

## A GENEALOGY:

### PLAY, FOLKLORE, AND ART

Games, festivals, folklore, a derivation of them, and artistic expression are manifestations of symbolic invention. To compare them is to bring out the differences in the order of the symbolic production and have, as a consequence, a differentiated perception of the way they function. It is also to put them into a perspective of filial relationship. In fact, a genealogy appears with the processes that regulate the passage from one to the other of these means of expression. Through the successive dissipation of structural stabilizations that are in turn play, festival and folklore, a generative order of complexity is established of which art, with its dynamics open to all expressive invention, is the end result. Finally, it is to discover at the end of the process the literary text, conceived as a work of art, surrounded by expression and preceded by it, appearing from then on according to one of the precepts of the theory of the text, as a production “of society and history” and as issuing from the social phenomenon in its entirety. “I am not only undertaking a study of a sociology of games,” wrote Roger Caillois. “My idea is to lay the foundations

Translated by Jeanne Ferguson.

for a sociology beginning with games.”<sup>1</sup> We would say of a sociology in which we would be permitted to glimpse the achievement of the task of explaining the entire social phenomenon itself.

## I

Is there an art of games? But is that the right question to ask? Would not the correct proposition be the following: Art only exists because games exist.

To begin, let us examine from the angle of symbolic production the manifestations of play. They are striking for three characteristics that are sufficient to define them in their differences:

1) They unfold in the imagination; 2) they give form to time and space; 3) they are governed by the pleasure principle. That is, there are three orders of phenomena developing a single generative structure, that of symbolic invention whose original model is games—expressions of festival, folklore and art being derived forms, socially more available.

1) The activities of play take place in the field of the imaginary. The child who plays at grabbing his mother's empty spools and rolling them away from him across the floor is imitating her coming into the room and the joy he feels at that moment; he is also imitating her leaving the room and the anguish he then feels. That is to say that this very first game takes on, with purely mental representations as its purpose, the accidental manipulations for which it is the pretext. This projection of joy and anguish onto an inanimate object shows us the primary modulations of psychic life at the same time as it permits us to come upon the first forms of symbolic activity.

Here we have a basic truth that has not escaped Paul Valéry, who writes, “Man, a symbolic animal; that is, one who admits substitutions that replace contact with something with the functional elements belonging to it. Fear and feeling are symbols.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Roger Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes (Le Masque et le vertige)*, Paris, N.R.F., 1958.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Valéry, *Cahiers*, Vol. I, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris, N.R.F., 1973, p. 915.

This unfolding in the field of the imaginary is primordial. The unchanging law of games in young humans is the invading of the imaginary; games only serve as a support. It is neither gesture, the handled objects nor rules that make up the essence of games. Instead it is the imagination, materialized in gesture, objects and rules. Thus the player keeps to the same places where our capacity of invention is created, in those perceptions of situations in which representation is only an occasion for substitutions, for stimulation of function, the prelude to the formation of internal events, opportunities for independent mental associations.

This is a relative unreality. The player tries out the representations and being excited by them, repeats and prolongs them. The child who plays with miniature automobiles is in another world, we say. Another world? Indeed. The world of his dreams, his desires, his fears and his joys. These are very real referents, consequently. Of course they are not to be numbered among visible objects. They are neither things nor rules but exist at the level of psychic intensities that echo in the conscious, modulations of an emotional participation in events.

“Play unveils the imaginary,” observes Mikel Dufrenne.<sup>3</sup> It is a very important experience in which the human being discovers that he can give meaning to things; he can cause an echo in himself of things he has brought about by his cleverness; he can be a relay of established communications—this time unlimited—with beings capable of expression.

Thus games are born of the unexpectedness of being places and occasions for conscious events. The player invents a body for himself that is able to communicate. Possessing an instrument of feeling and thought, he finds himself to be an infinitely differentiated source of alertness in others.

But this symbolic activity is an organization of perceptions; it expresses itself through the complexity of this organization and is its first manifestation. The complexity of the sensory organization reflects the perceived event on itself and through itself. “Sensation is like a spark in a hall of mirrors that animates an infinity of figures and relationships between those figures,”

<sup>3</sup> Mikel Dufrenne, *Esthétique et philosophie*, Collection d’Esthétique, Paris, Klincksieck, 1976, Vol. I, pp. 133-150.

notes Paul Valéry.<sup>4</sup> Let us imagine a consciousness fascinated by these effects. Better yet, let us imagine a consciousness born of them.

Space and time take forms that are not in things but belong to the mental order, that is, they arise from established neurophysiological relationships—from perceptions to affects—and now resound at the level of memory. To express these relationships by a gesture, a dance or a song, to make their mark on an object, a canvas or a musical instrument, is to establish a form functioning as interior space and time.

Little girls playing hopscotch with a pebble have “exorcised” the formless—for them—space of the village square. They have drawn squares for their successive jumps; the monotony of a summer afternoon is now divided into exuberant hops, joyful or derisive cries. How dismal the square is without games! How long and boring the afternoon is! Materially, however, this game is nothing, or almost nothing: a few lines drawn on the pavement. “The reality of games is in man alone,” concludes Paul Valéry.

2) Time and space are first given form by play. Success lies in imposing it by voluntary decree on the exuberances of life. Mikel Dufrenne has thus written, “The relationship of man with nature is at stake in games.”<sup>5</sup> It is a relationship that is all the more remarkable because it is without form, with scattered possibilities of accident, the unforeseen, of chance as provocation and challenge directed at the inherent organized nervous system. By trial and error, impelled by a desire that hallucinates its object, are proposed and adopted behaviors that function as so many bases for the activity of the imagination. Thus appears a definition of games as gestural supports for imaginary programs whose function is to install autonomous and controlled behavior in addition to necessary or merely useful conduct.

Born of the exuberances of life, games develop the organization of internal growth. They are distributed following a progressive order of the placement of structures of representation and mental control. Roger Caillois, in his typology of games, has shown how they are divided between confrontation with the turbulences of

<sup>4</sup> Paul Valéry, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 1156.

<sup>5</sup> Mikel Dufrenne, *op. cit.*

life, facing the vertigo and hazard they provoke, and skillful behavior in both competitive games and those mimicking social roles.

But what *Les Jeux et les hommes* further illuminates is how games, by their very nature, are close to maladjustment and anarchy. Because games are regulating structures, they are deployed between the poles of instability designated by perverse games. They thus appear as the first instance of form being given to the formless.

Whether man mimes, dances, sculpts, paints, sings, recites, accompanies himself or not with music, in his games he gives form to space and time that have no other references than those structuring consciousness. They present no other references—but they are important—than those of an original anthropology. By constituting games, the child is initiated into the powers that will become those of the artist, the use and fabrication of tools and through their skillful use, into scientific distantiating.

The marionette theater has the most humble of origins. Empty spools given to a child by its mother may have been its first manifestation. Marionettes, “little Maries;” the semantic origin points to children’s dolls, and the best examples of this theater still keep this image. Recitation accompanied by lively gesture, story subordinated to imaginary desire, improvised narrative, a game of the people: it is nonetheless the “romanesque art of the theater,” according to Ghelderode; it has furnished sculptured works and a repertory that at times has risen to the artistic level of a polished written work. The little theater reflects the fleeting impressions of childhood and by lending them their first objective form places them within the order of symbolic representation, which has no other limits than those of a consciousness endowed with a growth potential open to the infinite. Now, a consciousness carried to the limits of the imaginary inevitably participates in artistic experience. This explains how the natural expressions of joy, anguish, cruelty, fantasies farthest from the subconscious, as seen in the marionette theaters of Jarry, Maeterlinck and Ghelderode, arrive at the most subtle effects of art.

3) Play is governed by the pleasure principle, and this hedonistic ascendancy gives it a face of its own.

The giving of form to time and space for which play is the occasion is an almost immediate projection of the impulses of desire and dream. Thus play is at the same time a primary, fantastic and unreal psychic activity and the objectivated projection of operative and programmed gestures. Its singular character comes precisely from this *biplanéarité*, to use the expression of Iouri Lotman.<sup>6</sup> Thus games are the first objective support for desire and dream, a first socialized structure, from then on marked by the reality principle and the rationalization inherent in secondary activities.

The ease with which games lend themselves to the transfer of libidinal energy comes from their imaginary nature. We have seen that they are the vehicles of events of mental life. Play forms exist only to put previously subjective emotions and states into motion. Motor exercises reactivating the solicited emotion in the memory and giving it an objective and socialized existence through gestures, games are the first device of an awakened or conscious activity. The role of the latter is to receive the impulses of desire and dream and to relate our fantasies to a world in which our gestures are joined to objects and to the laws that govern their concrete manipulation, in short, encounter the initiatives of others.

What would the continuous waves of pleasure and pain that pass through the psyche of children be without games? It suffices to consider the child deprived of games when compared with one who is more fortunate in this regard. Weakness, fatigue, autism and a crippled ability to relate to others are all in evidence. In a film of the gestures of an autistic child throwing a ball to his nurse, Bettelheim shows us the first moment of an individual liberation that seemed impossible. Narcissistic and self-satisfied, the player is still open to a relationship with others through a lively and natural liaison. Through laughter, the joyful expansiveness of affects, through the almost magical exchange of non-verbal communication, play proves itself to be a very natural manifestation of sociability and as such is irreplaceable. A program for vital exuberance, a succession of free gestures and forms, signs and symbols disposed to exchange and the recognition of others, games furnish the occasion for investment and projection into reciprocal

<sup>6</sup> Iouri Lotman, *Structures du texte artistique*, Bibliothèque des Sciences humaines, Paris, N.R.F., 1973, p. 106.

situations that are outlines for objectivized relationships and apprenticeship in the codes of social life. The fascination connected with socially uncontrolled affects of anguish, wild desire or violent aggressivity is now extended to the concerted exchanges of a symbolic program. Thus this fascination comes to keep its distance, to be differentiated and appear as a composite of diversified choices: the player has unconsciously left the semi-delirium of fascination. He now chooses a flexible behavior adapted to social codes.

It is thus correct to say that the libido—modern avatar of Eros—seeks and in a way desires its own sublimation in games (if the libido can desire a defined object), because it finds there the realization of an instinctive dynamic. In its gestures, play sketches out the fantasies of a desiring hallucination; it becomes possible to stage projections having no object. In short, it is as though games brought about adaptation to the reality principle not through conflict but through trial and error, cybernetically, at the end of a symbolically governed definition.

This involves us in a different idea of the mechanism of sublimation. It is no longer a compensatory activity after the interruption brought about by censorship but inventive capacity associated with the manifestation of Eros.

Games could thus serve as instruments of adjustment for the most subtle stratagems of Eros, through exchanges of signs and symbols he introduces into the relationship between people to which erotic energy is devoted. Symbolic games work for the accomplishment of the ends of Eros, namely, to bring the union of individuals initiated to the free exchange of signs to the most subtle changes in participation. Later he will allow the partners in erotic games, through exchanges in their differences, to pursue continual invention.

Nietzsche believed that it was through codes of courtesy and the art of Provençal poets that the European West came to know love as passion. Now, courtly love consciously developed the erotic game. What was it a matter of? Becoming the accomplice of the desiring power and abandoning to it the space for play offered by poetry, song and music. Not through perversion or impotence—it is true that they came later—but for a childlike nature, an excess of vitality, a spontaneous taste for form.

In the above we see the reason why the great moments of civilization—from which democratic utopia derived its hopes—extended the games area to the larger manifestations of politics. Classic Athens, the Mayan Empire, Renaissance Florence, ancient Japan and the baroque monarchies cultivated games in the most serious forms of social life: politics, war, science and economics. These are moments of civilization in which we recognize a creative energy charged at every point with the impulses of Eros, in which childhood and science are both preserved: performances of games as art.

## II

The passage from play to festival is permanent. However, it is still possible to distinguish one from the other, beginning with the characteristics of play in a new key that gives in its turn the definition of folklore or, more exactly, signals its appearance.

The manifestations of a festival are games, but collective games; vital exuberance, but inseparable from the experience of participation; first form given to time and space, but according to the laws of oral transmission; governed by the pleasure principle, but induced into the structures, rituals and institutions of kinship. They are no longer behavior paving the way for the works of civilization, but the work of civilization itself.

Thus we see the space of games penetrated by that of the festival without losing any of its constituent elements but also without any of them suffering a transformation that would change it into a festive activity. It is a passage from one structure to another by the destabilization of the first to the profit of the second, through a metamorphosis which extends to all games.

Also worthy of mention is the agent of the metamorphoses at work here: the social institution appropriating the manifestations of the unstructured sociability of play and integrating them, by means of symbolic expression, into its own goal of the formation of the social group.

1) The participants in festival games belong to a community that is very strictly defined by the solidarities of work. Thus the issue arising from the collective nature of certain games is not to know



if all play is not already the outline for a community—no doubt it is—but that such a social group reserves a space and a time for games to which all its members are invited. This presupposes a leisure time extended to an entire society. Now, in a traditional society, that is, in an agrarian and artisan economy, this time is not and cannot be disposed of haphazardly. For all to take part it is necessary that all be free from useful, productive work. The collective games of a festival will have to coincide with work and certain days; they mark the rhythm of planting and harvesting. It is a time set aside for relaxed encounters and celebrations. However, reserved in this way such periods of time take on their own character; bound to the cadences of the seasons, they occur on fixed dates connected with the return of certain stars in the heavens. They are written in the sacred calendar, according to the very will of the gods.

2) Thus we will say that the manifestations of a festival are different from those of games because of a necessary and immediate reference to the collective myths of the group, myths of origin that translate symbolically the political, economic and cosmic regulations structuring the considered society.

The sole fact of a gathering extended to an entire people shows a first victory over need, the recognition of a political and social order and the continuance of an economic organization. Much more, this assembling of people only exists, in a way, in order to show this victory over necessity and to celebrate the common approval of it. The games that brought the group together become part of a collective destiny.<sup>7</sup> Hunger, war, epidemics, violence and death have thus been exorcized or, rather, the exorcisms that nullified those disasters appear on that day as a triumphant skill, a moment of life happily dominated. Thus festival games are skillful and daring. But we must see that here it is a matter of an incantation ventured against a background of catastrophe and murderous violence. The survival of the group is threatened, and every member of a primitive society feels this threat daily.

<sup>7</sup> Thus the festivals between working periods are carried over to military and religious festivals, as Georges Duby notes (*Fêtes en France*, Ed. du Chêne, 1977). But there are extensions: the military festival celebrates the return to the fields as well as the happy outcome of battles, and the religious festival elevates the agrarian calendar to the dignity of liturgy.

3) A festival does not celebrate only what makes one group different from another; it does not only legitimize the difference by giving it universal recognition: it expresses the symbolism of it at the peak of its exercise. "No symbol exists just because it has been put into circulation," notes Saussure.<sup>8</sup>

And it is exactly in these festival moments that they are circulated. Such is the symbolic tool that this tribe has given itself to maintain its existence, exorcise the threats of death, ritualize violence, overcome divisions and organize production. Thus the programming of collective exuberance that festival regulations consist of transposes into symbolic figures the techniques and organizations of expertise, the conditions for the survival of the tribe. First and most subtle, the principles that govern the political and social coherence of the ethnic group, then the virtuosity and intelligence shown in the activities of production.

Here we can only refer to the excellent works of Pierre Clastres.<sup>9</sup> There are no more fascinating illustrations to evoke the symbolic tools of political power than this author's description of the ways in which the ethnic groups of the Amazonian jungle have instituted forms of non-violent political power. It is evident from this that we have never done anything except dream of politics as an art, that is, exclusively an exercise of the symbolic tool. But let us leave political power here to rejoin the symbolic invention that is in all ways its necessary support.

Enthusiasm programmed through signs and symbols, the games in a festival bring the tribal imagination into play. From that it happens that during a period of self-assertion, when the destiny of the tribe is defined in terms of challenge faced with the violences of hunger and war, tribal games are permeated with references to the sacred, to myths, to rituals and to the gods: references that lapse into secular forms with the abatement of the dangers that cemented the community. Thus is explained the fact that the forms of folklore go from the sacred ritual to spectator games and, as the demons are forgotten, to the mere use of signs that have form but no content.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Starobinski, *Les Mots sous les mots* (Les anagrammes de Ferdinand de Saussure), Paris, Collection "Le Chemin," N.R.F., 1971.

<sup>9</sup> Pierre Clastres, *La société contre l'Etat*, Paris, Collection "Critiques," Ed. de Minuit, 1974.

From then on, a criterion is seen for determining the sign, the symbol, the object or the usage belonging to folklore. To folklore will belong the sign or object worthy of figuring on the festival day: games, dances, songs, paintings, poems, costumes, dishes, food, contests and tales belong to the folklore if they are worthy of being a part of those decisive moments in which symbols are exchanged and renewed in the group. This belonging is sufficient and necessary. It gives a distinguishing characteristic to an object, a gesture or sign, namely, to be a spontaneous expression and also, since it figures on that day, addressed to the group and relaunched by it, as if it recognized itself in it.

4) That is, here the cultural performance of the group is tested: its ability, skill and we dare to say, its genius, in inventing and transmitting signs and symbols. Mimes, dances, chants, poems, sculpture and painting: all expressions are called upon in turn and exalted. Thus it is assured that all living folklore can furnish works answering to the demands of art. That is, it can establish itself at the level of the structures of invention of the expressions it produces. What distinguishes forms of folklore from those of the fine arts is not quality but rhetoric or style. This difference has been, in essence, expressed by Jakobson,<sup>10</sup> namely, that in folklore expression is entirely governed by laws of oral tradition, as opposed to art forms, which are governed by written structures. This is a distinction whose importance we propose to examine at the level of symbolic invention.

The laws of oral tradition, only recently explored, are still largely unclear to us as a science. However, they are well enough known to us as specific forms of symbolic invention. Thus we may outline the structure that orders folkloric production, or symbolic invention, which has its origin in the festival. Oral interpretation is a specific mode of existence for a work of art. In each instance it demands an intense psychic investment, a materialization of signs that draw the public into experiences of active participation. Such works exist only because the public calls for them. The artistic forms for which folklore is the support thus possess in

<sup>10</sup> Roman Jakobson, *Questions de poétique*: "Le folklore, forme spécifique de création," Paris, Collection "Poétique," Seuil, 1973, pp. 59-72.

the highest degree the qualities of presence and participation. The structures of oral style are confirmed by the respiration, rhythm, dynamism and balance of the interpreting body of actors. All its structures express a rhythm-mimetic whose anthropological laws have been clarified by Marcel Jousse.<sup>11</sup> The rhetorical art and the poetics of collective participation organize the emotion and the comprehension even as far as the promiscuities of tribal life, beginning with those collective memorial gestures originally inscribed within a ceremonial and that perpetuate the rituals. No known science appears in them, but never will art as a medium of collective participation be more subtle or more knowing. As Claude Lévi-Strauss has pointed out, their perfection is truly musical. Great oral works that have come down to us as such are rare, but the first written transcriptions come near to them: the Veda, the Iliad, the Gospels, the fairy tales of Perrault. Such works call for a new kind of commentary on style, because their narrative art cannot be learned through the sciences of "text." These works are not, in fact, those of the written text; through their invention and composition they arise from the resources of oral delivery.

And who can say that the superiority of certain written works does not come from their not having broken the thread? Are they not structures of oral tradition that freely pass into the works of Shakespeare, Lope de Vega and Pirandello? Where does this kind of superiority over other productions of their time come from? From a textual structure open to the fluency of oral expression through a science of composition whose experience continues to elude us.

5) We have said that games are governed by the pleasure principle. The games of folklore are definitively influenced by Eros, that is, they are under the rule of institutions that organize the structure of kinship in the ethnic group. Games originate in the impulses of polymorphous pleasure of childhood. Ritualized eroticism that presides over the exchanges of women and the tribal laws of an alliance reigns over folklore. What the games of folklore give a form to and present, the subject their institutions and

<sup>11</sup> Marcel Jousse, *Anthropologie du geste*, Paris, Resma, 1969.

figures express, is never, functionally speaking, anything but a ritualized programming of the usages establishing the encounter of partners of marriageable age. Alternating processions of young men and girls, opposed figures in the choreography, singing groups facing each other, the hospitality offered to a neighboring group on a festive occasion, are so many collective programs conducive to favoring alliances and to renewing them from one season to another. The choreography of today's folk ballets testify to this, going all the way to B ejart's *Petrushka*, with no reference to folklore save that of eroticism.

Claude L evi-Strauss has brought to light the functions of biological and cultural survival that are basic structures in the social life of primitive groups, but these laws do not only assure the biological survival of the group: their effectiveness presupposes that the violences of Eros will be overcome. Gross buffooneries, faunesque dances and May festivals exorcise this state of undifferentiated sexual promiscuity that a very ancient tradition indicates already existed in archaic Greek festivals.<sup>12</sup>

6) There are probably no manifestations more impressive, more fascinating or more expressive of the human spirit than these unwritten works deprived of all objective support and having, down through the generations, only the frail memories of the living, the capability of interpreters and the ear of a naively artistic public.

The fragility of these works is quite apparent; we see them disappearing today along with the form of social life they helped to organize. That society existed and here are its last vestiges, broken and scattered fragments of the great primitive game.

Folkloric art and expression are now charged with ambiguity. Belonging to folklore, we have said, is any object worthy of figuring on a festive day. Now this object figures in our museums, in our sayings, in our tourist attractions, with no festival actually taking place. Today folklore is generally presented to us in the form of a festival without the content we acknowledged it to have. Exuberance, desire, the pleasure the player translates in the game, that the festival brings to the levels of the collective

<sup>12</sup> Louis Gernet, *Anthropologie de la Gr ce antique*, Collection "Textes   l'appui," Paris, Maspero, 1968, p. 39.

structures of a symbolic expression, are as though extinct. A spectacle severed from its spectators has replaced the celebrating community. An object of folklore has become an object of ridicule.

Are the revivals of folklore any better? Solidarities formed in factory work and in neighboring urban communities may be opportunities for the invention of a contemporary folklore. Here and there popular festivals maintain practices of free interpretation and oral transmission. The Happening, the Bread and Puppet Theater, folksongs, the *théâtre du geste* which uses no text, the timely renaissances of Western European folklore: all these expressly call for games and festivals and in that way participate in a folklore that would be common to all industrial cities on our planet. But such a folklore is marked by an ambiguity that subjects it to the transience of fashion: its inventions, authentically oral and expressive of a communal feeling of festivity, are soon invaded by the techniques of mass communication. The transmission of no longer oral signs is also no longer the expression of folklore. Such an intervention is thus a perversion that makes their source sterile, so that their invention is exhausted and must have access to confirmed structures of art, for the moment has come to ask ourselves how textual structures, models of those that governed non-verbal art, impose in their turn the expression of art that had been until then only intuited.

### III

Art is a knowing game. Unlike folklore, dominated by the myths of origin, it participates in the awareness of the group and thus leads to the limits of invention the expression it brings into play. Its "structure," determined by that of the text, is that of an open work. Its poetics, governed by Eros, integrates the unity of an amorous desire into the *jeux éclatés* of experience.

1) Art is a knowing game. It resembles a game in its sensory aspects, in excess and exuberance, and like a game it is deployed in the field of the imagination. Its activities, like those of a game, are of consciousness and symbolic representation. It proceeds from a seduction and seeks to seduce, but this excess, this activity

of the imagination, this seduction, are conducted under the sign of a concerted composition.

A player is astonished by the expansion of self in vitality and conscious participation in the imaginary for which the game is the occasion. He is astonished and he likes it. Mobilizing his attention, faculties and skill on this astonishment he consciously brings into play the conditions of experience for which his ingenuous participation has been the occasion. He concentrates his resources of expression on the signs and symbols of the experience of imaginary communication sketched out by play. All that the artist receives he appropriates from the tradition of games and festivals for his own use, not only to experience it in joyful exuberance as the player does but also to submit it to the effects of symbolic participation that have captured him and to those ways of production of signs that according to Jakobson determine the esthetic function at the very center of the exchanges of communication. It is through such efforts that the player is metamorphosed into the artist.

In this way, also, the artist has come to exercise consciously the means of expression in which the conventions of joy are inscribed. He thus comes to study in himself their composing elements, taking them to their limits of resonance and complexity according to the resources of his attention and his skill. An impassioned player, he pushes the imaginary programs of his game to the limits of symbolic invention from which this program proceeds: he concentrates all his science on it.

At the dawn of each day of his existence as a man, Paul Valéry played at surprising his ideas as they were born, but the 26,000 pages of his *Cahiers* make up a knowledgeable work, frightening for the attention spent on it, the confirmed tenacity to show intellectual life in its spontaneous and at the same time continuous movement. This singular work reveals how artistic intention modifies the play content in the gesture itself of the game. Each page of the *Cahiers* is born of a game, but there is not one that is not a literary text. The game is limited to the narcissistic utilization of the energies of which it is the support, while artistic activity takes up the elements of the game but subjects them to the process that governs the invention of signs. In art, play is governed by the demands of a text, that is, the demands of a mind attentive to

the means of consciously assumed production, interconnection and meaning of an expression. Art is essentially determined by the involvement of the mental faculties in continuous activities of deciphering and interpretation. It is an activity all the more infinite as it is not fixed on an object nor even on an imaginary program but on the experience of the interpretation of signs, with its unlimited potential, discoveries, unsuspected connections and continued invention.

Iouri Lotman wrote in an objective and not just metaphorical way that “artistic models are a combination of a scientific model and a ludic model,” organizing intellect and behavior simultaneously,<sup>13</sup> or as defined by Paul Valéry, a scientific model in the narrowest sense, “of an increase in organization, consciousness and connections,” but also an artistic model having a bearing on a specific subject. “Art rests on the unknowns of thought—on its marvelous coincidences, its rare clarity, its surprising and simple development.”<sup>14</sup>

2) Art is only games carrying to the limits of invention the expression they bring into play. Signs and symbols brought to the festival go back mythically to the beginning of time. As Claude Lévi-Strauss has pointed out, “They are an introduction to the sacred proximity of primordial energies, they restore its presence. Thus they deny a possible evolution and all historical consciousness.”<sup>15</sup> The festival is placed under the influence of myths of origin. Through the actualization of an interpretive game, whose fascinating imaginative effect is reinforced by oral transmission and the incarnation of signs, the festival is a ritual of participation, the embodiment of some collective symbol. The references of a historical order that it contains are drawn into the emotional eddies that are the object of the celebration. It is completely taken by a metaphorical delirium. The historical dimension, the signposts of duration, evolution and objective comparison are indistinct and shaky. The structures of actualization remain predominant, essentially those of contact and oral transmission.

<sup>13</sup> Iouri Lotman, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Valéry, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 836 and 926.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Pierre Bringuier, *Approche de Claude Lévi-Strauss*, O.R.T.F., May 20-21, 1977.



From this comes the fact that artistic achievement in folklore is a moment of the festival, a blessing that uplifts the celebration and ends in an experience of participation in which the public, invited en masse, completely consumes signs and symbols. Here signs are suspended to expressions of oral tradition only, the relay is essentially of a mnemotechnical order; the laws of invention that govern their operation are not carried to their limit until the moment of their actualization. Thus, when we are faced with the transient arts of games and festivals, we come to require a distinctive nature which is determined by this objective continuity of expression and style that we recognize as belonging to works of art.

In the center of acts of symbolic invention, this nature can only appear through the experience of a present lived as a moment of crisis, as a time set aside between a past and a future that myths of origin are no longer sufficient to give an account of, in short, through the experience of a time lived as a historical *dérive*, through this polysemantic time that writing precisely has as a function to call up and retain in the awakened consciousness.

A consciousness of history begins with the perception of a radical break with tradition, in the announcement of an unforeseeable future, in the critical perception of explanations of myth. In the order of symbolic invention, it is precisely the use of a text that first breaks through and keeps open this front of rupture, uncertainty and crisis, because the literary text inevitably multiplies occasions to compare the different sources, to choose among the varied and variable linguistic usages, to penetrate the strangeness of irreversible time. In short, it is no longer a question, as it is in folklore, of recreating some original moment, of resurrecting some traditional myth in the actualization of an oral presentation with no other control than the present memory of the social group but assuming, through putting into perspective the facts of evolution, the invention of a hazardous future. It is a question of agreeing to give a date to the tales through which the collective conscience learns that it is drifting with no hope of return, thrown into a history that is no longer that of heroes and gods but that of vulnerable and mortal men.

3) In the form of an objectively defined corpus the text, first,

finds an awareness of history, of a moment of the language, and introduces a critical elaboration of the myth. The epic poet in the guise of a writer no longer creates following tradition but faced with it. The text furnishes him with a field of comparison and choice that myths of origin and traditional interpretation no longer govern. We have a famous example. A decree of Athens established the tragic theater and officially organized the spectator games that up until then had been confided to the traditions, rituals and customs of festival. However, the institution of the theater defined the roles, organized a jury, prizes, the creative functions; it legitimized and gave dignity to a text. Authors withdrew from the community and affirmed their skill, putting their creations into writing. The theater, game and festival, that previously had no text, from then on produced them. However, the establishment of a written text determined a linguistic totality reciprocal to the history of the language, to the mythological memory of the people, to its questioning of the future. The poet-dramatist was no longer an interpreter of tradition but a demiurge who mixed, within the growing perception of his limits, the linguistic and mythical material transmitted. The writer, an artisan of expression and as such distinguished from the other activities of the city, became aware of the language through texts.

The process appeared in fifth-century Athens, was crystallized in its most evolved, academic and encyclopedic forms when Alexandrine culture appeared, was reborn in those moments so characteristic of textual mastery in Augustan Rome, in the Age of Enlightenment, and in a twentieth century dominated intellectually by the concepts and structures of a general theory of expressions.

These are moments that are not by chance pivotal ones in historical and critical consciousness, since they each time contributed to its constitution—or to its reconstitution.

The feat of the text is quite specifically to have instituted the historical and critical awareness of the linguistic patrimony of an ethnic group. Writing brings symbolic invention to the level of conscious activity, where it will remain thereafter.

We will notice, however, that other artistic expressions follow the lead of literature in this critical awareness, only reproducing it as “secondary models,” as Iouri Lotman notes. The reason for

this, he continues, is that "the consciousness of man is a linguistic consciousness".<sup>16</sup>

We will add that the performance of non-verbal arts holds only second place in a critical awareness. The immediacy of gestures in the painter, the sculptor or the musician may be exempt from an intellectual and critical awareness. The mythological reference does not necessarily reduce non-verbal arts to stereotypes. Games and interpretations, which are bound to this reference, assure the incarnation of the generative structures of the expression concerned, something that neither the commentary of the historian nor that of the esthete can do. Moreover, non-verbal art participates in history at the level of profound structures that are also collective structures of expression, through which is explained the permanence of a style through succeeding generations as well as this singular life of forms described by Henri Focillon. On the contrary, the history of art and esthetics is only available through the medium of the text. Historical and critical awareness are also gained by means of literary comment. The historical culture among artists is especially widespread in academic periods and appears today, with regard to the actual exercise of art, as only a rhetoric of distantiation.

The murals of Lascaux, which are the remains of some initiation rite, are outside historical consciousness. Much more, the traced signs were not intended to last, as is proved by the superimposing of paintings of different epochs. They nonetheless vest the wall with a decisive expression for the future of man. Figures painted in the dark solely by the power of a voluntary hallucination, the frescos of Lascaux put us in the presence of the constitutive power of pictorial expression, of the expression of painting at the level of its structure of invention in a relationship that resounds in human history.

Thus we will recognize a work arising from the complex games of art as soon as the expression that takes possession of it is established at the level of the invention of the expression concerned, that is, a level of anthropological invention. What is observed in so-called primitive works that we later discover to

<sup>16</sup> Iouri Lotman, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>17</sup> André Leroi-Gourhan, *Préhistoire de l'art*, Paris, Mazenod, 1965.

be also works of art, because we experience them according to the decisive definition of Iouri Lotman as so many “particular mechanisms, generators of ever new expressions.”<sup>18</sup>

The manifestations of the festival take up the past without canceling it; they respond only to the repetition of mythical origins. Let them bring inventions, and the past and the origin take on a meaning for the future that grips and also subjugates them. The means of expression in the art of primitive societies is that of the festival: it comes from the oral style but horizons arise from them that are no longer those of the tribe.

It is this metamorphosis that draws Malraux’ attention to primitive works. Specialists have reproached him for his non-chalance with regard to the demands of an objective and critical analysis of the archaeological past. A description of the past did not interest him: what interested him in the works of the past was how they bear on our present and what sort of future they portend. The critical awareness of the contemporary moment motivated and located the commentary of Malraux; he explored the works of the past not as works of the past but as works having bearing on the future of man, as works as inventors of expression. It is this interrogation in terms of destiny and expression still to be deciphered that appears in a work of art: “The meaning assumed by the presence of an eternal response to the question posed to man concerning his part in eternity—when it appears in the first civilization aware of its ignorance of the meaning of man.”<sup>19</sup>

4) On the contrary, the writer, completely involved in the production of a text, must not so much overthrow or go beyond the structures of tradition and myth, or even academic codes, as he must take on the crisis brought about by the comparison of texts alone.

Caught up in the network of the intertext, writing restores tradition and myth, but in a new light, filtered through a consciousness that judges and chooses. Language, until then transmitted orally, ceases to be the exclusive domain of the myth;

<sup>18</sup> Iouri Lotman, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> André Malraux, *Le Surnaturel*, Paris, Gallimard, 1977.

a production by means of texts is followed that can only develop through the control of the language at the level of its structures of invention, which fuse with the activity of the awakened consciousness. It is a structure which for the first time requires and needs, with regard to play and festival, the conscious exercise of the procedures governing works of art. Thus unlike non-verbal art, writing has no access to the exercise of art except through a progressive historical and critical awareness. Or at least this production brings it about.

However, in recognizing such a necessary critical destiny for a textual work do we not at the same time dedicate it to a complete dissemination, to a definitive breaking up that destroys it?

In fact, it would vanish if it were not for the energies mobilized for its benefit that we have pointed out in sublimation. Eros the player extends to signs and symbols his work of seduction, invention and unification of the pulsive energies. Symbolic play discovers at the sources of a poem its amorous and generative essence, a communion extending to the ultimate differences.

Deprivation structures desire at the level of the unconscious—a desire that conjures up its object as hallucination. But the fantasies of play are not pure hallucinations: they are ruses, skillful seductions, outlined inventions of more and more complex and rich forms. They are a “confrontation with the world and a possible totality open to our desire.”<sup>20</sup>

Earlier we spoke of the interpreter of folklore risking himself in the venture of interpretation. What his memory furnished him entered into a participation led by a game taking place in the present.

The use of a text installs, on the contrary, a permanent distanciation. Myths lose their enchantment, hallucinatory behavior is exposed as delusion. Thus symbolic activity must begin farther back, beginning with the movement that founds it and of which it is the issue, one that takes up the word and the desire to communicate, to exchange the signs we use to interpret the world and explain ourselves to each other.

Thus by means of a text are maintained the virtues of spontaneity, exuberance and activity governed by the pleasure principle,

<sup>20</sup> Mikel Dufrenne, *op. cit.*

as in children's games. Governed by the pleasure principle? No. Governed by something more impatient and more complex, by a power testing the reality principle itself: by an Eros who is no longer a child but an adult, aware of reality and who, alive and naked, would completely permeate it.

A poetic governed by Eros: industrial civilization adds only one more dimension to artistic endeavor that makes it still more hazardous. It is a question of integrating the meanings brought by modern science and technology; it is a matter of restoring an impossible totality, beginning with a fragmented society and expression. The technical product is an intermediary between the world and the acting subject. The technician, the scholar and the consumer stop at the intermediary functions, "at the mastery and possession of nature." However, the artist pursues ends of sensitivity, liberation and communion. How can he achieve them?

First, by a game. He must subvert a system subjected to mass production. This can only happen through a poetics that arranges signs for an initiatory reading outside mechanized means: "*compte totale en formation*," to use Mallarmé's words.<sup>21</sup> An open work, a text, a rhetoric of distantiation, a theater of cruelty. The poems of Hölderlin flash through our era with an inaugural sign, because they bring the rhythmic play and luminous myths of the Greek archipelago, festival itself, to the black gapings of madness. Today the work of art in which Eros manifests himself in deprivation, nostalgia, unfounded claims, fractures realized at the same time as they are refused, oppositions, contrasts, alternations, imbalances, interconnections, going to the limits that present the textual work as thought ceaselessly compromised with the audacity of living. In short, art as a totality of conscience and risk.

<sup>21</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, "Jamais un coup de dés n'abolira le hasard," Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris.