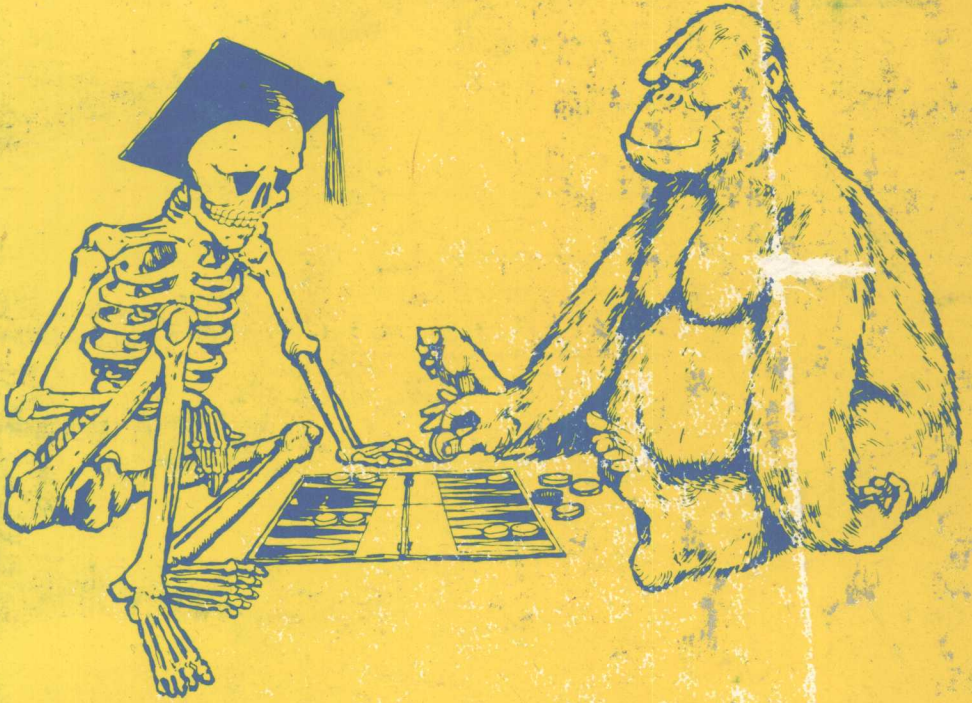# PLAY

ANTHROPOLOGICAL
PERSPECTIVES

edited by Michael A. Salter

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1977 PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
ASSOCIATION FOR THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF PLAY

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FRONT COVER

The drawing on the front cover is by David Frederick. We would like to thank Mr. Frederick and the Miami University Audio-Visual Department for granting us the privilege of reproducing it.

PREFACE

The majority of the papers in this volume were originally prepared for the Third Annual Meeting of The Association for the Anthropological Study of Play, held in San Diego, California, during April, 1977. At this time TAASP met in conjunction with the American Ethnological Society, the Society for California Archaeology, the Society for Applied Anthropology, and the Southwestern Anthropological Association. The papers contained herein do not represent all those delivered by TAASP members at this gathering. Some were presented as part of the AES program while others were simply not available in time for publication. Abbreviated versions of the articles by Saegert and Hart, and by Riner, appeared in Volume 3 of the TAASP **Newsletter** and were solicited for this manuscript.

During the past decade or so, concern has been voiced over a number of factors associated with the study of play — to wit: the apparent inability to define such terms as "play", "games" and "sport" so that they can be operationally employed in a cross-cultural context; failure to clearly establish the parameters of the total field under investigation; and so forth and so on. While it is true that one needs the other — particularly if the criticisms are constructive in nature and the creators pay them heed. By-and-large the questions raised relative to the study of play have been legitimate and have served to provide direction to the field. It would be naive to suggest that this volume (or any other single volume for that matter) will serve to allay all the concerns expressed. To the contrary, its contents may, and hopefully will, lead to the formulation of further questions. On the other hand, individual contributions, such as Bateson's and group thrusts, such as the chapter on work and play, do provide fresh insights and partial answers to long-standing questions. We may never completely resolve some issues, but that, perhaps, is the nature of knowledge!

The strengths of this volume must be attributed to the individual authors, and to John W. Loy and Phillips Stevens, Jr. who spent countless hours reviewing manuscripts and to whom heartfelt thanks are extended. Weaknesses in the volume are mine.

Windsor, Ontario
December, 1977.   M.A.S.

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Table of Contents

6

CHAPTER I

Theoretical Contributions to the Study of Play

PLAY AND PARADIGM[1]

Gregory Bateson, University of California, Santa Cruz

I have had extraordinary luck at two moments in my life which are, in a sense, historic behind my finally arriving here at this podium. One was a longish time ago in New Guinea—about 1932 — when I saw a **Naven** ceremony for the first time. This is a transvestite ceremony in which a mother's brother celebrates an achievement of a sister's child and, so to speak, shames himself, though I didn't know this. All I knew was, he wore female costume, "drag," to do this; and I knew about the econo-' mic exchanges that accompanied it. I had good native accounts of what happens, from 1929. But it wasn't until the Second Expedition, some time later, that I actually saw this thing happen, saw it done, and I discovered that it was **high comedy.** My notes had not recorded that simple fact. From the moment I knew it was high comedy, I began to be able to understand it, and this led into a very elaborate analysis which spread its roots through the whole culture. It was luck—and one of the things that was luck was the delay; that I was able to receive the fact, "It's funny," separately from the filling of my notebooks with the description of it, so that the fact of the funnyness stood out and became the thing to analyze —the new piece. That was the first piece of luck.

The next piece of luck, in a curious way, was rather similar. I was

7

working with Ruesch[2] in the Langley-Porter Clinic, and we began a conversation leading to the question of whether animals who exchange various sorts of signals (we'd all read Konrad Lorenz' **King Solomon's Ring** [1964] at that time) know that their signals **are** signals. For example, do the jackdaws, those "colonial crows" that lived in the top of Lorenz' house, do they **know** that the sounds which they exchange are in fact signals? A crow will go "kee-aw" (or something that sounds like "kee-aw"—ethologists, by the way, know absolutely no phonetics) and fly in the direction of home, and then other crows will say the same thing, and they too will fly in the direction of home, and evidently this utterance is somehow related to, "I'm going to fly home, you're going to fly home" (but who knows what the pronouns are). Do they know that this is a signal, or is it a sort of automatic thing, like blushing, for example? (Most of us do not recognize that we are signalling when we blush. We just wish we weren't blushing, if we know we are—and often we don't know we are.)

So, Weldon Keyes and I went down to the Fleishhacker Zoo[3] to look for the answer to this question, and we knew what we were looking for. You can't obviously, get inside an animal and know whether it "knows" something, but you **can** ask, "Has it the use of the information that its **signals are signals**?" If it has not the use of that information, for example, it could not deceive. Lying is a highly sophisticated operation, dependent on knowing that your signals are signals. It could not correct its messages, it could not utter a message which says, "I am going to utter a message." It might very easily not correct its signals for distance. A dog barks; does it bark louder to a dog that's far away? The answer is: on the whole, it doesn't; a dog barks louder to a dog that's close. Anyway, this was the question that we posed: can we find meta-communication among animals at the zoo, communication **about** communication, corrective messages, announcements of messages, and such things. You see, we **already** were asking about logical-type levels: "something" and "something and something **about** something."

When we got to the zoo we found something which everbody already knew—after all, we can't claim to have "discovered" it—namely, that animals play. The moment we saw **play** in the context we were in, in which we were asking ourselves about levels, about messages **about** messages (and I had, in the back of my mind, the Russellian[4] stuff on paradoxes and the trouble you get into with messages about messages and classes of classes, and such things), of course! Snap! Obviously, animals play — My God! — that means they can classify the components of their messages. It's not just us making classifications, it's **them** making classifications. We're in step with the native structure, not just

8

imposing our nonsense upon it.

I then wrote to the Rockefeller Foundation and said, "Look, we are going to have a research project, and we want a lot of money." I knew at that stage that this was big, it was "hot," but I didn't know where we were going to go. Chester Barnard, who was then the head of the Rockefeller Foundation, said, "Come by when you're next in town." I was in town within three days. He said, "I don't understand, Mr. Bateson, what you're going to do, or what you're going to find. How much money do you want?" Incidentally, I knew, I had inside knowledge, that he had a copy of **Naven** (Bateson: 1958) at his bedside, so I though he would be a good person to go to. But, stupidly, I didn't ask for enough, I didn't ask for enough for long enough.

But we then did a study of otters playing. We did a piece of psychotherapy with them: we re-introduced play to otters in the zoo who had given up playing; we got them to playing again. We have the film[5] —we have actually the moment at which the psychotherapeutic change occurred. As far as I know it's the first piece of psychotherapy that was actually filmed at the moment when the "turnover" occurred. That was luck, and, you see, the nature of the luck is that the piece of insight comes at the moment when you happen to be loaded for that particular sort of bear.

Now let me jump straight forward; leave the history and jump into theory. The resilient point which, as I said, touched this off is, of course, the point that class is not a member of itself, and a class of classes is not one of the classes which are its members. And if you make a model out of this you won't get into the paradox of Epimenides,[6] the liar, the Cretan who said, "I always lie." Can the message, "I always lie," be a true one? If so, then it **isn't** true, because he made a true statement. If true, then untrue. If untrue, then true. The "then" connecting those, as we've now of course learned, first from Wiener[7] and now, repetitively, from George Spencer Brown,[8] has to be a **temporal** "then."

Now, what we began to discover is that the word "play" is a classifying term within the life of the creatures—or the natives, or whomever you're going to talk about; ourselves. If that is so, then of course it is quite different from the acts which constitute it; or if it is **not** different, if the message, "This is play," is itself a playful message, then the roof blows off and you don't know where you are, and somebody is either going to laugh, or be hurt.

You will create the Paradox of Epimenides when the message, "This is play," becomes itself playful.[9] This is the hazing common in initiations, when initiators may conceal the fact that the message, "This is play," is playful, and may make it into a pretense of discipline.

And now we have a disciplinary point, a point of **method**, not just for the study of play; but if you're going to study play, or any other meaningful behavior, you've got to carry in the forefront of your mind what sort of logical-type this class is. What is the level of classification, what does it enclose, what are the messages that label it, if any, and so on. I will try to make this clear by an example from another field.

You cannot, in general, teach a rat **not to explore** by giving him electric shocks when he puts his nose into boxes. The word "exploration" is not a word for any particular action; but people usually talk as though it were. But the class is not one of its members. So, if you put electric shocks in boxes, the rat will learn not to go into those particular boxes. He learns at that logical level, but he does not learn at the next logical level up, which would be "not to be an explorer." Obviously not, because he **is** an explorer, in order to find out which boxes are safe. And when he gets the shocks he has found which boxes are safe, and which are not safe. His exploration has been successful, so why should exploration be extinguished by a shock in a box? He will, if anything, be more careful to look in **every** box to see which has a shock.

Similarly, if you try to teach your dog who has once become a "thief" not to steal by smacking him down when he takes meat off the table, you'll get a dog who takes meat off the table more carefully. And for 2000 years or more, I don't know how long, we have assumed that "crime" is of the same logical-type as the criminal act, the act which we call "a crime." We feel surprised and hurt when we punish criminals, and they become more successful criminals; or change their field of activity. I mean, that those we punish for picking pockets may shift to putting their hands into other people's safes instead of pockets. They might learn, you see, not to pick pockets, which is an **action.** They will not learn not to be criminals by being punished for being pick-pockets. The problem of making criminals non-criminals is a much more complicated business, and I would refer you to the recent study, **Delancey Street,** by Charles Hampden-Turner (1976). The description of the brainwashing ex-convicts do to each other, to make each other not criminal, is pretty grim. It's not at all the same as slapping the wrist for the **action.**

In learning theory you must distinguish the **act** which is learned, the **learning** of that act, the **context** of that learning and the learning of that context. And, as for **play,** the whole notion of play and its complexities is one of the "hot spots" for looking into this set of problems. And I suggest to you that this set of problems is **absolutely central** for any scientific discussion of human behavior, or what they call "psychology." That much is established, I hope, after an awful lot of fooling around with this and that, and bits of New Guinea, and bits of animal

behavior, and so on, which lies behind what I've just told you. The next thing is, since this is The Association for the Anthropological Study of Play, not to go roaming off sideways too quickly, but to take a good look look at this particular **levels** problem as it is associated with the word "play."

Let me set up a parallel. Let me tell you what scientists do. (Even in proper scientific labs they don't tell students what "science" is about, and of course still less do they tell anthropologists, and even less do they tell psychologists.) First they give a sort of general structural state-ment of some kind of something, be it play, be it gyroscopes, be it left-handedness, or what have you; and then they say, "Well, now, are there other sorts of phenomena in which similar sets of formal relations obtain?" We build what is called a "tautology" for the set, and we abstract that tautology and look for other phenomena to fit. That's called "abduction." It is abduction that give the whole of science its scope and body. It shifts science from being a series of mongoose-nosed insights and details, and creates a "scopish" picture, a broad scientific philosophy. The philosophy of science is that you **can** abduct, and the philosophy which is generated by science is a network of themes of wide scope.

In Iatmul, in New Guinea, there is a very sharp distinction between **wainga,** which is commercial buying, and **awa'ut** which is, literally tranlated, "in the direction of 'yes, yes'." That is true "giving," the sort of giving which is in the direction of reciprocity and not commercial relations. The term for reciprocity is **awa-awa,** "'yes, yes;" **awa'ut**, "in the direction of **awa,**" giving, as opposed to **wainga,** which is "trade." Here again, we've got a level, where the **content** of the action, from me to whomever, or from me, happening to be a mother's brother, to a sister's son, gets to **awa'ut**, because he will be compelled to give back valuables. The reciprocities of Iatmul are, in general, not symmetrical; they are, for example, valuables in one direction, food in another. That is, they **look** very much like trade, like **wainga,** in which valuables are given in exchange when buying sago in the market, or wherever. But the whole frame, as classified by the Iatmul, is totally different. And one of the things they will complain about is that a young man is behaving as though he **bought** his wife. Of course, he gave valuables for her, but these valuables were **awa, awa'ut**, in the direction of "yes, yes," and not in the direction of **wainga.**

Again, you see, we have the capacity, as human beings, to classify up into an abstract level. And this is what I'm talking about. That capacity gets to be more and more complex, and the analysis of it gets to be richer and richer, as you begin to think about it. When we were working

with schizophrenics, what we found was that they were torn by what we call "double binds;" and a double bind is, in essence, a tangle of meta-labels. Suppose you think of the Iatmul **wainga** versus **awa'ut** discussion, and ask, what would happen to a man who had intended his act as reciprocity, when he finds that it is being classified by other people as a commercial trade act? This is where feelings get hurt, you see, because these levels of classification of behavior are where mammals really live. The fellow is put into a double bind by the deliberate or accidental criss-cross misunderstanding of the sort of behavior he's engaged in. Similarly, imagine that you intended your act to be play, but somebody took it seriously. Or, you intended it to be serious, and somebody took it for play. This can be painful. I am continually hurt because I make jokes when I talk, and people therefore think I don't mean what I said. **My** rule is, "never an untrue word spoken in jest." I don't know why people think that jokes really are not serious; or, indeed, why they would think that **play** is not serious. It's a funny sort of vulgarism we get into in this culture.

As you get into the more complex arrangements, where you can get cross-cuttings of these classes, **exploration** is taken to be **invasion,** and so on. Play is taken to be serious; the serious is taken to be play; the **wainga,** the commercial, is taken to be reciprocal; the reciprocal is taken to be the commercial, and so on. When you get up to those levels, you'll begin to discover that the way **out** of those tangles is largely dependent on a crow's-eye view. But it cannot be exactly an **intellectual** crow's-eye view. The intellect can talk about it, can dissect it, but you've got to get **up** there, not only with your intellect, but also with your diaphragm, or—perhaps it's your right hemisphere, or your heart—wherever you think, culturally, you carry your feelings. The analysis to deal with these hurts must itself be heartfelt.

Let's look, for a moment, at the sort of tangle I'm talking about, because "play" is a subset of this larger class of tangles. People will double-bind each other in "play." It's usually a rather cruel thing to do, I think; but you'll find it done by initiators to novices, in which the novice is essentially being "hazed," until he gets straight about the **logical-typing** of the hazing that he's suffering—until he can **transcend** his first view of that cruelty. When this happens the relationship between initiator and candidate undergoes a total change.

I'm trying to lead you to both feel and think about this matter of paradigms, so that when you go to places—as anthropologists should go to "places"—you may think and feel about such things **in the structure in which they occur in the places that you go to,** which will, no doubt, be different from ours. When you get to Bali, the contrast between **Yin** and

Yang won't be on quite the same diameter of the circle that it is among the Chinese. And when you get to the Chinese, **Yin** and **Yang** are not on quite the same diameter as they would be among Americans, or among the English.

Let me take the problem of addiction. The question is: you have an alcoholic or, indeed, a criminal, or, indeed, you and me; and you want him or her to make a deep change. You want that individual to make a deep change in the classification, the **paradigm,** of life. I use the word "paradigm" because I really am talking about the same thing that Kuhn is talking about in **The Structure of Scientific Revolutions** (1962); the "jump" from a learning of this order to a learning of that order; from a learning of content—not to put you nose into boxes—to a learning of how to be or not to be an explorer. And that is a very, **very** difficult jump to make, as looked at from before the jump. Looking back after the jump, you can't see what the difficulty was; but before it, you're stuck. A great part of every great religion is concerned with this particular business of being "stuck." And a great part of psychiatry is concerned with it too.

If you are going to understand what goes on on the Sepik River of New Guinea, or in Bali, or in San Diego, you have to be aware that these "stucknesses" are a part of the basic structure of the life of all people.

Take the simple case of a man who is stuck in alcoholism. The common-sense course from him is (let's leave out the ego problems and all that) to have another drink. He will feel uncomfortable if he doesn't; he's already beginning to feel uncomfortable and, if he does, he will, at least for a while, feel comfortable. He may become addicted not just to the comfort which **a** drink would give him, but addicted to **a progressive change in a given direction**; a next logical type of addiction. There are many alcoholics who are happy only when there is a positive gradient of alcohol in their bloodstreams. Such people become exceedingly skillful; they can keep that positive gradient going for a week, perhaps for ten days, slowly mounting. And that slow change is to them a stationari-ness, a static sort of bliss. But you cannot maintain that constancy, that constant positive first derivative, beyond a certain point, because at that certain point you land in the gutter.

How is the alcoholic going to get out of the logical-typing which says, "This is fine, the message is fine, and I am, **I am** the sort of person that enjoys that sort of message, and I'm going to have it. My personal culture involves that message." He can not get out, you see, by some-body saying "Don't," by somebody trying to cut him off from his alcohol, by somebody putting him in a tank of the local police station, or, indeed, by putting him in a local mental hospital, or by stuffing him

full of various drugs, etc., etc. **He's got to get out by a change that will crack the whole paradigm.** And that which would crack the paradigm has got to be a **new** structure, a **totally** new structure.

Perhaps the first time he lands in the gutter at three o'clock in the morning will be a sufficient shock to be what Alcoholics Anonymous call "hitting bottom." That's a moment when it's worthwhile to try to help him. Between binges, you can't do much. But the **third** time he's woken up in the gutter at three o'clock in the morning, that won't work. You're going to have to wait until he takes the next step of bottom-hitting, because the bottom is changing.[10]

But in contrast to the alcoholic, there are people who deliberately put themselves into pain of this kind and "discipline themselves." They even "have fun." It is their "hobby," and the word "hobby" is somehow related to the word "play;" I don't quite know how. These people, for example, are people who climb mountains. Consider a man half-way up the mountain, his legs hurting, his breath coming short, his boots beginning to feel as if they had slipped or pinched his feet, and all that. His body is beginning to scream. The common-sense thing for him to do, we would say, is to sit down, open his rucksack, eat his lunch, and go home. But there are people who willingly go out for weeks—they even go to Mount Everest—to perform the **extraordinary** feat of a sort of play. "Cold turkey," they resist the common-sense temptation to eat lunch and go back home. These people go **on** climbing the mountain. Why do they do that? Why do people in Zen meditation rooms set through a **seshin,** a six-day retreat, with their legs getting worse and worse, and their minds getting more and more addled, and the guru becoming a more and more terrible and horrible figure, a figure of utter fear and contempt until...well, they go on, and perhaps in the last two days suddenly the whole thing switches over and looks different. A paradigmatic change, of a very deep order, has occurred.[11]

They say play has no purpose, but really its purposes are of a paradigmatic order. Consider Shiva, the **Nataraj** figure, the Dancing Shiva. This is a paradigm, imposed upon the entire world of experience; in which it is assumed that everything that happens, ranging from earthquakes to gossip, to murder, to joy, to love, to laughter, and all the rest, is an incredible ziz-zag of what might seem otherwise to be unclassifiable and disordered experience, but is, in fact, all framed within the Shivaite concept as **The Dance.** Dance is perhaps not quite the same thing as play; it has an aesthetic angle that play doesn't have, but it is, at any rate, an extension of what I used to call the "play frame," wider and wider, until it encloses the whole of existence.

In the present epoch the grown-ups and people in my generation wish

we could experience a paradigmatic change, and we are rather envious of the youth engaging in all sorts of lunacy to try and achieve a wisdom for themselves. They do this and they do that in their communes, none of it very sane, **unless** you say, "But the hunt for paradigmatic change is the **only** sanity."

We play, and we try to make the jump. What I'm trying to do is to encourage you to make the jump.

NOTES

[1]**The Keynote Address,** Third Annual Meeting of The Association for the Anthropological Study of Play, San Diego, California, April 8, 1977. Transcribed, edited and annotated by Phillips Stevens, Jr. This paper was revised, with Mr. Bateson's assistance, from an earlier draft which appeared in the TAASP *Newsletter* (1977). With the exception of n. 11, the following notes are my own, added for the reader who may be unfamiliar with Bateson's work. I am grateful to Wendy Seubert and Irene Suhr for their assistance in transcribing the working draft.

[2]Jurgen Ruesch, with whom Bateson wrote "Structure and Process in Social Relations" (1949), and the seminal *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry* (1951).

[3]In San Francisco.

[4]Referring to Bertrand Russell (d. 1970), known principally as an eminent and pioneering mathematician and philosopher (see his *Principia Mathematica* [1910-13]) and Nobel Laureate, but also interested in paradoxes and logical-type levels. His "barber paradox" (the village barber said that he shaved everyone who did not shave himself, which is a trustworthy statement until it is asked, "Who shaves the barber?") is well known in logic, and this led to what is known as the "Russell Paradox," which has to do with statements about classes which are members of themselves and classes which are not members of themselves. Russell was an early mentor of Norbert Wiener (see n. 7).

[5]*The Nature of Play — Part 1: River Otters.* 16 mm., one reel, 1952.

[6]Cretan prophet and seer of the 6th century B.C., credited with having made the statement, "Cretans always lie," which could not be a true statement, since he himself was a Cretan.

[7]Norbert Wiener (d. 1964), the so-called "father of cybernetics," mathematician and logician (see his *Cybernetics: Or, Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* [1948]).

[8]Mathematician and logician (see his *Probability and Scientific Inference* [1957]; and *Laws of Form* [1969]).

[9]For elaboration, see Bateson (1956 and 1972a).

[10]For elaboration, see Bateson (1972b).

[11]For a vivid account of paradigmatic change in Zen *seshin,* see Dass (1977).

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16