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# Caillois's *Man, Play, and Games*

## An Appreciation and Evaluation



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This article explores the contributions of Roger Caillois to the study of human play. The initial portion of the essay focuses on Caillois's scholarly career as a response to the public events and intellectual movements of his time. The author shows how Caillois's responses influenced the portraits of play that he developed in such important books as *Man and the Sacred* and *Man, Play, and Games*. The article then analyzes the themes Caillois developed in these writings and compares them to Johan Huizinga's interpretation of play in *Homo Ludens*. In a final section, the article shows the continued pertinence of Caillois's approach to contemporary scholarship and offers author's own evaluation of this theory.

**A** half century has passed since Roger Caillois's classic study of play, culture, and the human condition. First published in 1958 as *Les Jeux et Les Hommes* and then with an English translation in 1961, the book spans the concerns of many disciplines and fits neatly into none. Most prominently, perhaps, *Man, Play, and Games* is a kind of sociological or anthropological study, an attempt to categorize certain forms of play and to describe how these forms operate in societies. But traditional themes of history, religion, and art—of the changing character of civilization and the possibilities for human expression within that setting—abound. Even at the time of its publication, Caillois's account was what Everett Hughes describes as “an old-fashioned book, one in which a fugue is played upon a few simple themes elaborated by material from a great variety of cultures” (1962, 254). In this sense, the work is, as Hughes continues, a “speculation about gradual, universal evolution,” a look at how play forms have both responded to the qualities of societies and made possible their development.

Classic books sometimes occupy curious positions within the disciplines that honor them. Ideally, of course, the classics maintain this status because they are so filled with rich and complicated meanings that each generation profits from consulting them, and individuals learn something new at every

rereading. More practically, academic traditions exalt themselves and motivate their members by holding aloft examples of what followers working within these traditions can accomplish if only they possess the right combinations of talent, skill, perseverance, and public awareness. And, it must be added, classic works are not infrequently books that people only claim to have read, or have read without diligence during their student days, or have consulted only for a few selected themes. In short, they are not read so much as used to validate the purported reader's work.

*Man, Play, and Games*, I argue here, has this diminished legacy in the field of play studies. On the one hand, the book is remembered—as it should be—as a useful characterization of the nature of play, as a guide for distinguishing between games and the freer forms of play, and as a description of four different types of play. Play scholars widely recognize Caillois's work as a response to Johan Huizinga's more famous treatment of play in *Homo Ludens* and, at least in some regards, they see Caillois's work as an improvement of Huizinga's book. On the other hand, many of the more subtle and complicated themes of Caillois's work—essentially challenges to rethink the character of play and to prevent its "corruption" in our modern world—have not been addressed fully by the play studies community.

My purpose is to remember, reflect upon, and perhaps creatively develop some of Caillois's thoughts about play and games. In this light, I hope in this article to make plain many of Caillois's themes. But I also wish to place these themes into the wider context of Caillois's life and intellectual commitments, to show some of the ways in which his ideas have been used by others, and, ultimately, to offer an evaluation—and perhaps a refinement—of his contribution.

### **An Overview of Caillois's Career**

Intellectual careers are frequently responses to the great social and political events that mark the coming-of-age of a scholar. Certainly, this is the case with Caillois (Felgine 1994). Born in 1913 in Rheims, he grew up in the period between the world wars when both fascism and communism were rising in Europe, when capitalism lurched into worldwide depression, and when artistic and creative people sought spirited responses to an increasingly bourgeois, mechanical, and bureaucratic age. He attended France's most prestigious university, the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris from 1933 to 1935 and the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, where he studied with Marcel Mauss and Georges Dumézil and

received a diploma in 1936 for religious studies. As Claudine Frank (2003) has emphasized in her excellent review of Caillois's life and work, he was also very much influenced by André Breton and the surrealist movement during this period. Surrealism, itself an extension of Dadaism, pushed forward selected themes from Freudian psychology and romanticism by stressing the role of the unbounded imagination as a counterweight—and font of criticism—for social and personal routine. In Frank's judgment, much of Caillois's writing can be seen as a movement away from his early embrace of surrealism in an attempt to discover other, more stable sources of the imagination.

A major event in Caillois's career was his founding in 1937—with Georges Bataille, Michel Leiris, and others—a so-called College of Sociology, a group of scholars who gathered to develop and share new ideas about the character of the social imagination (Grindon 2007; Hollier 1988). In contrast to the surrealist emphasis on private fantasy, the members of the college tried to identify more communal sources of subjectivity and to find connections between the approaches of literature and science. Of special importance to this project was the concept of the sacred as developed by Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, and Rudolf Otto. The group also committed itself to exploring the tension between orderly, ritualized events and those order-breaking eruptions of collective imagination that Durkheim (1965) had discussed as "collective effervescence." In this light, Caillois's own work can be described as an effort to discover the cultural and material patterns that transcend and animate collective life—and even more ambitiously—to see the parallels between the physical and symbolic realms.

As might be imagined, these inquiries into the nonrational, communal sources of human experience raised havoc in an era marked by the rising collectivist ideologies of communism and fascism, and Caillois tried to distance himself from both movements. As part of this process, he moved in 1939 to Argentina where he remained until the end of World War II. Ever the public intellectual, he founded the Institut Français de Buenos Aires and the journal *Les Lettres Françaises*. In 1939 he also published perhaps his greatest book, *L'Homme et le Sacré* (published in English as *Man and the Sacred* in 1959); and during the war he produced a number of other literary and philosophical tracts.

Two of Caillois's more famous essays should be mentioned here as a way of indicating the character of his thinking. The journal *Minotaure* published the first of these, "The Praying Mantis: From Biology to Psychoanalysis" (Caillois 2003, 69–81) in 1934. In his search for the biological and mythological foundations of human experience, Caillois (like several others in the surrealist camp) was drawn to the powerful metaphor of the female mantis who devours her mate

after (or even during) copulation. Caillois's own treatment of this act explored the possibilities of a "death instinct," an idea that Sigmund Freud had made popular during the preceding decade in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud 1967). The seemingly sado-masochistic behavior of the mantis—as well as the human fascination with it—suggested to Caillois the existence of objective ideograms, or crystallized psychological associations that were transmitted through evolution. Essentially, Caillois claimed that humans have universal urges and longings that are part of our inherited, physical nature (hence, their objectivity). Moreover, these yearnings are "over-determined" (to use another Freudian term); that is, in the fashion of dreams, they are made manifest by many different kinds of physical and symbolic causes coming together at once.

A year later in 1935, *Minotaure* published a second essay, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia" (Caillois 2003, 89–106), similar in many respects to the first. In this work, Caillois presented the unusual argument that mimicry—the process by which creatures (like many insect species) take on the appearance of foreign objects or other species—is not a mode of self-protection or survival but instead an antiutilitarian "luxury." In other words, creatures can be said to possess an "instinct for abandonment," or a desire to move into a "dark space" that stands beyond the requirements of routine functioning (Caillois 2003, 100). In Caillois's view, humans have long been fascinated by ideas about sympathetic magic; we wish to attach ourselves to images or resemblances of idealized personages and to draw from them their powers. Mimicry is connected to psychasthenia then in the sense that this latter (now outmoded) term refers to the obsessive desire of humans to escape the boundaries and limitations of their own selfhood, to lose themselves in the patterns of the world. Creatures seek obliteration as much as they seek to advance their mundane, private interests.

Such ideas became even more extreme with Bataille, who formed (without Caillois's participation) a secret society, *Acéphale*, that fantasized about death and speculated on the prospect of collectively murdering a volunteer from its own ranks. As one can see, this set of concepts—nonrational or instinctual forces, collective representations transmitted through evolution, quests for death, desires to replace orderly human affairs with passionately destructive states of being—were a dangerous brew in an age of extremist politics. Caillois's response was to shift from his prewar interest in the powers of the sacred and nonrational as transgressive forces in history to a new theme: the importance of civilization. Against the spectacle of Nazi atrocities, the problem then was not how to destroy the orderliness and moral rectitude of the world but, indeed, how to save it.

During the middle and latter portions of his career, Caillois became more the academic statesman. Returning to France in 1945, he joined the editorial boards of some journals and publishing houses, began his project of translating the works of important South American writers into French, taught at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, and resumed his own writing and publishing activities. In 1948 he joined the Office of Ideas at UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) and headed its program of literary translation. In 1952 he founded the important journal *Diogenes*. During this time, most of his writing focused on political, literary, and aesthetic topics; however, in 1958 he published *Les Jeux et les Hommes*, the sociological study analyzed in this article. In 1971 he was elected to the Académie Française, the organization that regulates the French language. Actively writing and publishing until the end, he died in 1978.

Caillois's mature writing suggests his quest to integrate the disparate styles of study and expression found in the sciences and humanities. Although he was fascinated by the qualities of excess, disruption, openness of meaning, and untrammled subjectivity emphasized by the literary and artistic avant-garde, he always sought to discover (in the manner of his teacher Mauss) the orderly patterns that stand behind such discontinuities. With this end in mind, he advocated what he called "diagonal science" (Caillois 2003, 335–57). Modern science, in Caillois's view, has become focused increasingly on narrow subjects and narrow methodologies; a taste for economical, even reductionistic explanation prevails. What is needed, then, are perspectives that span or bridge the findings of the individual sciences and humanities and that suggest the parallels in biological, material, social, cultural, and psychological phenomena. These integrative hypotheses, however fanciful, should be scrutinized in the most scientifically rigorous ways. This search for what is basic to the lives of creatures—and what practices represent their best forms of possibility—is carried forward in his studies of play and games.

### ***Play and the Sacred***

Play scholars commonly see Caillois's description of play as a response to Huizinga's treatment of play in *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1955). I include the subtitle of Huizinga's classic here because it makes plain his challenging thesis that play is an activity that both precedes culture (in an

evolutionary sense) and continues to serve as a context where new cultural possibilities are explored and refined. As generations of play scholars can testify, Huizinga's work is important not only for its attempt to distill the essence of play but also for its historical and anthropological analysis of the role of play in such institutions as warfare, philosophy, poetry, mythology, law, art, and sport. Against the long-standing philosophical tradition of *homo sapiens*—humans as thinkers—and the materialist thesis of *homo faber*—humans as makers—Huizinga advances his claim for *homo ludens*—human as players—a vision of people as active explorers and negotiators of societal possibility. In Huizinga's view, people have an impulse to play that cannot be explained by other factors or elements of human society or nature. This creative (and for Huizinga, competitive) impulse has been critical to processes of societal self-consciousness and renewal throughout history. Because of this, contemporary societies should be careful not to restrict or corrupt the very activity that forms one basis of their existence. This general, and now problematic, connection between play and culture dominates Caillois's writing.

Caillois critiques Huizinga's work most directly in *Man and the Sacred* (Caillois 2001a) in the form of an appendix added to the book in 1946. As mentioned, Caillois was much influenced by Durkheim's (1965) distinction between the "sacred" and the "profane." The profane segment of the world (really, most of it) includes those objects and activities that can be approached directly and treated instrumentally. In contrast, the sacred is that which stands apart—and above—the realm of everyday affairs. The sacred possesses an aura or power that makes it a dangerous force in people's lives. For this reason, the intervention of the sacred into regular life must be monitored with extreme care, and profane elements must not be allowed to contact—and thereby pollute—it. Caillois focuses on the ambiguity and mystery of the sacred, the role of ritualized taboos in guaranteeing its purity, the way in which it is used to guide people through the life cycle, and (most interestingly, perhaps) the extent to which it is a transgressive or revolutionary force in societies. He develops this latter theme in his theory of the festival.

How, then, is play different from the sacred? Caillois begins his essay with praise for Huizinga's conception of play. He admires that Huizinga eschews utilitarian or functional views of his subject (Caillois shares this antiutilitarian spirit). But he is troubled by Huizinga's quest to assimilate all play activities into one form (what Huizinga called the *agôn*, or competitive struggle). Surely, there are other styles of play that involve quite different patterns of activity and

motives. And why does Huizinga disavow the importance of material interests in play, including (and this is one of Caillois's special interests) gambling? On the basis of these concerns, Caillois describes what he sees as "the defect in this admirable work. It studies the external structures better than the intimate attitudes that give each activity its most precise meaning. And the forms and rules of play are the object of more attentive examination than the needs satisfied by the game itself" (2001a, 154).

Huizinga's formalist approach also is the source of one of the most daring—and in Caillois's view, incorrect—themes of *Homo Ludens*: the identification of play and the sacred. As I have argued elsewhere (Henricks 2002, 2006), Huizinga was especially interested in what he called the "play-festival-rite complex" (Huizinga 1955, 31). In times past (and in traditional societies still), people performed their commitments to society—and to one another—in public events that mixed important social frameworks and symbols with personal creativity and exuberance. All participants understood the events as special moments, cut away from the ordinariness of life. Huizinga's explores the "formal" similarities of play and ritual and the times when play itself seems to rise to almost holy seriousness.

Caillois appreciates the view that ritual and play are often mixed. He even adds a number of helpful examples from the anthropological literature that support Huizinga's case. But he does not agree that play and the sacred—or the ritual, the vehicle by which the sacred is regulated and presented—are the same things. Although some games may well have distant, mythic origins and many rituals are conducted with a kind of winking connivance by their adherents, the two forms are animated by quite different attitudes. This distinction holds even though both kinds of events are routinely cut off from ordinary affairs by special constructions of space and time, behavioral regulations, costumes, language, elaborate preparations, and so forth.

An initial difference for Caillois is that play is mostly about "form" while the sacred is profoundly about "content." He explains that play is "activity that is an end in itself, rules that are respected for their own sake" (2001a, 157). Said differently, no claims are made that the objects or actions of the playground are of any importance beyond the moment itself. In the same light, playing rules are recognized simply as artificial agreements that people make to behave in a particular way during the event. The sacred, on the other hand, is "pure content—an indivisible, equivocal, fugitive, and efficacious force" (2001a, 154). Rituals are only best attempts at capturing and controlling this force. In other words, in play people themselves control the course of the events; in ritual, they

subordinate themselves to otherness. Caillois provides the best summary of his own distinction in the following. “Through the sacred, the source of omnipotence, the worshipper is fulfilled. Confronted by the sacred, he is defenseless and completely at its mercy. In play, the opposite is the case. All is human, invented by man the creator. For this reason, play rests, relaxes, distracts, and causes the dangers, cares, and travails of life to be forgotten. The sacred, on the contrary, is the domain of internal tension, from which it is precisely profane existence that relaxes, rests, and distracts. The situation is reversed” (2001a, 158). As he continues, play is a kind of “haven” where players themselves choose their level of involvement or “risk.”

Similarly, players decide how seriously they will take the game. In that sense, sportsmanship is a kind of willful consent, a clear-minded (and good-hearted) agreement to follow the playing rules scrupulously but also to maintain some awareness that what is occurring is only a game. Again, Caillois provides the best summary: “Thus, one is led to define play as a free activity in which man finds himself immune to any apprehension regarding his acts. He defines its impact. He establishes its conditions and conclusion. From this derives his ease, calm, and good humor, which are not merely natural but even obligatory. It is a point of honor with him not to show that he takes the game too seriously, even in the event of ruin or defeat” (2001a, 159).

Whether or not the reader accepts this view of the sacred as a force in its own right (either as a supernatural power or, in the Durkheimian way, as a symbol of the transcendent authority of society over the individual), Caillois’s distinction seems sound. Rituals—in their role as conduits of the sacred—are obligatory and profoundly serious affairs. Play celebrates the way in which individuals gather together and orchestrate their own destinies.

Caillois then addresses the relationship of both play and the sacred to ordinary or profane life. He is especially interested in how the ritual actor and the player feel when they move back to their daily activities. As he sees it, experiences with the sacred are so obligatory and challenging that the participants find themselves relaxed (and refreshed) by their return to normal pursuits. In sharp contrast, players find their return to profane life stressful and tiresome. In his view then, “a *sacred-profane-play* hierarchy needs to be established in order to balance Hui-zinga’s analysis” (2001a, 160). To be sure, both the sacred and play realms are opposed to daily affairs; but they bring different perspectives to bear upon these affairs. Caillois’s hierarchy represents a gradient of obligation, an acknowledgment that people have successively less control over the worlds they enter.



Caillois's final reflections address the theme that characterizes most of Huizinga's writing: the historical change toward organizational gigantism and formality that has eroded the vitality and creativity of small human communities. Caillois argues that we have entered "a world that is not sacred, without festivals, without play, without fixed moorings, without devotional principles, without creative license, a world in which immediate interest, cynicism, and the negation of every norm not only exist, but are elevated into absolutes in place of the rules that underlie all play, all noble activity, and honorable competition." What is needed now, he claims, is a recommitment to the principles of the playground. As he continues, "There is no civilization without play and the rules of fair play, without conventions consciously established and freely respected. There is no culture in which knowing how to win and lose loyally, without reservations, with self-control in victory, and without rancor in defeat, is not desired" (2001a, 161). Such ideas, which reaffirm Huizinga's own conclusions in *Homo Ludens*, are taken up again in *Man, Play, and Games*.

### ***Man, Play, and Games***

Caillois divides his principal work on play into two parts. The first of these develops an overview of play (in contradistinction to Huizinga's account) and then establishes a classification of games and their functions in society. The second explores, in a more complicated way, some relationships between his four types of games and analyzes the variation of these types in the modern world. In an appendix, he comments briefly on the importance of games of chance and on the value of psychological and mathematical approaches to the study of games.

As in his 1946 essay on play and the sacred, Caillois begins in *Man, Play, and Games* with an acknowledgement of the brilliance of Huizinga's work, but he quickly emphasizes that "most of its premises are debatable." Moreover, as he continues, *Homo Ludens* is "not a study of games but rather an inquiry into the creative quality of the play principle in the domain of culture and more precisely, of the spirit that rules certain kinds of games—those which are competitive" (2001b, 3). And, although he admires Huizinga's conception of play, he argues that at least one of the elements of the definition—Huizinga's claim that play promotes the formation of social groups which surround themselves with secrecy—is wrong. In Caillois's view, playful activity "is necessarily to

the detriment of the secret and mysterious, which play exposes, publishes, and somehow *expends*.” The idea of expenditure or waste, which was a key theme of Bataille and other members of the College of Sociology, forms the basis of still another criticism. Huizinga’s definition, “which views play as action denuded of all material interest, simply excludes bets and games of chance—for example, gambling, racetracks, casinos, and lotteries—which, for better or worse, occupy an important part in the economy and daily life of various cultures” (2001b, 4). On the basis of such statements, Caillois’s intention seems clear: he will re-define play and discuss the different ways in which the play spirit is harnessed in societies.

Despite his several criticisms, Caillois’s definition of play is similar to Huizinga’s. Huizinga (1955, 3–13) defined play as an activity possessing the following qualities: (1) it is voluntary; (2) it is different from ordinary affairs, especially in its disregard for material interest; (3) it is secluded or limited by special times, places, and cultural configurations; (4) it explores tension and balance within a framework of rules; and (5) it is characterized by secrecy and disguising. I should emphasize that Huizinga’s definition of play—which assumes the competitive character of play and focuses instead on how it tends to emerge as a limited, orderly world—remains consistent with his attempts to safeguard settings where creative social interaction (and, ideally, cultural innovation) can occur (Henricks 2002). Caillois’s definition has six elements. Play is (1) free—that is, nonobligatory; (2) separate—that is, cut off in the ways described above; (3) uncertain—in the sense that the results are not known beforehand; (4) unproductive—that is, an expenditure that does not create wealth or goods; (5) rule bound; and (6) fictive—that is, it is “accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life” (2001b, 9–10).

As we see, Caillois’s special contribution is his attempt to include material considerations—even money—in a definition of play. He does this by claiming that play is distinctive because it leads to no increase in economic productivity but instead simply expends and redistributes resources, as when poker players pass their money to one another. Secondly, his distinction between uncertainty and rule governance, which Huizinga lumped together, is important. This distinction reflects Caillois’s more general attempt to isolate the more uncertain, spontaneous forms of play from those that are rule bound. Finally, his ideas about play being make-believe—what he refers to the as-if or the subjunctive quality of play—deserves attention. In Caillois’s view, Huizinga was interested

in disguises, jargon, and arcane rules primarily as a means to separate play insiders from outsiders. For Caillois, these are part of the make-believe that is key to the play impulse.

Huizinga is searching for an all-embracing or unitary conception of play, but Caillois is reconciled to play's many forms. Some of these forms are not easily combined or are even mutually exclusive. For example, he argues early on that games "are not ruled and make-believe. Rather they are ruled *or* make-believe" (2001b, 9). Similarly, he believes that competitive games (the *agôn* that Huizinga stressed) and games of chance are opposite affairs. In the former, the player "tries to vanquish a rival operating under the same conditions as himself": in the latter, the player "merely awaits the outcome" (2001b, 12). His famous typology of games, then, follows: *agôn* (competition), *alea* (chance), *mimicry* (simulation or role play), and *ilinx* (balance or vertigo).

Although Caillois develops these four categories, he does not claim that his list is exhaustive. Rather, the four types suggest one scheme that places play activities into "quadrants, each governed by an original principle." Just as games can be arranged in terms of their fulfillment of a single organizing principle, so examples from all four types can be placed "on a continuum between two opposite poles." One of these extremes is termed *paidia*, the principle of "diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety." The other is *ludus*, the tendency to bind this capriciousness with "arbitrary, imperative, and purposively tedious conventions." When this latter principle is applied to the freer forms of play, it calls out in the player a "greater amount of effort, patience, skill, or ingenuity" (2001b, 13).

Significantly, Caillois does not differentiate games to decide which involve primarily mental or which primarily physical skills. Instead, he argues all games feature a repositioning of individuals in the world. However, games do feature quite different attitudes toward this world, and they can be categorized on this basis. The first type, the *agôn* that Huizinga emphasized, includes regulated competition or rivalry. It can be found in both humans and animals and involves games that always have some social (or invidious) element. Typically, these games attempt to equalize the chances for either side to win, and even solitary activities such as mountain climbing are made social (that is, competitive) by a relying on shared rules, techniques, and equipment.

The rivalry of peers previously described is quite different from *alea* (the Latin term for games of dice). Whereas *agôn* celebrates willful assertion, *alea* features willful surrender to external forces. For Caillois, at least, "*alea* ne-

gates work, patience, experience, and qualifications” (2001b, 17). Unlike their animal kindred, humans can conceive of an abstract, inanimate power and enjoy awaiting the “decision of destiny passively and deliberately” (2001b, 18). Furthermore, he believes that games of chance have relatively little appeal for children who prefer to be “active.”

The importance of Caillois’s distinction—at least for his own approach—cannot be overestimated. People play in ways that are more or less active. In some games, they try to master their own destiny; in others, they await the touch of fate. Such distinctions should be seen in the context of Caillois’s understandings of the sacred. Humans do not simply construct and dominate the world; they live inside formations that have long preceded their existence and have powers they can scarcely imagine. However, both forms are similar in that they are vehicles for participants to gauge their standing in the world. Because of this, they are frequently combined in games, that is, *alea* (chance) and *agôn* (merit) are routinely mixed together to create a framework of equality of opportunity. Such settings “substitute perfect situations for the normal confusion of contemporary life.”

Both of these forms described allow people to continue being themselves, albeit in new (perfected) settings. The third form of games, *mimicry*, is quite different. There, the player tries to “escape himself and become another.” Caillois’s chooses his terminology intentionally for he wishes to remind readers of “mimetism, notably of insects, so that the fundamental, elementary, and quasi-organic nature of the impulse that stimulates it can be stressed.” Caillois sought to discover the prehuman foundations of our playful impulses. He was fascinated by the ways in which certain species camouflage themselves or even assume the appearance of another species. In humans, masking serves a similar purpose, “to change the viewer’s appearance and to inspire fear in others” (2001b, 20).

Unlike animals, humans can control their disguises. They understand that what they are doing is a contrivance. A reveler at a carnival does not believe that she is in fact a dragon; a child’s playing at cowboy is only make-believe. And the motivation shifts somewhat from the inspiration of fear in others to the pleasure that “lies in being or passing for another.” Again, the player does not try to become entirely the person or creature that she performs; nor does she expect to convince others that she is really a locomotive or a toreador. To this degree, playful make-believe in the contemporary world is a somewhat softened version of the ritual enactments of traditional societies.

In Caillois's opinion, mimicry and competition (*agôn*) sometimes mix, not only in the obvious case of costume competitions but also in events like spectator sports, where not the performers but the viewers imaginatively inhabit the characters they see before them. Furthermore, Caillois feels that mimicry and *alea* have no relationship at all. For him, mimicry features the process of active, incessant invention by the player, while *alea* expresses the passive waiting for fate.

The final type of play is *ilinx*, the pursuit of vertigo, which consists "of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind" (2001b, 23). Here Caillois is thinking of whirling dervishes, high-wire acrobats, Mexican *voladores*, and others who are fascinated by physical and psychological disorientation. As he notes regarding competition and mimicry, Caillois cites cases where animals also seem to enjoy self-directed spinning or tumult. If in earlier times *ilinx* (the Greek term for whirlpool) represented turbulent ritual involvements and even trance states, it later described the pursuit of vertigo very much associated with the mechanized carnival rides of the industrialized world.

Just as the four types of games can combine with one another, so too can they bear different relationships to Caillois's distinction between *ludus* and *paidia*. In his view, competition, chance, and mimicry all lend themselves to the set of artificially complicated rules and restrictions that is *ludus*. In sharp contrast to this pattern, *ilinx* defies rule-bound existence just because it is the pursuit of disorderly uncertainty. It might be imagined then that *ilinx* would be the only form to celebrate *paidia*, but this is not the case. Competition, mimicry, and vertigo all illustrate *paidia*, although, in the freest forms of these, the activity may simply be spirited frolicking or exuberance. What does comport with *paidia*, in Caillois's view, is *alea*. This, the waiting for the fall of the dice or card, is an occasion of passive anticipation.

Caillois's scheme—which establishes a gradient between the freer and more regulated forms of play—is important. *Ludus*, as the set of artificial restrictions that creatures place on activity to challenge themselves further and even to "allay boredom," is the device by which activity takes coherent, communicable form. In this sense, formalized games are social and cultural, rather than purely psychological, events. *Ludus* "disciplines" *paidia* and in consequence, gives "the fundamental categories of play their purity and excellence" (2001b, 31).

Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* is distinctive—and, some argue, can be criticized—because it does not address solitary play or even the play of children. For his part,

Caillois recognizes that people sometimes play alone but that play “is not merely an individual pastime.” It “may not even be that as frequently as is supposed” (2001b, 37). In his view, people want to be well regarded by others. They wish to interact and to be watched, and they understand themselves by comparing what they do to the achievements of others. The institutionalization of games—that is, their development as cultural artifacts with widely accepted names, rules, equipment, and techniques—permits wider groups of people to participate and to comprehend the accomplishments of the players. All four of his types of play “presuppose not solitude but company” (2001b, 40). Competition is perhaps the most inherently social of the forms. But mimicry is most fully realized when there are appreciative audiences. *Ilinx* benefits from collective enthusiasm, and even *alea* seeks its public casinos, lotteries, and racetracks.

Any scholar propounding a set of ideal types—and Caillois’s four models of play are such a set—must address that many occurrences in the real world do not fit the terms of his ideals. In his response to this issue, Caillois discusses what he calls the corruption of games. He suggests that people possess four distinctive attitudes, instincts, or drives that motivate their equally distinctive play expressions (2001b, 44). Although each form of play is different, all share (in varying degrees) the general qualities of play as an activity that is free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, regulated, and “fictive” (2001b, 43). As he asks: “If play consists in providing formal, ideal, limited, and escapist satisfaction for these powerful drives, what happens when every convention is rejected? When the universe of play is no longer tightly closed?” (2001b, 44).

When the boundaries between real life and the play world become blurred, many curious—and to Caillois, “perverse”—patterns result. When external social and psychological commitments become too strong, the sheltered quality of the play world is lost. “What was an escape becomes an obligation, and what was a pastime is now a passion, compulsion, and source of anxiety.” Interesting also is his view that only some of the four forms may be selected as legitimate social expressions (for example, societal commitment only to the *agôn*). The intrusion of external concerns routinely leads to professionalism; play (as relaxation) becomes work (as obligation). However, Caillois, unlike Huizinga, does not see professionalism as an entirely suspicious affair. In his view, sport events as isolated, regulated, and formal competitions retain most of their character when the player is paid. This is also the case for the professional actor, who, like the athlete, returns to reality when the curtain falls. Similarly—and here he agrees with Huizinga—cheating is “still inside the universe of play.” Unlike

the spoilsport, the cheat “by his attitude, safeguards and proclaims the validity of the conventions he violates, because he is dependent upon others obeying the rules” (2001b, 45). To this degree, he gives lip service to the canons he violates.

The situation becomes more problematic when one of the fundamental human impulses (the drives associated with the *agôn* being the most common example) spill over into society in an unplayful (that is, untempered) way. Avidity, as he puts it, may be a natural impulse, but the very function of play is to regulate this desire and to put its significance into perspective. Greed in business or warfare has lost this quality of restraint. In an interesting though disputable argument, Caillois claims that gambling is also perverted by individual desire and assertiveness. For him, *alea* is essentially a respecting of the play of fortune upon one's life. Superstition, magic, and the various strategies used at casinos and racetracks are different from a respect for the fall of the dice. These practices are examples of individuals trying to manage their own destinies or at least to increase their odds of success. Their strategizing mentalities extend to other spheres of life. As Caillois calls it: “Upon waking up in the morning, everyone is supposed to find himself winning or losing in a gigantic, ceaseless, gratuitous, and inevitable lottery which will determine his general coefficient of success or failure for the next twenty-four hours” (2001b, 47). Once again, the function of play is to temper and to make coherent a person's experience of these impulses.

Excessive involvement of a similar sort also turns mimicry into the various forms of obsession and self-delusion when one forgets that the character he or she plays is only that, a character. The desire for vertigo that becomes a fascination with alcoholism and drugs is likewise a closely related phenomenon. As Caillois summarizes, “if the principles of play in effect correspond to powerful instincts (competition, chance, simulation, vertigo), it is readily understood that they can be positively and creatively gratified only under ideal and circumscribed conditions which in every case prevail in the rules of play” (2001b, 55).

Though he does not make the connection explicitly here, Caillois's general point recalls Durkheim's assertion that human culture always involves a balancing act between excessive individuation and excessive social control. Too much unregulated expression, says Durkheim (1951), leads to the twin dangers of anomie and egoism; too little produces fatalism and (self-denying) altruism. In the same way, the great spheres of human existence, the sacred and profane,

must be kept separate or at least monitored closely, to ensure that they stay true to their principles (Durkheim 1965). Caillois identifies a third sphere, the play world, which also has principles that must be honored. Although he does not argue for a wholesale transgression of the profane, he does feel that the playful, like the sacred, provides important models to enhance the character of civil life.

In what he calls a “sociology derived from games,” Caillois revises another of Huizinga’s main themes. As previously noted, Huizinga saw play as an activity that effectively precedes culture and, indeed, is a continuing source of cultural creativity and change. Such a viewpoint, Caillois notes, opposes the view held by most historians of games, who argue that games are “a kind of degradation of adult activities that are transformed into meaningless distractions when they are no longer taken seriously” (2001b, 58). Is it possible to resolve this chicken-or-egg dilemma? Caillois’s response to this question poses that the “spirit of play” is indeed a fertile source of culture but that “games and toys are historically the residues of culture.” That is, the essence of play, which both Huizinga and Caillois stress, differs from its specifically ludic developments, its complex of cultural conventions that shape the impulses to play.

Caillois’s understanding of the changing cultural contexts of play also differs from Huizinga’s. For Huizinga, play was deeply embedded in the sacred and secular institutions of archaic societies. In this sense, wars, debates, and courts of law were essentially fields of play. Caillois does not dispute this point, but he makes clear that what has occurred with play activities is that their “social function changed, not their nature” (2001b, 59). Caillois offers several examples. Masking was once a crucial theme of religious ritual; now it is a pleasant way to promote sociability. Games of chance and riddling were once guides to divining the secrets of universe; now they are amusements. Weapons of war, such as slingshots, bows, are in many cultures toys. Critically for Caillois, modern versions of ancient activities must not be seen as degradations. He believes, instead, that basic human impulses—the need to prove superiority, the desire to conquer fear, and the search for answers to riddles—are worked out in both the real world and in play worlds. Games are not inferior settings but rather alternative worlds, places that allow people to play through the possibilities of life and, in some cases at least, to find satisfactions denied them in profane society. Dismissing Huizinga’s lament about the declining status of play historically, Caillois takes a more sociological position. Play forms, for him, are inevitably mixed, both as expressions and as contributing elements, with the patterns and practices of societies.



The latter portion of *Man, Play, and Games* explores some variations and combinations of the basic themes described. Caillois examines the game preferences of different societies. To accomplish this study, he considers first how his four types—competition, chance, vertigo, and simulation—combine. Caillois asserts four basic types of play and six possible ways to pair them. Two of these pairings he considers problematic or forbidden relationships. These are competition-vertigo and simulation-chance. In the former combination, attempts at skillful manipulation are the opposite of willful dissolution; in the latter, attempts to disguise oneself are irrelevant to the courting of destiny. A second set of pairings—chance-vertigo and competition-mimicry—are what he calls contingent relationships. Such combinations do not enhance either member of the pair, although they make interesting experiences possible. Thus, vertigo (as the sense of being possessed by otherness) sometimes accompanies the receptivity to fate in games of chance. And competition is not altered in its essence by patterns of spectacle or mimicry but develops in ways that court spectators.

But Caillois is mostly concerned with his third set of pairs, what he calls fundamental relationships. These are simulation-vertigo and competition-chance. Why are these two combinations fundamental?

To understand Caillois's answer to this question, it helps to view his work in terms of some long-standing concerns within sociology and anthropology. Since the inception of these disciplines, many scholars have explored what accounts for cross-cultural differences in societies and, more precisely, if there is some set of factors associated with a gradient or evolution of these societies, essentially a clear path of social development (Parsons 1966). Older schemes speculated on a path of progress from savagery to civilization; newer models used pairings like simple and complex or traditional and modern. And, it should be emphasized, many contemporary thinkers now question the proposition that there is any single path of development or that particular societies should be pictured as isolated actors who are moving ahead under their own steam. Given such qualifications, Caillois's writing seems an attempt to understand how societies have moved from one type to another and how play forms also have shifted in the process.

Sociologists and anthropologists have viewed early (and economically simple) societies as smaller, more community based, traditional, religious, broadly personal, agrarian, kin oriented, and emotional. In such societies, people lived amidst familiar others who shared the same values and possessed similar skills. Over many centuries, this world changed from intensive agriculture to indus-

trialism. Through a series of developments, societies became much larger, more socially complicated, hierarchical, and economically specialized. Respect for tradition gave way to a search for progress. Smaller family units and, then, individuals, as possessors of private property, became important social agents as did their complements, huge organizations like nation-states, businesses, and schools. Relations became impersonal (and even money based). Religion turned from community-founded expressions to more individualized forms and (so some argue) to a spirit of secularism. Rationalization, as Max Weber (1958) famously described it, was let loose upon the world. Like the capitalist entrepreneurs in Karl Marx's books or the characters in Charles Dickens's novels, people became self-regarding, strategizing, and hard-boiled.

Caillois presents these changes as a shift from what he calls primitive or Dionysian societies toward orderly or rational societies. In this view, Caillois uses Friedrich Nietzsche's (1956) treatment of the Dionysian and Apollonian as rival cultural traditions in ancient Greece. For Nietzsche—and for Ruth Benedict, who applied these ideas to Native American cultures—Dionysian traditions encourage aggressive, emotional, turbulent, and ecstatic styles of being. Apollonian traditions emphasize order, harmony, and rational control. For Caillois, Dionysian societies are “ruled equally by masks and possession, i.e., by *mimicry* and *ilinx*.” “Conversely,” he continues, “the Incas, Assyrians, Chinese, or Romans are orderly societies with offices, careers, codes, and ready-reckoners, with fixed and hierarchical privileges in which *agôn* and *alea*, i.e., merit and heredity, seem to be the chief complementary elements of the game of living” (2001b, 87).

The reader may object, with justice, that older and newer societies do not fall into terms of disorderliness or orderliness but into terms of two different kinds of orderliness. Durkheim (1964) took exactly this view. However, Caillois with his images of the wild imagination was influenced equally by Nietzsche and by the surrealists. Thus, his comments on early societies emphasize the community-based festival, “an interregnum of vertigo, effervescence, and fluidity in which everything that symbolizes order in the universe is temporarily abolished so that it can later re-emerge.” (2001b, 87).

A reader might expect, then, that Caillois's chapter on simulation and vertigo describes the patterning of games in early societies. But no. Instead, his approach recalls Huizinga's reporting on the play-festival-rite complex. That is, Caillois stresses how festivity partakes of both the playful and the sacred and discusses mythology, initiation rites, and shamanism. But he differs with

Huizinga's view of play as an order-building activity. Caillois sees masking and vertigo as attempts to get behind, and even counter, everyday realities, and he believes the two forms support each other fundamentally. As he summarizes, "It should be understood that mask and panic are present *in association*, inextricably interwoven and occupying a central place, whether in social paroxysms called festivals, in magico-religious practices, or in the as yet crude form of a political system" (2001b, 97).

Modernizing societies organize play impulses differently. If earlier ages dramatized chaos (through combinations of ilinx and mimicry), in "the transition to civilization" these categories fall by the wayside. Competition and chance take their place. Much of Caillois's chapter on the *agôn* and *alea* combination treats the historical transition toward the increasingly "methodical control" (2001b, 101) of human expression. Rationality (as a publicly supported process of thinking and administering) becomes dominant. Wild, orgiastic, experiences and masking are seen only as remnants of ecstatic communalism. More pertinently, they are considered to be dangers to a new urban style of life that emphasizes self-regulation and commitment to distant, abstract forms of authority.

In a world where individuals have the opportunity to alter their social standing, a new tension rises. Against the ascriptive, or birth-assigned, practices of traditional, hierarchical societies, modernizing societies offer the prospects for personal mobility based on perseverance, luck, and, especially, merit. In such societies, play dramatized the opposition between chance and merit. Societies with egalitarian mythologies, in particular, continue to make much of the relative equality that exists on the field of play; and luck is celebrated as a factor that enables the less able to have some prospect of victory. To be sure, competition and luck have a place in every society, but, as Caillois emphasizes, in the earlier world, "competition has not been systematized . . . and has little place in its institutions." He continues, "As for chance, it is not an abstract expression of a statistical coefficient, but a sacred sign of the favor of the gods" (2001b, 126).

The development of elaborate forms of gambling (such as state-sponsored lotteries) are, in Caillois's view, something of a sop thrown to the public, a largely imaginary prospect of wealth that buttresses the broader commitment to personal success. He sees the public's identification with sporting heroes and other celebrities as a degraded form of imitation that "provides harmless compensation to the masses, who are resigned and have neither hope nor opportunity of attaining the luxury and glory by which they are dazzled." (2001b,

125). Most degraded of all are the modern forms of vertigo, which in his view have become a descent into alcohol and drugs.

Caillois's final chapter concerns his "revivals" of ancient practices. For example, masking occurs at times like Carnival or Halloween. But such use of masking is sharply delimited and carries no profound social meaning. Indeed, in the modern world, the mask has given way to the uniform, which is an opposite device that surrenders individuality to the authority of a formal organization. Similarly, traveling fairs, amusement parks, and circuses have either become spectacles or, in their more interactive forms, opportunities for physical disorientation. In both instances, the powerful social meanings of ecstatic states have been purged. So also has the modern version of the trickster, the circus clown, who has become little more than a public entertainer. Although clowns engage in social satire, they do not invite their viewers into the profounder forms of criticism, disorder, and, even, vertigo.

Although Caillois presents his arguments in the manner of one who wishes primarily to illustrate scientifically the social underpinnings and the social consequences of play forms, he also evinces regret about the course of civilization. It is logical and perhaps appropriate that his *agôn-alea* combination dominates in our contemporary era. But we should not forget that play manifests itself in different ways, and each one of these ways expresses some kind of human longing. One should not confuse "degraded," "corrupted," or "perverted" expressions with activities that provide these basic commentaries on profane existence.

### **Evaluating Caillois's Work**

Caillois's scholarly interests were wide ranging, and his intellectual project was equally broad. He sought to integrate dispersed bodies of knowledge from the humanities, natural sciences, and physical sciences. In his writing, he attempted to develop a general and scientifically based theory of aesthetics that described conditions or forms within which people experience themselves as active subjects in the world. He was as much a literary theorist, a political thinker, and a mythologist as he was a sociologist and an anthropologist. His work arose out of a specific European socio-political context; and he was marked by some of the prominent intellectual movements of his time—Freudianism, surrealism, and Marxism—and by his famous teachers and colleagues. He was a public intellectual who spoke to the issues of his day.

Caillois's principal concerns, many of which find expression in *Man, Play, and Games*, have been carried forward in a number of academic fields. The general themes of his work about play's status as a set of distinctive, coherent, and even transgressive patterns have influenced other theories, including Victor Turner's (1986) connections between play and liminality and Wolfgang Iser's interpretation of the fictive and imaginary as political acts (Iser 1993; Armstrong 2000). Perhaps the most noted element of Caillois's book was his treatment of the four types of play, which continue to appear in such varied works as Denis Hollier's (1988) comments on the parallels between literature and death (mimicry), Bruce Michelson's (1977) focus on qualities of make-believe in tourism (mimicry), Jennifer Milam's (2000) analysis of the swinging scenes in Fragonard's paintings (ilinx), and Brian Sutton-Smith's (1997) comments on gambling as play (alea).

Caillois's distinction between *paidia* and *ludus* also continues to be important for philosophers who wish to develop a general theory of games (Rowe 1992) and for analysts and designers of electronic entertainment (Salen and Zimmerman 1994; Juul 2003). In this emerging field, which is sometimes called *ludology*, designers try to create for players environments that feature both coherent, shared systems of rules (*ludus*) and opportunities for creativity, spontaneity, and self-assertion (*paidia*). Games without *paidia* seem ultimately sterile, formulaic settings in which players quickly lose interest; but games without sufficient ludic elements also lack appeal in that they do not lead the player toward increasingly sophisticated challenges or permit complex social interaction. In even more general terms, Caillois's distinction reminds us that satisfying experience balances order and disorder and focuses the reader's attention on the willful private assertion that makes any expression coherent.

Of course, Caillois has had his critics. The literary theorist Jacques Ehrmann, perhaps the best-known critic, argued against the view, which Huizinga and Caillois share, that play appears as a special world isolated from everyday affairs (Ehrmann 1971; Motte 2009). In Ehrmann's opinion, the oppositions of play and seriousness or play and reality will not work. Play is rarely gratuitous or for nothing; rather, it is a part of the society in which it occurs. Players do not stand apart; they participate in the cultural realities that course through the playground. I think Ehrmann's criticism is unfair, for both Huizinga and Caillois sought to understand how the separated world of play intersects with social and cultural patterns, which shape play forms and respond to their expressions.

Warren Motte (2009), another critic, also challenges the structure of Caillois's general argument. Having emphasized the value of *paidia*, Caillois—according to Motte—spends the majority of his book discussing the more formalized expressions of play, that is, *ludus*. Caillois's association of ludic play with developed or even civilized societies should trouble contemporary readers all too aware of the problems of the overdeveloped world. And his practice of grabbing examples from the anthropological and historical literature to illustrate his points—much in the fashion of Huizinga—will satisfy only those readers who are inclined to accept his argument and who do not require more systematic presentations of evidence. In the opinion both of Ehrmann and Motte, *Man, Play, and Games* begins as a critique of Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, but it does not stray far from the latter book's theme. As a bounded world of its own sort, play provides a subtle critique of the society that harbors it and (in its more developed forms) supports the civilizing of the world.

Caillois's categorizing of the four types of play also attracted criticism (Rowe 1992) and inspired rival views. Anthropologist John Roberts and his colleagues proposed one of those alternative schemes (Roberts, Arth, and Bush 1959). Roberts divided games according to whether participants rely principally on strategy (that is, mental calculation), physical skill, or chance. By the terms of this conflict-enculturation thesis, societies create characteristic tensions for their members and give people opportunities to work through these tensions (and develop relevant skills) in socially approved games. Because Robert's approach offers a simpler scheme for classifying games (excluding mimicry, for example), it has been used more for cross-cultural comparisons.

Of course, scholarly work can always be criticized, both for what it does and what it does not do. Moreover, reflecting on such work from the vantage point of another half century inevitably introduces new concerns. As a kind of conclusion then, I offer a few additional comments about the challenges raised by Caillois's writings.

I should emphasize at the outset that I admire Caillois's intent, which is to make clear the ever-present tension in play between improvisation and rule observance, to explain the different kinds of play forms, and to discuss the shift in play preferences throughout history. I agree with his (and Durkheim's) view that the sacred differs substantially from the playful or, at least, they require quite different attitudes from their participants. I support his quest to discover the ordering principles that give shape to human expression.

His focus on the development of the rules for play and on the ways they become packaged in games is an important contribution. However, this trouble spot also raises a wide range of questions that Caillois does not address. Such a list includes questions about when and why rules become formulated in situations and why only some sets of rules become institutionalized in society as defining features of particular game forms. It seems apparent that Caillois associates rule development with the advent of complex, hierarchical, and administered societies, but he does not develop this theme at length in his book. Nor does he address the surrounding complex of beliefs, norms, supporting practices, and organizations that grow up around institutionalized games. In every society, participants accept understandings about who should play a particular game and who should watch, how participants at different proficiencies should be motivated and rewarded, how the game should connect to other activities, and how society should value the game. This supporting structure or paratext is also part of the culture of games.

Moreover, understanding the different ways in which a society sponsors and supports games gives insight into comprehending the functions served by the events. Some events may well offer opportunities for status reversal or other experiences that counter daily routine; others may affirm prevailing social patterns; others still may simply be “alternative worlds” (as Huzinga emphasized) that offer models for behavior but do not confront other social patterns in any direct way. Stated most generally, determining the possible functions of any particular game (at a certain place and time) is, to a large extent, an empirical question. The empirical analysis must include observations determining what kinds of actors play what kinds of roles in the sponsoring and maintenance of the event. Again, Caillois's scholarly approach is sensitive to these issues, but he does not develop them in *Man, Play, and Games*.

His opposition of *ludus* to *paidia* is very important, though it raises as many questions as it answers. This would not be the case if *paidia* were only formlessness, the absence of the rule systems and supporting frameworks. However, Caillois's *paidia* is a broader vision of “diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety.” It incorporates ideas about the attitudes of the players themselves—that they are enjoying themselves and improvising as they go along. Much like Huzinga, Caillois celebrates the relative freedom of the playground as a setting where people conduct themselves as they wish. However, this view of the untrammelled, spirited individual evades the issue of

whether there are other ordering principles in play beside rules. A somewhat different view of play identifies different sources of orderliness in games—psychological, social, cultural, physical, and environmental—that effectively regulate the activity (Henricks 2009). Although players may be doing what they want, they may also be conforming to a wide variety of factors (for instance, bodily impulses, well-developed skills, and environmental and technical limitations) that shape their interaction. Orderliness and disorderliness in play are, to a large extent, matters of perspective, and ideas about freedom and spontaneity (however appealing) are difficult to establish. All this might seem peripheral to Caillois's argument about the formfulness of human activity except that his scholarly writing was largely a search for just these sorts of forms (as those deeply established associations and ideations that have descended to us from our creaturely ancestors). In *Man, Play, and Games*, he does not do enough to show how play brings together these different kinds of ordering principles, or how much of the pleasure of play is the experience of realizing the connections and disconnections of these patterns.

One can argue, of course, that Caillois does address the bio-chemical and psychological foundations of play in his portraits of the four types: *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx*. These impulses, instincts, and yearnings are said to be distinctive and even mutually exclusive. In such ways, he counters Huizinga's search for a uniform spirit of play. In my view, Caillois typology is a wonderful contribution to the study of play; however—as he said of Huizinga's work—“most of its premises are debatable.”

Let us examine first *agôn*, the type of play Huizinga stresses. To be sure, humans have a taste for social rivalry; and even private activities can be conducted with an eye to how other people have performed these same behaviors. Play may well take this focus, though ideas of partisanship must not be separated from ideas of team membership or of the collective affiliation that includes both sides. Sometimes, these collectivities may even surround themselves with the secrecy that Huizinga emphasizes and Caillois disavows. In my view, play is contestive or rivalrous, but there are many forms and objects—one's own bodily skills and limitations, psychological factors, environmental challenges, cultural difficulties—that may be the objects of play. Overcoming the will of other people is commonly a principal concern, but there are many other ways of contending with the world.

Caillois's development of *alea* or chance is also an important type, though his particular view that people simply wait passively for fate to reveal itself seems



misdirected. In my view, the active efforts of people to manipulate the forces of the world (be these supernatural forces or simply natural combinations that they cannot predict) are not corruptions but rather proper expressions of the play impulse. It may not be possible to control the roll of the dice or the fall of the cards, but much of the fun of play involves the active choices of placing one's marker, choosing a level of the bet, shouting out inducements, reading the actions of other players, rubbing a good luck charm in one's pocket, and so forth. Caillois's general point—that people experience their placement in the world in both active and passive ways—is well taken as is his contention that *alea* ultimately involves recognizing forces that players cannot control. I would argue, however, that giving up oneself to fate (as in the decision to close one's eyes and cross a busy street) is not playful; opening one's eyes and artfully dodging the traffic is.

Caillois also deserves much credit for his focus on mimicry, in its senses of simulation, identification, imagination, make-believe, masking, role playing, and similar forms. In contrast to his treatment of chance, Caillois in this instance emphasizes the active participation of the persons who inhabit the imagined form and play it out. And his argument—that, in this particular form of play, one effectively gives up the self to join with otherness—is interesting. However, one could just as easily maintain that mimicry (like the other forms of play) features an interaction between the form that is being “played” and the subjectively sustained inspirations of the player. Furthermore, his claim that play is either rule bound or make-believe (but never both) seems doubtful. Quite the opposite, play of this sort frequently involves very clear expectations—that is, rules—that must be confronted. People cannot play “pirate” or “astronaut” in just any fashion; they must match their creativity to their shared ideas about how pirates and astronauts normally look and behave.

Caillois's final type, *ilinx*, also deserves comment. There is certainly pleasure in jumping into the whirlpool, in losing one's sense of normal placement in the world, or even in seeing the self (as a unitary concept) dissolved. Indeed, such ideas about self-experience as fragmented, fluid, and contextual have become popularized by postmodern writing. And I do not dispute the proposition that experiences where the self is buffeted about and even disoriented by otherness (as in a carnival ride) are significant. People are objects in a world that stands beyond their powers. However, in my opinion, this act of submersion is not equivalent to play. Rather, players hold up their arms on rides of this sort to display their daring, they try to rock the conveyance, they shout and look

around, they tease their companions to make them nervous, and they pay their money and climb aboard again. Such assertiveness is the playful quality that makes the participant no longer the prisoner of the contraption. We do not simply surrender to vertigo; we make decisions about what situations we will enter, how we will ready ourselves for them and behave during the disorientation that follows, what we will do to and with the other people involved, and even (sometimes) how we will make the experience end.

I should add a few comments about Caillois's combining of the four types. Recall that two pairs—*agôn* and *alea* and *mimicry* and *ilinx*—combine well; two others combine with more difficulty; and a final two combine not at all. He asserts this position because he believes that the four play modes differ as forms of expression and that their essences either support or contradict one another. Moreover, he believes that the competition-chance combination is more likely to become rule bound than the other pair. Furthermore, his discussion of the two pairs indicates that the former (*agôn* and *alea*) is much more prominent in modern societies while *mimicry* and *ilinx* is a feature of simpler and more traditional societies.

I have difficulty accepting some of Caillois's arguments about how the various forms combine and how *ludus* manifests itself in their more developed expressions. Many modern play forms seem to me to combine all the elements he mentions, albeit in ways he might consider degraded. For example, many spectator sports involve *mimicry* in the sense of disguising (through costume) and fan identification. Chance and competition, of course, play central roles; but so does the challenge of being thrown out of balance by forces one did not anticipate. Extreme sports like snow boarding make this quest for physical disorientation and the player's response to it even more central to the experience. And contemporary role-playing video games bring all these themes into focus as players become characters who wander through confusing environments, encounter random occurrences they cannot predict, and contend with the difficulties presented both by the logic of the game and by other players.

Having said this, I do think Caillois's classification of the four types of play has value, for it makes play scholars analyze the different kinds of challenges that any particular game (and more informal play activity) presents. And it encourages these same scholars to think about the different kinds of satisfactions offered in such games. To what degree does pleasure come from asserting oneself against (or controlling) environmental challenges, and to

what degree does pleasure stem from giving oneself to forces too powerful to be controlled?

Despite the reservations I've expressed, I also think Caillois's categorizing of play by societal type is very useful. In an earlier type of society, people understood themselves to be embedded in long-standing communities that were given coherence by powerfully established ideas about the sacred. Participation in Huizinga's play-rite-festival complex meant plunging into experiences of a transcendent sacred realm that was never understood to be "orderly" in some entirely predictable or doctrinaire fashion. Collective involvement of this sort offered a way of taking on new guises (mimicry), experiencing feelings of disorientation and change (ilinx), and acting out creatively the new sense of being. In a quite different way, modern societies (which imply ideas of clearly defined individual selves) present a vision of a person as constructing or even constituting social order. People wrangle with one another and attempt to establish hierarchies which, as Caillois emphasizes, are based partly on personal merit and partly on heredity, good fortune, membership in favored social organizations, and similar factors. Modern games are spectacles for this more activist self, who competes with others but acknowledges the reasonableness of complicated rules for the process.

Participation in sacred matters, as mentioned, involves the subordination, humiliation, or even negation of the self. In play, to recall Caillois's phrase, "All is human, invented by man the creator." Differences between the competition-chance and mimicry-vertigo pairs are perhaps best seen as differences of degree. The former embraces the assertive self who learns about the world through confrontation or opposition; the latter describes the yielding, embedded self who enters the forms of otherness and discovers the new possibilities of expression that are found in the expanded identity. As I have argued elsewhere, when the experience of being embedded in transcendent form is the dominating theme of an event, it is perhaps better to use the terms "ritual" and "communitas" to describe the resulting patterns of expression (Henricks 1999, 2006). When subjects seek to dominate the world (and in the process to make it respond to them), work and play are perhaps the more helpful designations. Nevertheless, there is always some tension or balance between the themes of assertion and compliance—between discovering what you can do to the world and what the world can do to you. That people make these discoveries in somewhat different ways is, I think, the abiding message of Caillois's work.

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