeming to touch or throw the forbidden object. For the child it is a question of expressing himself, of feeling he is the *cause*, of forcing others to pay attention to him. In this manner, K. Groos recalls the case of a monkey which took pleasure in pulling the tail of a dog that lived with it, each time that the dog seemed to be going to sleep. The primitive joy in destruction and upset has been notably observed by the sister of G. J. Romanes in precise and most meaningful detail.¹²

The child does not stop at that. He loves to play with his own pain, for example by probing a toothache with his tongue. He also likes to be frightened. He thus looks for a physical illness, limited and controlled, of which he is the cause, or sometimes he seeks an anxiety that he, being the cause, can stop at will. At various points, the fundamental aspects of play are already recognizable, i.e. voluntary, agreed upon, isolated, and regulated activity.

Soon there is born the desire to invent rules, and to abide by them whatever the cost. The child then makes all kinds of bets—

which, as has been seen, are the elementary forms of *agôn*—with himself or his friends. He hops, walks backwards with his eyes closed, plays at who can look longest at the sun, and will suffer pain or stand in a painful position.

In general, the first manifestations of *paidia* have no name and could not have any, precisely because they are not part of any order, distinctive symbolism, or clearly differentiated life that would permit a vocabulary to consecrate their autonomy with a specific term. But as soon as conventions, techniques, and utensils emerge, the first games as such arise with them: e.g. leapfrog, hide and seek, kite-flying, teetotum, sliding, blindman's buff, and doll-play. At this point the contradictory roads of *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx* begin to bifurcate. At the same time, the pleasure experienced in solving a problem arbitrarily designed for this purpose also intervenes, so that reaching a solution has no other goal than personal satisfaction for its own sake.

This condition, which is *ludus* proper, is also reflected in different kinds of games, except for those which wholly depend upon the cast of a die. It is complementary to and a refinement of *paidia*, which it disciplines and enriches. It provides an occasion for training and normally leads to the acquisition of a special skill, a particular mastery of the operation of one or another contraption or the discovery of a satisfactory solution to problems of a more conventional type.

The difference from *agôn* is that in *ludus* the tension and skill of the player are not related to any explicit feeling of emulation or rivalry: the conflict is with the obstacle, not with one or several competitors. On the level of manual dexterity there can be cited games such as cup-and-ball, diablo, and yo-yo. These simple instruments merely utilize basic natural laws, e.g. gravity and rotation in the case of the yo-yo, where the point is to transform a rectilinear alternating motion into a continuous circular movement. Kite-flying, on the contrary, relies on the exploitation of a specific atmospheric condition. Thanks to this, the player accomplishes a kind of auscultation upon the sky from

afar. He projects his presence beyond the limits of his body. Again, the game of blindman's buff offers an opportunity to experience the quality of perception in the absence of sight.¹³ It is readily seen that the possibilities of *ludus* are almost infinite.

Games such as solitaire or the ring puzzle, although part of the same species, already belong to another group of games, since they constantly appeal to a spirit of calculation and contrivance. And lastly, crossword puzzles, mathematical recreations, anagrams, olorhymes¹⁴ and obscure poetry, addiction to detective stories (trying to identify the culprit), and chess or bridge problems constitute, even in the absence of gadgets, many varieties of the most prevalent and pure forms of *ludus*.

It is common knowledge that what to begin with seems to be a situation susceptible to indefinite repetition turns out to be capable of producing ever new combinations. Thus the player is stimulated to emulate himself, permitting him to take pride in his accomplishment, as against those who share his taste. There is a manifest relationship between *ludus* and *agôn*. In addition, it can happen that the same game may possess both, e.g. chess or bridge.

The combination of *ludus* and *alea* is no less frequent: it is especially recognizable in games of patience, in which ingenious maneuvers have little influence upon the result, and in playing slot machines in which the player can very crudely calculate the impulsion given to the ball at various points in directing its course. In both these examples, chance is still the deciding factor. Moreover, the fact that the player is not completely helpless and that he can at least minimally count on his skill or talent is sufficient reason to link *ludus* with *alea*.¹⁵

Ludus is also readily compatible with *mimicry*. In the simplest cases, it lends aspects of illusion to construction games such as the animals made out of millet stalks by Dogon children, the cranes or automobiles constructed by fitting together perforated steel parts and pulleys from an Erector set, or the scale-model planes or ships that even adults do not disdain meticulously constructing. However, it is the theater which provides the basic

connection between the two, by disciplining mimicry until it becomes an art rich in a thousand diverse routines, refined techniques, and subtly complex resources. By means of this fortunate development, the cultural fecundity of play is amply demonstrated.

In contrast, just as there could be no relationship between *paidia*, which is tumultuous and exuberant, and *alea*, which is passive anticipation of and mute immobility pending the outcome of the game, there also can be no connection between *ludus*, which is calculation and contrivance, and *ilinx*, which is a pure state of transport. The desire to overcome an obstacle can only emerge to combat vertigo and prevent it from becoming transformed into disorder or panic. It is, therefore, training in self-control, an arduous effort to preserve calm and equilibrium. Far from being compatible with *ilinx*, it provides the discipline needed to neutralize the dangerous effects of *ilinx*, as in mountain climbing or tightrope walking.

Ludus, in itself, seems incomplete, a kind of makeshift device intended to allay boredom. One becomes resigned to it while awaiting something preferable, such as the arrival of partners that makes possible the substitution of a contest for this solitary pleasure. Moreover, even in games of skill or contrivance (e.g. patience, crossword and other puzzles) which exclude or regard as undesirable the intervention of another person, *ludus* no less inspires in the player the hope of succeeding the next time when he may obtain a higher score. In this way, the influence of *agôn* is again manifested. Indeed, it enriches the pleasure derived from overcoming an arbitrarily chosen obstacle. In fact, even if each of these games is played alone and is not replaced by an openly competitive one, it can easily and quickly be converted into a contest, with or without prizes, such as newspapers organize on occasion.

There is also an aspect of *ludus* that, in my opinion, is explained by the presence of *agôn* within it: that is, that it is strongly affected by fashion. The yo-yo, cup-and-ball, diablo,

and ring puzzle appear and disappear as if by magic and soon are replaced by other games. In parallel fashion, the vogues for amusements of a more intellectual nature are no less limited in time; e.g. the rebus, the anagram, the acrostic, and the charade have had their hours. It is probable that crossword puzzles and detective stories will run the same course. Such a phenomenon would be enigmatic if *ludus* were an individual amusement, as seems superficially to be the case. In reality, it is permeated with an atmosphere of competition. It only persists to the degree that the fervor of addicts transforms it into virtual *agôn*. When the latter is missing, *ludus* cannot persist independently. In fact, it is not sufficiently supported by the spirit of organized competition, which is not essential to it, and does not provide the substance for a spectacle capable of attracting crowds. It remains transient and diffuse, or else it risks turning into an obsession for the isolated fanatic who would dedicate himself to it absolutely and in his addiction would increasingly withdraw from society.

Industrial civilization has given birth to a special form of *ludus*, the hobby, a secondary and gratuitous activity, undertaken and pursued for pleasure, e.g. collecting, unique accomplishments, the pleasure in billiards or inventing gadgets, in a word any occupation that is primarily a compensation for the injury to personality caused by bondage to work of an automatic and picayune character. It has been observed that the hobby of the worker-turned-artisan readily takes the form of constructing *complete* scale models of the machines in the fabrication of which he is fated to cooperate by always repeating the same movement, an operation demanding no skill or intelligence on his part. He not only avenges himself upon reality, but in a positive and creative way. The hobby is a response to one of the highest functions of the play instinct. It is not surprising that a technical civilization contributes to its development, even to providing compensations for its more brutal aspects. Hobbies reflect the rare qualities that make their development possible.

In a general way, *ludus* relates to the primitive desire to find

diversion and amusement in arbitrary, perpetually recurrent obstacles. Thousands of occasions and devices are invented to satisfy simultaneously the desire for relaxation and the need, of which man cannot be rid, to utilize purposefully the knowledge, experience, and intelligence at his disposal, while disregarding self-control and his capacity for resistance to suffering, fatigue, panic, or intoxication.

What I call *ludus* stands for the specific element in play the impact and cultural creativity of which seems most impressive. It does not connote a psychological attitude as precise as that of *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry* or *ilinx*, but in disciplining the *paidia*, its general contribution is to give the fundamental categories of play their purity and excellence.

Besides, *ludus* is not the only conceivable metamorphosis of *paidia*. A civilization like that of classical China worked out a different destiny for itself. Wisely and circumspectly, Chinese culture is less directed toward purposive innovation. The need for progress and the spirit of enterprise generally seem to them a kind of compulsion that is not particularly creative. Under these conditions the turbulence and surplus of energy characteristic of *paidia* is channelized in a direction better suited to its supreme values. This is the place to return to the term *wan*. According to some, it would etymologically designate the act of indefinitely caressing a piece of jade while polishing it, in order to savor its smoothness or as an accompaniment to reverie. Perhaps this origin clarifies another purpose of *paidia*. The reservoir of free movement that is part of its original definition seems in this case to be oriented not toward process, calculation, or triumph over difficulties but toward calm, patience, and idle speculation. The term *wan* basically designates all kinds of semiautomatic activities which leave the mind detached and idle, certain complex games which are part of *ludus*, and at the same time, nonchalant meditation and lazy contemplation.

Tumult and din are covered by the expression *jeou-nao*, which

means literally "passion-disorder." When joined to the term *nao*, the term *wan* connotes any exuberant or joyous behavior. But this term *wan* must be present. With the character *tchouang* (to pretend), it means "to find pleasure in simulating." Thus *wan* coincides fairly exactly with the various possible manifestations of *paidia*, although when used alone it may designate a particular kind of game. It is not used for competition, dice, or dramatic interpretation. That is to say, it excludes the various kinds of games that I have referred to as institutional.

The latter are designated by more specialized terms. The character *hsi* corresponds to games of disguise or simulation, covering the domain of the theater and the spectacle. The character *choua* refers to games involving skill and ability; however, it is also used for contests involving jokes or puns, for fencing, and for perfection in practicing a difficult art. The character *teou* refers to conflict as such, cock fighting or dueling. It is also used for card games. Lastly, the character *tou*, not to be applied to children's games, covers games of chance, feats of daring, bets, and ordeals. It also is the name for blasphemy, for to tempt chance is considered a sacrilegious wager against destiny.¹⁶

The vast semantic area of the term *wan* makes it even more deserving of interest. To begin with, it includes child's play and all kinds of carefree and frivolous diversion such as are suggested by the verbs to frolic, to romp, to trifle, etc. It is used to describe casual, abnormal, or strange sex practices. At the same time, it is used for games demanding reflection and *forbidding haste*, such as chess, checkers, puzzles (*tai Kiao*), and the game of nine rings.¹⁷ It also comprises the pleasure of appreciating the savor of good food or the bouquet of a wine, the taste for collecting works of art or even appreciating them, voluptuously handling and even fashioning delicate curios, comparable to the Occidental category of the hobby, collecting or puttering. Lastly, the transitory and relaxing sweetness of moonlight is suggested, the pleasure of a boat ride on a limpid lake or the prolonged contemplation of a waterfall.¹⁸

The example of the word *wan* shows that the destinies of cultures can be read in their games. The preference for *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry*, or *ilinx* helps decide the future of a civilization. Also, the channeling of the free energy in *paidia* toward invention or contemplation manifests an implicit but fundamental and most significant choice.

The Social Function of Games

Table I. Classification of Games

	AGÓN (Competition)	ALEA (Chance)	MIMICRY (Simulation)	ILINX (Vertigo)
PAIDIA Tumult Agitation Immoderate laughter Kite-flying Solitaire Patience Crossword puzzles LUDUS	Racing } not regulated Wrestling } Etc. } Athletics } Boxing, Billiards Fencing, Checkers Football, Chess Contests, Sports in general	Counting-out rhymes Heads or tails Betting Roulette Simple, complex, and continuing lotteries*	Children's imitations Games of illusion Tag, Arms Masks, Disguises Theater Spectacles in general	Children "whirling" Horseback riding Swinging Waltzing Volador Traveling carnivals Skiing Mountain climbing Tightrope walking

N.B. In each vertical column games are classified in such an order that the *paidia* element is constantly decreasing while the *ludus* element is ever increasing.

* A simple lottery consists of the one basic drawing. In a complex lottery there are many possible combinations. A continuing lottery (e.g. Irish Sweepstakes) is one consisting of two or more stages, the winner of the first stage being granted the opportunity to participate in a second lottery. [From correspondence with Caillois. M.B.]

Play is not merely an individual pastime. It may not even be that as frequently as is supposed. To be sure, there are a number of games, notably games of skill, in which an entirely personal ability is displayed and which should not occasion surprise when played alone. However, games of skill may quickly become games of competitive skill. There is an obvious proof of this. As individualized as one imagines the operation of the contraption to be—whether kite, top, yo-yo, diablo, cup-and-ball, or hoop—it would quickly lose its capacity to amuse if there were no competitors or spectators, at least potentially. There is an element of rivalry in these varied activities, and everyone tries to vanquish his rivals, perhaps invisible or absent, by accomplishing unpublicized feats, triumphing over obstacles, establishing precarious records for endurance, speed, precision, and altitude—in a word, even though alone, reaping glory from a performance difficult to equal. Generally, the owner of a top hardly finds pleasure in the presence of curling fans, nor does the lover of kite-flying,

in a group occupied with rolling hoops. Possessors of the same toys congregate in an accustomed or convenient place where they test their skill. This is often essential to their pleasure.

The competitive drive does not remain implicit or spontaneous for long. It leads to the establishment of rules by common agreement. Regulated kite-flying contests take place in Switzerland. The kite that flies highest is proclaimed the victor. In the Orient, the contest takes on the characteristic appearance of a tournament. For a certain distance from the kite the string is coated with grease to which sharp-edged pieces of glass are attached. The object is to skillfully cut the strings of the other kite fliers. This keen competition is the result of a pastime that in principle does not seem to be so adapted.

Another striking example of the transition from solitary pastime to competitive and even spectacular pleasure is provided by the game of cup-and-ball. An Eskimo is disguised as a very schematic representation of an animal, bear, or fish. He is stabbed many times. The player must use his weapon in a pre-determined order, holding the knife properly. Then he begins the series again, his knife held inside his index finger, then emerging from behind his elbow, next pressed between his teeth, while the thrust of the weapon describes even more complicated figures. If he misses, the awkward player must pass the weapon to a rival. The latter goes through the same motions, trying to catch up or take the lead. While stabbing and withdrawing, the player simulates an adventure or analyzes an action. He tells the story of a journey, a hunt, or a combat, enumerating various phases of the dismemberment of his prey, an operation that is a female monopoly. At each new hole, he triumphantly announces:

She grips her knife
Cuts open the seal
Removes the skin
Removes the intestines
Opens the chest
Removes the entrails
Removes the ribs

Removes the vertebral column
Removes the pelvis
Removes the hind quarters
Removes the head
Removes the fat
Folds the skin in half
Soaks it in urine
Dries it in the sun . . .

Sometimes the player substitutes his rival and imagines that he is cutting him to pieces:

I beat you
I kill you
I cut off your head
I cut off your arm
And then the other
I cut off your leg
And then the other
The pieces for the dogs
The dogs eat . . .

Not only dogs, but foxes, crows, crabs, and anything that comes to mind. His rival, before entering combat, must first reassemble his body in inverse order of its mutilation. This idyllic pursuit is punctuated by clamoring for assistance from the audience, which has passionately been following the episodes in the duel.

At this stage, the game of skill is obviously a cultural phenomenon, an aid to communion and collective recreation in the cold and long darkness of the Arctic night. This extreme case is no exception. However, it has the advantage of suggesting at what point games that are among the most personal in nature or intent lend themselves, in certain circumstances, to developments and refinements that bring them close to institutionalization. It would seem that play lacks something when it is reduced to a mere solitary exercise.

Games generally attain their goal only when they stimulate an echo of complicity. Even when the player could in principle conveniently play alone, games quickly become a pretext for a

contest or an exhibition, as has been observed in kite-flying or cup-and-ball. Most of them indeed seem to reflect stimulus and response, thrust and parry, provocation and contagion, and effervescence or shared tension. They need an attentive and sympathetic audience. It is unlikely that any category of play would be an exception to this law. Even games of chance seem to be more of an attraction in a group, if not in a crowd. Nothing prevents the players from placing their bets by telephone or risking their money in comfort either at home or in a discreet salon. But they would rather be pressed by the throng which fills the hippodrome or casino, for the pleasure, thrill, and excitement engendered by fraternization with an anonymous multitude.

It is also painful to find oneself alone at a spectacle, even at the movies, despite the absence of living actors who would suffer from lack of an audience. It is also clear that one is disguised or masked for the sake of others. Finally, games of vertigo are in the same category—swinging, horseback riding, and tobogganing demand an effervescence and collective passion to sustain and encourage the intoxication that they produce.

Therefore, the different categories of play—*agôn* (by definition), *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx*—presuppose not solitude but company. Moreover, a necessarily restricted circle is most often required. Each plays in his turn, as he desires and as required by the rules, so that the number of players could not be multiplied indefinitely without reducing the frequency of individual play. A game permits only a limited number of participants. Thus a game readily seems like a pursuit for small groups of initiates or *aficionados*, who momentarily surrender to their favorite pastime. In addition, the mass of spectators favors *mimicry*, just as collective turbulence stimulates, and is in turn stimulated by, *ilinx*.

Under certain conditions, even the games intended by their very nature to be played by a limited number of players exceed the limit. They reflect forms which, while doubtless remaining in the domain of play, evolve a bureaucracy, a complex ap-

paratus, and a specialized, hierarchical personality. In a word, they sustain permanent and refined structures, institutions of an official, private, marginal, and sometimes clandestine character, whose status seems nonetheless remarkably assured and durable.

Each of the basic categories of play has socialized aspects of this sort and has become socially legitimate because of its prevalence and stability. For *agôn*, the socialized form is essentially sports, to which are added contests in which skill and chance are subtly blended as in games and contests on radio and as part of advertising. In *alea*, there are casinos, racetracks, state lotteries, and pari-mutuels. For *mimicry*, the arts involved are public spectacles, puppet shows, the Grand Guignol, and much more equivocally, carnivals and masked balls which are already oriented toward vertigo. Finally, *ilinx* is revealed in the traveling show and the annual or cyclical occasions for popular merry-making and jollity.

A whole chapter of this study of games is devoted to examining the means by which games become part of daily life. Indeed, these manifestations contribute to the development in various cultures of their most characteristic customs and institutions.