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Thinking Play Seriously—Lone Ranger in Legoland—
Professional Recreation—Listen to your music, Pa
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Fr. cover by Darcey DeWinter
Back cover by Amy Harper
Washboard Wizard

Dan Hawkins

The perfect game is... pinball. Put aside stewardly objections to its cost and moral arguments against its chanciness just long enough to see its faultlessness as an amusement. The gleaming ball rockets up out of its channel onto the board, caroms at random angles and varying speeds off the bumpers and targets, shoots into the scoring lanes, bounds away from a pair of deftly worked flippers, triggers lights and bells, racks up the points. Only sleep at the buttons or the defenses of the machine cause you to lose it. The experienced player spontaneously applies a remarkable variety of techniques in his effort to exceed the required number of points, but even the uninitiated stands fair to win through "specials," extra balls, or, that unparalleled device, the "match." And everyone is paid off in the coin of the realm: another game.

Add to these delights these facts: 1) Competing players, according to the unwritten code, play only against the machine; 2) Anybody trying to spoil the fun by manipulating the machine gets his desserts—the machine tilts; 3) Pinball players, real ones, eschew the epithet "Wizard", don't claim to be "better lovers," and never spit tobacco on the glass. They just play the game. Fast and fair. Nobody gets hurt.

What I want to point out about the Perfect Game, however, is not that it is pinball, but that it has certain innate qualities. It is played within certain bounds by definite rules, and yet all the action is natural and extemporaneous. Technique and finesse gallantly court Dame Chance. Bullies are ejected, and competitors aren't rivals. Each man is justly rewarded. Winning and losing are afterthoughts.

Above all, The Game is for the player. Where it is not, as in most televised professional sports, professional spectators like Howard Cosell, Tom Brookshier, and even Keith Jackson are forced to mouth idiotic descriptions of what nearly everyone can see for himself. (Imagine blacking out the picture in order to hear a sportscaster's words better!) To play the game takes total concentration, but it gives refreshment in the same degree.

And most of us, I think, seek that kind of mental, emotional, bodily refreshment to be gotten from competing in games or sports. We seek it consciously, not as a retreat from the rigors of academic discipline—we could, after all, just take naps—but as their vital counterpart. Unbridled play of our creative impulses, not rest, is what we need most from such activity; a good game of handball is far from restful.

Consider how large a part of childhood is playtime. In retrospect, it seems that much of that play was preparation for the work of being men and women. We tested, through play, the possibilities of being fathers, mothers, nurses, doctors, soldiers, shopowners—in short, good workers. The most sophisticated child's play, from an adult's standpoint, is that which approaches real life most closely. When a child decides to make oatmeal for its dolls, but refuses to allow the doll to be placed in the saucepan, that child has developed a good sense of the role it wishes to play.

The experience of freedom within form (the child could choose to feed its "children" eggs or hot dogs which children seem to capture so effortlessly—before the form can be questioned—persists in its effect on adult life. The most obvious case in point is that of the artist, who attempts to impose conscious, wilful control over his medium, but only where it lends itself to such control. A poet, for example, does not try to write a sonnet without verbs, nor does a painter hope to include a detailed portrait within his abstract. They both play a game, but they follow the rules.

It is not futile, I think, to expect that creative choices can be made in every area and activity of life, and that their consequences can mesh with disciplined labor. Albert Einstein, whose centenary passed this month, provides a paradigm for play-within-work with his achievement of the theory of relativity through "thought experiments."

Einstein began to develop them as he re-played well-known geometry proofs in his idle moments—for fun. He was later capable of imagining what would happen to a man rocketing away from earth at the speed of
light while his twin remained behind, which led him to his famous conclusions about the contraction of time at that velocity. It is significant (Erikson cites in Toys and Reasons) that two key words in Einstein’s writings are Bild (image) and Spiel (play).

Even the most “serious” or drudging tasks can be approached playfully. The college president can break up the graduates by inserting a good story into his commencement charge, and the college student can separate his washload with a mind to shooting baskets. The important thing is that a ritual is performed or a duty discharged with joy; solemn it may be, but it is always joy.

As Christians, we can accept and appreciate the permeation of play into everything we do in a greater sense. For do we not come to God through Jesus as little children, seeking to know him and his wisdom? And to enjoy him forever? The answer (Calvin Seerveld points out) is in Proverbs 8:22-31. Wisdom speaks:

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of old.
Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth;
when there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth;
Before he had made the earth with its fields,
or the first of the dust of the world.
When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the foundations of the deep,
when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a little child;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world.
and delighting in the sons of men.

This is wisdom, this is the creation; the children of God are wise to re-create within it and within her ways.

Editor’s Note: This is (no fault of mine), I think, the first 48-page Dialogue ever. I’d like to accept the responsibility but not the blame. It more appropriately belongs to Dialogue’s associate and contributing editors, and to a few whose only weakness was a few spare hours, namely: Bob Boomsma, Cathy Bouwsma, Paul De Jong, Wayne De Vos, Bill Franson, and Emily Talen. Please excuse us all while we go catch up on our homework.
Childhood

i was never alone
just by myself
sitting in the itchy grass that hid me
and building twig bridges for ants
picking dandelions
running barefoot everywhere
anywhere i could and making
bird nests out of dried grass
and filling them with treasures
water smooth glass
a robin's egg
and my tooth

Dibby Dykhuizen

When

When I was seven
I had a boyfriend.
His name was Phillip
and he liked birds.
So did I.
He liked lizards and
gerbils and snakes, too.
I didn't
Until I met Phillip.
Phillip invited me
to a party
and I gave him
a bird nest.

Phillip
wasn't supposed to run.
He had asthma.
But he did—
After gerbils
And birds
And me.

Adriane Shuant
"When I am playing, I really don't think much about anything but the game," says Kristin, of Mr. Vriend's fourth grade at West Side Christian School here in the city. We think she has the right attitude.

We talked with Kristin and some of her classmates, who are currently holding sessions in the demonstration classroom on Calvin campus, to discover more about their attitudes toward playing games and such. Here are the results:

**Why do you like the games**

*Interviews with Kids*

---

reported by Dan Hawkins

Davy Bouwkamp once hit three consecutive home runs in a Little League game. When he grows up, he wants to be a baseball player.

**What sports do you like to play?**  
I like baseball, basketball, and kickball.

**Why do you pick them?**  
Because you run, kick, hit, throw, and catch.

**What else do you like to play?**  
I like Monopoly and Sorry, for games. And someday I want to play the drum.

**How come?**  
Because it's loud and you hit it with a stick.

**Let's get back to sports. Three home runs in one game is pretty good. Do you think you're a good player?**  
I guess so.

**What's your favorite baseball team?**  
The Tigers.

**Who do you want to play for when you grow up?**  
(smiles) The Tigers.
Beth Vredeveld owns "a regular doll that has blond hair mixed with dark." She calls it Mandy.

**Who do you like to play with?**
Well, I really don't know but I'll guess Joan.

**Why?**
Because I like her.

**Is there more than one person?**
No.

**Do you like to play sports?**
I like playing kickball and catching football, but not if there's bad weather.

**What do you like to play when you're inside?**
I like the game Sorry, and I play the piano, and house with my doll, Mandy.

**What do you do with Mandy?**
I make believe I'm a mother to Mandy, and I put on some of my Mom's earrings that she had before she got her ears pierced.

**So you use your imagination a lot?**
Mm-hmm.

**How important is your imagination?**
Imagination is almost the most important but love is most important.

Todd Driesenga likes to hit all the bumps when he goes downhill skiing.

**What kind of games do you like?**
I like outdoor games, like skiing, climbing, and football. And horseback riding.

**Why do you like them?**
Because they're fun to play.

**Any other reason?**
(grins) Because they're rough.

**What positions do you play?**
I like to be catcher in Little League, but they usually stick me on the outfield. In football, I like tackling and running with the ball.

**Do you play anything besides sports, like a musical instrument?**
I play recorder because you have to.

**What would you really like to learn?**
The cornet.

**Why?**
My cousin plays it.

**What do you do to amuse yourself when you're on your own?**
Put together models.

**What have you put together lately?**
A van, and a semi that had 250 pieces.

**The whole truck?**
No, just the cab.

**How about things that take your imagination?**
I use my imagination when I draw pictures.

**Pictures of what?**
Mostly robbers and getaway cars.

**How about when you're with others? How do you use your imagination then?**
I play house.

**What part do you play?**
The cat or the dog. Sometimes I like to be a horse.

**One last question. What do you want to be when you grow up?**
A veterinarian.

**So you can take care of dogs and cats?**
And horses. Horses are the best.
Professional Recreation?

More than Plato versus Ping-pong

Over the past six years, Calvin College has been debating the introduction of a new professional program to the curriculum. The concentration would certify involved students to be professional recreationalists. The jobs into which such students would presumably go are administrative, decision-making roles including, for example, recreational therapist, community recreation director, continued education director, national park manager, industry or business recreation consultant, physical fitness facility manager, and church youth coordinator.

Originally, the proposed program did not conform to the established liberal arts core because of the interdisciplinary nature of the program. A "recreation" major would have to be well versed in Physical Education, Sociology, and Psychology as well as have a working knowledge of Art and Music. But subsequent revisions of the proposal model is entirely after standards concerning professional training adopted by the faculty in 1973. These standards make up a document entitled "Professional Education" (CLAE), revised in the sixties, deals with what kind of people we want to graduate but not where, specifically, we want them to go.

The original emergence of the recreation proposal, however, was simultaneous with the emergence of PECLAC. Since the majority of the courses in the program were to be PE courses, the PE Department was given the job of revising the proposal to conform to PECLAC standards. But despite several surfacings, the proposal has been virtually forgotten by those not directly involved. Last May the faculty returned the document to its committee and asked that it be resubmitted to the faculty later at a special hearing. Many of the faculty were totally unfamiliar with the entire idea, and the general sentiment was that the proposal as it then stood was too broad and premature. Dean of Faculty Peter DeVos and the PE Department are presently working on revising the proposal once again. This time there will be no core substitutions—the program will conform to the entire liberal arts core as well as the standards for professional training as set by PECLAC.

PECLAC sets several criteria for professional programs; the recreation proposal has been criticized in four of these major areas. The core part of the program is of primary concern (as noted above). Secondly, some faculty members are concerned a program such as this is a bit too easy. Some also point out that we don't have the resources here for recreational training.

(Steve Holtrop)

The last formal report, presented last May, calls for the addition of one faculty member to the PE Department.) Finally, others question the actual need in society and the enthusiasm of participants for this type of program.

Six years ago all students were polled and thirty claimed they would be interested in the program for either a major or minor. But at that time the requirements substituted certain "specialized" courses for "non-essential" or "less pertinent" courses within the normal core sequence. Language, for example, was not included in the recreation major's list. Now the proposal stands identical to most of the other areas of concentration, as far as core is concerned. On completion of the program, a graduate will be deemed suited to a profession in the field of recreation in compliance with the standards set by the National Recreation and Park Association.

So the question is no longer one of fulfilling our liberal arts standards. The question has shifted, focusing directly on the standards themselves. The CLAE and PECLAC documents display much thought but the implications can be left only to those who implement the various programs. One can always meet the "letter," so to speak, without any regard for the "spirit" of these standards.

Calvin College has a tradition of three resistances. The powers that be generally avoid change. First, in light of our heritage and in contrast to other small
Schools who teeter a bit too progressively, Calvin holds fast to its high standards of faith-oriented, analytic courses. Although Calvin is no longer strictly a ministers' training school, all our courses still seek to require an active faith as well as mind. Second, there is a tendency to avoid the emphasis of non-humanities courses and concentrations and apprehension to substitute them for the humanities in the core requirements. A student must take a set number of courses in the fine arts, philosophy, theology, history, and languages. Students who feel these courses won't do them any good because they won't relate to a future job may have lost the intended perspective of a liberal arts college.

The third resistance is to specialization. There is an underlying view that Calvin should prepare its students for all of life rather than one specific profession. CLAE and PECLAC give the guidelines for this objective but no one can force a student to apply Econ. 151 and Eng. 100 to his life in the same way. Each of us discriminates as to the relevancy and importance of each of his various courses. Core requirements only ensure our exposure to these aspects of life. Some people feel that this is not enough. We all know how potentially easy it is to "pass" some lower level courses without attending much, doing much, or even understanding much. We seek a third alternative to "Mickey Mouse" core courses or to the abolishment of core.

The problem of retaining our Christian convictions and their ramifications concerning education in a constantly changing culture is a very difficult one. We are called to serve our world; CLAE says we do this best by being broadly educated. However, Calvin now attracts more students who have a wider scope of interests. We agree that every Christian has a divine calling—we can't all be ministers and Christian school teachers—but should these be at the top of our list if we can do them? Why does our Economics Department attract so many majors and Classics so few? Are we ignoring social needs and our Christian priorities? Are we on our way to becoming a poly-technical school?

Getting back to recreation, we want to use our liberal arts exposures to help integrate body and mind, play and work, humanity-mindedness and practical specialization. We can't all be "jocks," nor can we all be "artists." Nonetheless, we can all be responsible, therefore informed, Christians. If we are clear as to the legitimacy and responsibility of adopting recreation, we should by all means put it in the ranks of our teaching, fine arts, and pre-professional programs.

However, when the faculty questions the core requirements of the proposed recreation program, they question the potential of the program to produce responsible professionals. When they question the academic status of it, they ask whether the liberal arts ideals remain pertinent to this "calling." They ask whether at this time it is responsible to take on the new program in light of the changes in facility and staff which it would necessitate. They ask if society will accept Christian young people in these positions and whether the students will be there once the program is opened. And finally, they ask if it's really responsible to endorse the whole American recreation scene, including professional sports and entertainment, by training people specifically to join the existing structures. We do not have any advertising courses at Calvin for this very reason; there are some things we think Christians ought not do because of their nature.

We should view our specific jobs—how we make money—and their concomitant technical skills as one facet within the total Christian life instead of seeing our various courses and the aspect of life they deal with as subordinate to our vocational training. The world needs Christian recreation coordinators as well as Christian teachers, artists, and thinkers. But a teacher should be able to do his recreation, his expression, and his philosophizing responsibly also; that is, we should all be able to act in a responsible way in all areas in addition to our occupational area. Have our two existing professional programs and our several preparatory programs already let go some of our vision of the liberating arts? Are we already entrapped in a vicious stimulus-response culture of apathetic wage-takers? Is recreation per se for everyone? Is it less important than business, or philosophy? Is it our obligation to provide training in this, another, "divine" calling? Are we apprehensive to induce a professional program in recreation simply because other concentrations like English or history do not provide the same opportunity for specialized job training? Perhaps a full program in medicine should come before something like recreation. Or should we have job-oriented courses at all? Does the field of recreation lend itself to irresponsibility, perhaps a bad use of talents, as the area of advertising apparently does?

These are the problems at the root of the recreation program proposal. It's much more than whether to read Plato or play ping-pong; greater even than choosing a career. The formation of our answers comes from how we integrate and relate this all-to-common dichotomy between play and work—between praise and paychecks. 

---

Fool helps build a house

Fool
knows not
where time and
chance have gone to,
he only knows what
he knows of people that
are building homes, planting
gardens—tomatoes, cauliflower.
There is time when there is no time but
the moment to begin—the fool knows the
ture sound of the trumpet, and he dances through
the mirror of the past onto a rock, shuffles,
laughs and then hands over the cornerstone: the builders
build a home and then come outside to dance a step with fool.

Chris Campbell
Had we landed already?
My head felt heavy, boxed in a sleepy numbness. Voices were a dull rumble.
"Joanne." It was a familiar voice close by.
"Joanne, you rumpled sleeping beauty, do you think you're capable of getting up?"
The reflection in the dark window beside me was not one of sleeping beauty. It was me, Joanne, with coarse red hair flattened on one side and bushed up into a knot on the other.
Yawning very loud and long I turned to look at Aunty Carolyn. Her mouth spread into a wide grin.
Then, without warning, my stomach starting pinching again. It does that when I'm nervous. I looked down quickly and tried to smooth the impossible wrinkles in my cotton skirt and jacket.
My stomach pinched even harder when I tried to make a picture in my mind of Oma and Opa, waiting for me to visit them. What would my grandparents be like?
While Aunty Carolyn and I walked through customs I could hear my dad's voice telling me softly that Oma had had a stroke and couldn't walk very well. He had said she depended on Opa to get to the bathroom. I pictured Oma as a cripple, ready to die.
The man at the customs desk spoke Dutch with Aunty Carolyn and waved us through. Then Aunty Carolyn started walking faster. She was waving. "Piet!" she said loudly. I was abruptly left, feeling a little sick.
I watched a tall stranger being attacked by my aunt and guessed it was my uncle.
"Are you Joanne?" It was a voice behind me. Turning around I nearly collided with a girl about my age.
"Yeah."
"Hi, I'm Carla, your cousin." She said it so easy, so friendly, in perfect English.
I'm lousy at conversation so I just kept gawking at her and smiling. She was tall and skinny like me, but she had fluffy white hair and even her freckles seemed to be neatly in place. I noticed with envy she was wearing a pair of jeans. "How long are you staying in Andyk?" she asked. "Two weeks."

"Great! I get off work to show you around."

"Oh." I just kept nodding my stupid head, shy.

"Heard you were an artist. You'll love Holland!" Her eyes were wide.

I thought about Oma and looked at the ground. "Sure."

Carla's chirping was beginning to bug me.

Carla talked non-stop all the way from the airport in Amsterdam to Andyk. While we drove through many wide fields under endless skies she told me about her job in the tulip shed and how she was in love with Johannes. For Carla everything else began to tug at me. This was where my father grew up. It seemed so hard to imagine Dad as a country boy, riding a bike hard against the wind three miles to school.

When we drove along the narrow streets of Andyk something else began to tug at me. This was where my father grew up. It seemed so hard to imagine Dad as a country boy, riding a bike hard against the wind three miles to school.

"This is it! There's the shed and that's my house." Carla's voice was a sing-song.

"Do Oma and Opa live on this street too?" I asked.

The car came to a stop. Carla pointed to one of the little brick houses. "Here we are," she said.

It was still a little dark and there were no lights on in the house. I stood for a while beside Aunty Carolyn in the chill morning drizzle. The car with Carla in it drove off to leave us alone again.

I felt tired before the weather-beaten, toy-like house. I sensed I was about to enter a chapter of a long past, a place where I had to climb steep winding stairs. Aunty Carolyn went straight to the window and forced it open like two little doors. The sweet, damp air rushed in and quickly lifted the stuffiness.

We'll sneak in and sleep too, okay?"

"Yeah." The word was a sigh.

Luckily the suitcases weren't heavy because once inside we had to climb steep winding stairs. A cracked white porcelain basin met us at the top. We went around it to the left and along a bare attic-like wall towards an open bedroom door. Inside the bedroom was a bed, a large wooden dresser and a small window.

Aunty Carolyn slid in beside me. Her big frame made the bed feel lopsided. I was uncomfortable but at least I wasn't alone. And now there was a fifty-fifty chance the spider would crawl into her mouth instead of mine.

When I awoke the spider was gone and so was Aunty Carolyn. I listened for sounds but heard only the steady pattern of taps on the window from rain.

The room was completely lit. Faded wallpaper, violet with pink roses, covered every wall. Perhaps, I thought, I could paint a cheery picture to put in the room.

Quickly, I tore off my girlish pear-colored night gown and grudgingly put my wrinkled suit on. Mom had made me promise to wear it for my first meeting with Oma and Opa.

At the thought of them I felt my stomach ache once more. Out of the bedroom door I saw again the white basin, just a few feet away. Beside it lay a lavender soap bar and a folded blue and white towel.

I walked towards it and found a small faucet above. The cool water felt wonderful on my face. Then with the towel pressed to my cheeks I heard another sound besides the rain.

Below me, close by, was the slow, steady tick, tick of a grandfather clock.

The steep, skinny stairs were even more tricky going down. I had to press my hands flat against the wall so I wouldn't fall.

At the bottom of the stairs I could smell coffee. It was coming from my left, which would be the kitchen we had stumbled through last night. The tick, tick, ticking was almost beside me on my right.

I turned to study the long elegant hand, waving back and forth. It was so old, and a little sad, but so dignified.

"It was here before your father was born." The voice was slow and thick with Dutch accent. Opa.

I waited, dumb. The man wasn't much taller than me and he just stood there so still. His arms hung at his sides looking very heavy, pulling his shoulders down.

"Opa?"

"Ja. Come Joanne." He held out those arms then and I saw how they were really so thin, and where the shirt sleeves were rolled up I could see the bluish hue of his freckled and wrinkled skin. His hands were shaking a little.

"Come," he said again.

I gave him a quick polite hug and was about to pull away but he held me there for a while. His arms were firm like my father's. I smelled rain on him. Then, as he loosened me, I saw his white head slightly bent, his pale eyes glazed and watery.

"Morning Joanne. Sleep well?" Aunty Carolyn was coming from the kitchen with a coffee tray.

"Oh. Yeah?"

"How do you like your grandchild, Father?" She tipped her head to one side and winked at me.

Opa looked at me and smiled. "She is a pretty girl," he said, "and looks like you did once. But I think her eyes are from her mother." He spoke almost formally.

He and I followed Aunty Carolyn into the next room. Opa walked slow, and his slippers shuffled a little.

It was the living room.

"Oma, this is Joanne," Opa said.
Oma too, was saying come with her hands. She was slumped in a large, solid chair. Resting on a cushioned stool in front of her were two skinny legs, wrapped in thick wrinkled stockings.

I went around to the side of her chair. She put out a delicate hand for me to take. I took it awkwardly, afraid to hurt it. As I bent down to hug her small frame, I smelled the cool fragrance of Au de Cologne.

“Hello, Oma.” My voice was barely above a whisper.

“Oh young thing,” Oma chuckled softly.

I felt a sobbing wave break inside of me as I saw with relief that though she was frail she was very much alive.

I kissed her cool, peaked cheeks and felt her wet lips gently touch my own.

Again Oma chuckled and told me to sit down for a cup of coffee and a piece of honey-cake. A single tear was stuck on her nose but no one noticed.

Oma and Aunty Carolyn talked together. I sat quietly, glad to be with my own thoughts. I watched Opa look out the window. He seemed to be thinking very hard while he stood there pushing tobacco into a dark brown pipe.

I looked from Opa in his dark sweater and baggy pants back to Oma. She wore a navy blue dress with just a bit of lace at her neck and wrists. Delicate wire glasses rested on her nose and her thin, sweet lips barely moved as she spoke.

The room was filled with thick, patterned carpets and fine crocheted cloth. The colors were all deep and dark. The only brightness in the room was the neat row of plants under the window.

Behind me the walnut-stained bookcase held millions of memoirs, many ornaments and solemn family portraits.

Opa spoke. “Joanne, maybe you’d like to come with me to the tulip shed after dinner. Carla will be there.”

I felt wide awake and ready to do something. Carla’s chatter would be nice now. “I’d like that Opa.”

Steaming food in old white porcelain bowls was set on the white table cloth.

My mouth watered as we bent our heads to pray. The room fell reverent during Opa’s slow formal prayer of tradition. He spoke so deliberately; the words seemed to roll off his tongue like the deep ocean waves. “Onze … Vader … die in … de He mel …”

I could hardly open my eyes when he was done; for fear the magic would disappear.

“Eat well,” Oma said, when it was over.

The food was saltless. I couldn’t wait to see Carla.

She came to the house just as we were finishing. “Come on,” she said with her eyes.

Aunty Carolyn nodded OK. I ran to change. Upstairs I dove straight for my jeans and a bright green sweater, leaving my skirt and jacket a rejected heap on the floor. Thank goodness—it had stopped raining.

My new boyish sneakers squealed on the kitchen tiles as I stopped to mutter a goodbye.

“Wow!” said Carla, as the screen door slammed behind us, “You sure look different.”

“Yeah.” I was shy again with easy Carla.

Carla started running. It felt wonderful to run with her, my hair away from my face and slapping my back, my legs and arms wild, loose, and free.

We ran over the lawn, crossed the narrow road and kept going without talking, until we reached a short bridge. Carla started to scramble down the bank where the grass was high and still wet from the rain.

“Over here, Jo.”

I laughed, a prickly joy creeping through me at the sound of the nick name Carla had called me.

“Hey, Jo,” Carla yelled, “down here by the canal. We’ll go for a boat ride.”

I slid down, the long blades of grass wetting my butt and sneakers.

“Get in!”

“Where are we going?”

“Oh these canals wind along everywhere, Jo.”

Purplish red flowers dotted the fields on either side of us.

“What gorgeous colors the fields and flowers are after it rains,” I said.

Carla was quiet for a long time as we skimmed around bends and passed farm houses. My hand trailed along in the water.

After a long time she stopped rowing. “Want a smoke?”

Carla was fumbling with something in her pocket.

“Okay.”

Both of us shyly looked at each other while Carla produced a crumpled wad of cigarettes. She solemnly lit one for me and then one for herself.

We tried to look grave and easy while taking short awkward puffs. But, after one very long inhale I went into a coughing fit.

The boat rocked as I stomped my feet choking for air. The drama ended in loud giggles, both of us waving our arms into the thick swirls that hung between us.

Back on the road we linked arms together and giggled all the way back to Oma and Opa’s place.

Carla raced home. I walked slowly up the lawn fearing the quiet house would smother my freedom.

At supper Aunty Carolyn reminded me that she would be going to her sister in Utrecht the following morning. She said it like a question.

I thought about Carla. “It’s fine by me, Aunty Carolyn.”

The next morning, after breakfast, she left and I got a phone call from Carla. She had a cold, she said, and had to stay in bed.

Carla was sorry and I was lost. It was Saturday and raining again. I spent most of the day reading a book in the living room while Opa read too and Oma crocheted.

Carla stayed sick until Thursday. So everyday, when the rain let up for a while, I took an old stool and my paints out into the backyard and worked.

I painted the gardens and the trees; I painted the ever-stretching skies; I painted the canals and the little brick house.

My room upstairs started to look like home with all my work hanging on the walls. Opa asked once if he could hang a piece in the living room. I felt proud.

One day Oma said she wanted me to have something from her. I helped her from her chair and followed her from the
living room to the bedroom. Her four-legged walker in front of her, she moved slowly to the shelf by the bed.

"This was mine when I was your age," she said.

It was difficult for her to bend way down and pick up the little purse. Her frail hand pushed the black thing into mine.

"You see, it's a lovely little purse. I kept it good all these years." Her weak voice struggled with the English words.

The black velvet money purse had a tiny detailed pattern of stitched flowers on each side. The pretty colors were delicately woven into the cloth. Along the top, by the clasp, was a thin ornamental strip of gold metal.

Later in my room I cried, holding tight to the precious gift. I knew then that I had been quiet all these days with a growing dread of the oldness that was strangling two people I was learning to love.

When I visited Carla at her house on Thursday afternoon, I tried to tell her how I felt.

"But Jo, Oma and Opa aren't sad that they're old."

"They can hardly do anything Carla. Opa even has to help Oma go to the bathroom."

"Oh Jo, don't be sad. You know Opa got a medal from the queen for being brave during the war. He was something. Everyone gets old."

"But it must be horrid to sit and watch everyone else busy with their own lives."

"I guess they don't think so."

"Did Opa really get a medal?"

"Sure. He was important. People still respect him."

On Saturday the sun finally came out. Opa said it was a good day to show me the orchard.

I felt shy to take his hand as we crossed the road and down the path to Opa's land. But Opa held it firmly, pressing my fingers as if to say he liked my being with him.

"Did you really get a medal, Opa?"

"Ja." Opa was smiling. "The pears will be too green yet but the apples will be fine."

Opa stopped to check his fruit every few steps. He handed an apple to me. It was small and still quite green but when I bit into it a bitter-sweet tingle filled my mouth.

The liquid dribbled down my chin.

Opa smiles. "Good?"

I nodded.

"We'll take some home. You and Oma can make applesauce and you can surprise Aunty Carolyn when she is here for supper."

"Oh yes!" The thought of seeing Aunty Carolyn again made me stand on tiptoe and twirl.

Then the funniest thing happened. Opa laughed and started to dance. He grabbed my hands. I laughed then too and we both swung our arms to a crazy Dutch tune Opa was singing.

He kept singing while we loaded a pail full of apples. The sky was blue, and red poppies lined our path.

"Oma and I used to dance like that in the orchard."

"Really?"

"Ja. Oma and I are old now but we remember those times like they were yesterday. Oma wore her hair down, like you, and it would fly when we danced."

"Was Oma pretty?"

"Oh, the prettiest thing I ever saw, or so I thought then." Opa's laughing reminded me of Dad when he would catch my little sister and hold her tight before bedtime.

I wished the walk with Opa would never end and the sun would never stop shining.

"Seems like everything is happy and young when the sun is out, eh, Joanne?"

"Opa, why don't you and Oma ever wear bright and happy colors?"

"Oh my darling Joanne." Opa put his arm around me. "I didn't know you ask so much all at one time."

My face was hot. I looked down at the ground.

The rest of the days passed quickly. Mornings were spent in the sun or helping Carla in the tulip shed, afternoons Aunty Carolyn and I went for long drives in the country.

The morning we were to leave I found Oma sitting alone in her chair with her hair loose down her back.

"Can I do your hair Oma?"

Oma's weak shoulders went up and down as she chuckled. She seemed amused. Her smile reminded me of Aunty Carolyn.

"Why of course child, if you like."

It felt strange to comb out the long thin strands. She must have had it long all her life. When had she begun to braid it into a tight knot at the back of her neck?

Oma. I was standing so close to her I could hear her breathing. My fingers hesitated, wanting to touch her face. My Oma.

I sat alone in the back seat turned around so I could watch the house slowly disappear.

Opa was standing at the living room window, waving. Slowly waving, back and forth. He looked a little sad but there was a tallness about him I don't know how to describe.

I thought about the grandfather clock—tick, tick, ticking. Tears made him fuzzy in the window. But as the car began to creep away I caught the movement of something bright.

Opa was waving a red scarf in the window.

Opa was waving the red cloth and laughing.
Q: What is a Bachelor of Arts in English lit (Calvin, '68) doing in his Alma Mater's art department? A: What else but teaching and making art? James Kuiper, now completing his first year on Calvin's faculty as Instructor of Art, has bridged a gap in his experience by reaching his current place.

Born in the farming community of South Holland, Illinois, Kuiper speaks of an early awareness of the earth. The sight and smell of rich black furrows cut into the soil, the action of rain and sunlight, the growing crops: all these things made for a deep sense of vitality. By contrast, his early, highly regimented years of schooling dampened this inner impulse; he had to struggle through them.

Still, Kuiper kept at it and, in 1968, took a post with his wife at a mission school in Gboko, Nigeria. Through learning Nigerian cultures as a 'reorganizer' of the Jos Museum, the two divergent streams in his life—of discipline

James Kuiper:
Feeling to Gesture to Symbol
and of energy—began to come together. The Nigerian in-
volvement with "art for the earth" re-awakened his childhood
roots in the soil. Out of that grew a fresh search for structure
which led him, upon his return to the U.S., to the successful
pursuit of an M.F.A. from Michigan State.

Now, at Calvin, Kuiper has coupled his involvement with
primitive art with an interest in children's work. He is
concerned with the expression of feelings through what he
calls "mark-making," that is, through visual "gestures"
(making) which produce "symbols" (marks).

Currently, he describes his work as "a primitive gestural
record of regular, controlled, and systematic movements. It
grows out of an attempt to understand innate energy and the
nature of gestural relationships and activity." He searches for
"gestural energy and a more complete symbol structure"
which has that energy for its basis.

From the basic impulse that responds to the earth to a
complete, disciplined structure that represents that impulse
to both artist and viewer—this has been the movement of
James Kuiper's work. He puts it differently: "I want to awaken
the senses in both others and myself, and to take those sense
experiences and put them into a structure that encourages
understanding and wisdom, the wisdom that one needs to
understand his place in the universe."

—reported by Dan Hawkins
Sonnet—To a Portrait of a Lady

Dear double-jointed lady are you bound
To wile away, an impress on a sheet?
Although your slipshod manner is renowned,
You've barely been exposed to the aesthete.
Favored lass, familiarity breeds—
As surely you're aware, reproduction
Of illustrated issues has its seeds
In the graphic arts of seduction.
Tricksters in a darkroom fix your roto-
Graven image; thumping machinations fold
Your ink-on-paper visage. And photo-
Genic journals leave none of you unsold:
Your titillating triptychs will entice
The lovers of art with a modest price.

Eric Jager

Vice Versa

Literary Criticism,
Once but verbal voyeurism,
Now includes the various ways
To rape and plunder poems and plays.
This specious calling consecrates
The felonies it sublimates,
Allowing criminality.
A scholarly mentality.
In learned journals pedants write,
Divesting beauty of delight:
The articles strewn everywhere
Suggest assault—no love affair.
Quarterly the leering critic,
A psychopath who's analytic,
Spoils Virtue with his thesis,
Chops her up, and leaves the pieces.
For one who's bent upon this vice,
A misdemeanor won't suffice;
The studied master must devise
A crime which wholly satisfies.

Ars Poetica

Baby, you're a figure of speech;
Your looks I simply can't impeach.
Luxe and calme and volupté,
You are the consummate cliché.
Those well-scanned lines, from head to feet,
Are dressed in measures of conceit.
Your rhythmic walk's the very best
—A loose and lilting anapest.
My limping doggrel can't keep pace,
But what I've writ I won't erase:
When beauty kindles me to verse
Whose craft is merely intersperse,
Poetic license is the trick
For making one-night stanzas slick.
Route 80, Coming Home  
Cathy Heerdt
Completing our series of interviews with student artists

Dennis DeWinter lived and worked in a studio apartment in New York City this past Interim, sharing quarters with eight other Calvin students. Dennis was intensely affected by his physical surroundings and the artistic atmosphere of lower Manhattan. He found that the time he could and did spend drawing and painting turned his work decisively in a new direction.

Before going to New York, Dennis had been using what he calls a "safe" drawing technique, a workable formula which sufficed for much that he produced. But he decided that he wanted to experiment there—be a bit more uninhibited—and the city streets gave him the impetus to try something new. From the sidewalks of the warehouse district came his ideas. Combined with the use of a new material, oil sticks, Dennis has created some exciting and forceful work.
"The streets in the area where we lived were full of interesting objects," says Dennis. "Trucks dumped all kinds of things into them. One item that particularly took my eye was a pile of punched-out stencil forms; in fact, they were scattered everywhere." Dennis used these circular and oval shapes as focal points for his new designs. He mask-taped them into place and they served as neat boundaries to draw into and around. Some stencils he removed when he finished his layering of color, in order to show the contrast and the steps to completion. Others he left on as part of the work. "Spatial unity is important to me," Dennis explains, "and the stencils here help to hold everything together."

With his oil sticks, Dennis pressed color onto the paper. Then he poured turpentine over the surface and worked it into the oil until he got a creamy consistency. "Mixing this substance with my fingers was fun," confesses Dennis. "I wasn't constricted by the tighter structure required by a linear drawing. The texture of this 'paint' is very smooth and soft, and yet the action directed by my fingers is bold." The effect is spontaneous and yet controlled within its limits. Some of the paintings have up to ten layers of color, all of which add to the sense of power and drive evoked by the result of putting them together in such a way.

It is often quite difficult for Dennis to explain his work. "Before I make an attempt to create something," says Dennis, "I try to be rational, objective, and disciplined. My approach to my work is somewhat pre-planned and I always have an idea of what I want the result to be. But although I try to stay within certain bounds, my initial effort isn't always visible. And the actual result is usually unexpected and sometimes totally surprising to me."
"I have plenty of questions of my own about what I'm pursuing, so I don't have all the answers to other people's questions about my work." Dennis operates mostly on what he calls an "intuitive drive." "When I think something I've done is successful, I feel a certain knowledge of its rightness, although I realize that doesn't help much in explaining it to others."

Dennis' New York works are well-defined, however. They display clearly what he means by "spatial unity." Every element of the design has been allocated to an area where it will contribute best to the whole design. At once harsh and confronting, the movements on the works' surfaces are also subtle and sensuous. That they work together so dynamically is not always easy to describe, but certainly easy to see.

Someone once said of Marcel Duchamp that "he would take risks in order to play a beautiful game, rather than be cautious and brutal to win." Dennis has tried to do the same.

—reported by Kate Harper
ANNOUNCING the first annual

JOHN CALVIN

RECREATIONAL TOURNAMENT

to be held on the grounds of his college
some Sunday afternoon in the spring

The Events*

Paper Sail-boat Races
—on Lake Servetus!

Precision Key Ring Sliding
—hang it over the table's edge—
as far as you dare!

Lawn Bowling
—the perfect Sabbath rest!

Wine Bibbing
—need we say more?

The Teams

Geneva “Spiritual” Giants

CRC Creationists

Amsterbless Tulips

The Hugenettes

and many, many others

What a spectacle! Make it your pre-destination!

The JOHN CALVIN MEMORIAL RECREATIONAL TOURNAMENT

*All events based on authenticated details of John Calvin's life.
Minimal poetry is an art form that we developed as an answer to the 20th century developments in minimal music (a la Anton Webern), minimal film (a la Andy Warhol) and minimal painting (a la Ad Reinhardt). We don’t know if anyone has ever written minimal poetry before, but if they have, we’ve never heard of them. A minimal poem may be defined as a poem that tries to say as little as possible in as few words as possible. A good minimal poem is harder to write than it looks, and usually comes only in a flash of inspiration. However, one advantage to writing a minimal poem is that not many rewrites are required. Since minimal poems by themselves are rather dull and boring, we decided to set them to music. But instead of setting each minimal poem to a minimal tune, we just decided to have one continuous musical piece in the background while the minimal poems are spoken, shouted, screamed, sung, whispered, or whatever. What we ended up with was a new genre which is a unique combination of music and the written word: The Minimal Song Series.

Bob Hoolsema and Todd Huizinga

The Minimal Song Series: I

Moderately Fast

Hum hum etc. along with tune...

whispered shouted

Shoot to kill So What

explained

Me Tarzan
Instructions for Performance
1. The music may be played by any four instruments that have the proper range. Each part (Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass) should be played by a different instrument.
2. The Reciter hums along with the Soprano part in between reciting poems.
3. The auditorium is completely dark except for one spotlight on the Reciter's feet and another spotlight on a clock, preferably on a large wall clock.
The other day, a young man asked me, "Why do Black People play?" At first I didn't understand what he meant. He explained, "What makes you interact with your environment the way you do?" First, I want it understood that mine is a personal voice. I don't pretend to speak for all Blacks—or let them all speak for me.

More importantly, to understand the essence of art in the Black culture, it is necessary to consider the nature of its people. In this article I would like to discuss the artist who gives shape, value, texture, color, and meaning of play to his culture.

When we discuss Picasso's "Three Musicians," we talk about the shapes that tip, slide, bend suddenly, break up, and interweave in a staccato-like fashion; or we speak of the total effect, which is one of great activity. When I speak of the Black community, I see a picture of the total effect. The ability to evoke resilience through coping. My eye travels straight to the center, the focal point, which is the family.

The Black family, in the traditional sense, is an important institution for several reasons. First, this is where we get our intrinsic stimulation. God is the center of the family. Self-respect and self-image is developed in the home. A philosophy for life is given at an early age. This includes learning how and when to cope in all situations.

Second, the family thrives on two major models: Father and Mother. The father is at the head of his home. His duties include protecting, providing, and giving a sense of pride to all other members of the family. In Africa, certain villages stipulate that men must prove that they are ready to accept responsibility by making him pass many and difficult tests that are designed to examine maturity. For example, a man must be able to prove he can take care of a family; therefore, he must learn to hunt and fish before he can take a wife. The mother, on the other hand, gives a sense of peace; in essence, she must be congruent in her day-to-day life.

We have taken a look at the African traditional pattern. However, I would like to examine the American role models. (What I am about to say should not be viewed as a cop-out!) First, the Black man. Before we can make a complete examination of him, we must understand his past. The Black man's past dates back to the "peculiar institution---" slavery. After journeying to America from Africa, he was stripped of any pride that he may once have had. He watched as slave owners raped his women. He watched as uprisings ended in castration of him or someone he knew. He watched as the slave owner sold his family for a side of beef. In this ordeal he realized that in order to survive in a strange land he must learn to adapt and understand the limitations imposed on him, namely the environmental pressures. Slowly, distress and pain took away the proud sense of "self."

Black woman didn't make it easy for her man. She found more freedom and acceptance than he. She had a better chance of moving up the social ladder. It's funny how other women speak of "liberation"; the Black woman cried to be free of her freedom. She didn't have any opportunities. It was up to her to bring money into the home, thus adding more injury and humiliation to her proud Black man.

In short, the Black man had to deal with many negative influences. But there is a positive side. What makes this man a special human being is not, in the end, the number of sentimental anec-

Ellen Ashford

Lost in A Masquerade

Art as a form of play

The Black community. We express colors in music, music that consists of jazz, blues, or Rhythm and Blues. The Puritans brought their emasculated versions of Italian, Dutch, and English madrigals; the slaves brought their African melodies and tom-tom beats on the bottom of tubs and tin kettles.

We used music as a form of interaction. Through this form of communication we realized that others were experiencing the same kind of agonies, conflicts, disappointments and happiness. Music becomes a kind of courage.

Out of all the forms of communication pertaining to musical styles, fusion jazz is my favorite. Fusion, of course, implies unity, or a coalition. Jazz is usually classified on the basis of "what the music sounds like," or, to be more accurate, on the musical forms derived by composers, arrangers and soloists from previously existing forms and styles and their own musical imagination or interpretation.

When I think of fusion jazz, I recall the vocalist George Benson. He sings one of my favorite songs, called "This Masquerade." This is a song that addresses itself to the interaction of people behind their guises. In Africa, the guise is called the "primitive mask," in the western culture, "persona." It hides real nature by means of repression. We become more
like this mask every day we use it. I've heard it called the "ideal-self." Thus the mask becomes harder each day to take off. We find the only time we dare unmask is when we dream. All the things we had suppressed come to surface.

I must admit that the game becomes complicated; it gets sophisticated. Sometimes the relationship or interaction between male and female in society is inhibited by fear, fear that if the mask is taken away, the ego becomes vulnerable. (Sometimes if a person hasn't come out of the traditional family institution, resilient coping can turn into other psychological phenomena.) Fear because of vulnerability is negatively related to a wide range of "not" coping patterns. Some Black males fear that opening up will lead to a mental castration. Some Black females fear that openness to the environment will lead to total destruction.

Non-competitive sports and dancing are ways to release this tension due to fear. In them, there is freedom for self-expression. The defenses come down and everything that's done is spontaneous. Beneath the facade there is a need to run free, a need to escape. Stimulation, consequently, helps us cope with the pressures of the social roles we play.

George Benson, in my opinion, says it best: "Are we really happy here/with the lonely game we play/looking for words to say/searching but not finding/understanding anywhere/We're lost in a masquerade."

In conclusion, I'll say that our art is determined by behavior through developmental contributions, given mainly through the family structure. Coping abilities are either resolved or intensified according to the situation.

For Blacks, the coping tool has always been music. The expression of feelings is cultivated through blues, Rhythm and Blues, and jazz. I think the epitome of these musical styles is fusion jazz.
"Winter is just around the corner, folks. High today around 40, lows tonight in the mid-30’s. Sixty percent chance of rain this afternoon, increasing..." In the kitchen, Esther heard faintly the voice of the radio announcer, rising and falling as briskly as the wind. Outside, a sullen drizzle caught the leaves cringing and turning in the wind and plastered them to the street. Grey, everywhere it was grey, Esther thought, the sky, the trees, the air. She let go of a dingy white curtain and turned, with a sigh, back to her task.

Slosh, splash, swish. The mop slid over the linoleum leaving a trail of soap bubbles. Esther wondered why she bothered to clean this kitchen. No amount of soap would erase the streak of rust on the sink or the splotches of grease behind the stove. But today was Saturday; she always scrubbed on Saturday. She tucked a clump of brown hair, just beginning to grey, behind her ear and pushed the mop forward.

The radio blared into the quiet.

"Pa!" Esther straightened her back. "Pa, turn that thing down! No, no, the other knob." She dropped the mop and strode into the next room, heels tapping a staccato rhythm on the floor.

"Maria?"

"No, Pa, it's me—Esther. What are you doing?"

"Playin' my music, just playin' my music."

"Almighty loud, too," Esther muttered. Joshua smiled, the smile of a child uncertain if he has offended. Torn between pity and impatience, Esther looked at him standing there, a tree bent under a load of snow.

"See this picture here?" he said pointing to a yellowed photograph leaning against the radio. "That's the Mrs. and me."

"Yeah, Pa, come on now and sit in your chair." Esther pushed him onto a rocking chair.

"Where's Mama?" he asked.

"She passed on a long time ago, Papa. You know that."

"She's been gone a long time. She ought to be home by now. It's almost time for dinner," he rambled on as if she had not spoken.

"Listen to your music, Pa." Esther left him staring at the photograph and walked back into the kitchen. She poured soapy water into the sink, lifted the bucket and dripping mop and carried them both out to the back porch. The air pierced her lungs; winter was not far off.

She was slapping plates around the kitchen table, smiling in amusement, or perhaps it was derision, as the table trembled on its rickety legs. Dinner at five o'clock, always at five, precisely at five. "A family custom," Esther had heard over and over. "Papa likes his routine, wife. 'Else he gets his rememberin' mixed up."

"Esther!"

"What do you want, Pa?"

"Esther!"

"What?" Esther said louder, sliding her head around the corner.

"Isn't it about dinner time?"
“Pretty soon, Pa, pretty soon. Just sit quiet for a while.”  
“I’ll be needin’ my teeth ‘fore I can eat dinner.”  
“You teeth are in your mouth, old man. I washed ‘em after lunch and put ‘em in there myself.”  
“Oh.” His forehead wrinkled. “Of course your teeth are in your mouth,” he murmured. “That’s where they ought to be, too.” Esther sighted, a deep, heavy sigh, as if she had held her breath for a long time. The old man, the kitchen, the weather—everything was grey.

The back door slammed, and a wave of air set the table trembling again.

“Walter, that you?”  
“Who else?” Her husband’s figure appeared in the doorway. “Where’s dinner? Ain’t it five yet?”  
“Walter, we gotta talk.”  
“’Bout what?” He lifted the lid of a saucepan with the tips of a thumb and finger and inhaled.  
“’Bout your Papa.” The lid clattered down onto the pan, scattering water droplets that sizzled on the hot burner.

“We been through all that.”

“Walter—” Esther sat down on one of the Sears bargain-basement chairs and stared out the window; the sun set before five o’clock these days and she saw only her own face reflected in the darkened glass.

“Walter, I just can’t take no more of this.”

“No more of what, Esther? Can you even say? Pap’s seventy-six years old—an old man. Give him his scraps and pictures, dinner at five, and Lawrence Welk on Saturday nights and leave him be. He ain’t no bother to us.”

“Who is it washes filthy sheets every morning, Walter? Who brushes his sticky teeth and buttons up his slobbered shirt. Who—”

“Esther—” Embarrassment chased across Walter’s face.

“He can’t help it.” Esther’s body sagged.

“I’m not blaming him, Walter. I love him, too, in my own way. That’s why I—” she hesitated. Walter looked at her, suspicious.

“Yeah?”

“I put him on Lakeview Home’s waiting list four months ago.”

“You did what?” The pitch of Walter’s voice slid upward. His face flushed. “Behind my back you went and—and—committed my own father to some—some—institution? Four months ago and you never told me?” He jerked away from her, rubbing the back of his neck in bewilderment.

“Yes, I did.” Esther’s words fell like stones against Walter’s shoulders. “Come and sit down. It’s time to eat.” He turned to the doorway. Now he shuffled into the room.

“Papa!” Walter shouted, throwing an arm around the old man’s shoulders. “Come and sit down. It’s time to eat.” He flashed Esther a warning glance. “Let’s put this on, O.K.? I said, tucking a napkin under Joshua’s chin.

“You just don’t understand, Walter—” she stopped. with a steaming pan and a wooden spoon.

“For heaven’s sake, Walter answered. “It’s good for you, Pa.” Joshua didn’t speak. He rarely responded to Walter’s gushes of affection, merely smiled as if embarrassed by the performance and aimed the spoon for his mouth, dropping most of the corn onto his lap. The kitchen was quiet, save for the chink of a cup on a saucer or a fork on a plate.

“Pa, be care—” Esther bit her lip.

“How sloopy we are tonight! Here, let me do it,” Walter said, snatching Joshua’s napkin out of his fumbling fingers and dabbing at the gravy dripping down his shirtfront.

“Pa, I have something to ask you.” Esther’s words were tightly coiled springs.

“Esther—”

“Ever heard of a place called Lakeview Home, Pa?”

“Esther, shut up!” Walter’s harsh tones surprised the old man.

“Let her talk, Walter.”

“It ain’t important, Pa. Is it, Esther.”

“Pa, how would you feel about moving out to Lakeview Home?”

“She don’t mean it, Pa. This is your home, right here with us.”

“It’s a pretty place. You’d have a room on the corner with a view of the flower gardens. It’s so clean and new, Pa. The walls are bright yellow. And the nurses would take good care of you.”

“You don’t have to go anywhere, Pa. You got a family to take care of you.”

“There’s a nice dining hall and a big room with a T.V. They play Bingo and read books in there, too.”

“Is that where Maria is?” Esther looked down without replying. “Yeah, yeah, I know,” he continued. “Could I take my pictures and my radio with me?”

“You ain’t goin’, Pa.”

“Yes, and you can take your chair, too.”

“Esther, would you just shut your mouth?”

“Leave her be, Walter. Fact is, this place sounds pretty fair, pretty fair.” Joshua nodded.

“Pa—” Walter’s voice was coated with hurt. “Haven’t I been good to you? Haven’t I shared my home with you? Ever since Mama—”

“Yes, boy, I am truly grateful, truly grateful. But things just haven’t been the same since your mama died.” He turned to Esther. “You’re sure I can take my radio?”

“I’m sure, Pa.”

“Well, then—”

Walter jumped up, pushing his chair back on two legs. “Come on and sit in the living room, Pa.” He slid his hand under his father’s arm and lifted him to his feet. “We won’t talk about this anymore.”

Esther watched them go and reached for the dishes. She filled the sink with hot water and Joy. With a grimace, she realized that she had never expected Walter to understand.
She stared at the woman in the window. Grey strands wove a furtive web in her hair; lines crept around her nose and mouth. The years were getting heavier, snow falling, deepening, until drifts were mounted high. Watching Papa fading and yellowing like an old shirt, she could feel her own body shrinking and creasing. Couldn't Walter see? They were both getting old, too. It was almost too late. They had no children, no savings. What would become of them?

"He wants to go," Esther jumped.
"He'll be better off, Walter. We all will."
"You got your way—I hope you're satisfied."
"Walter—" Esther spun around. "It is better this way."
"Would you say that if it was you gain' to live in some kindergarten for old folks?" Esther didn't say anything. "Well, I'll tell you this," Walter went on vehemently. "Nobody is ever gonna shelve me in some nursing home. I'm gonna be kicking till the day I go. None of those rocking chair and radio retirements for me."

"Yeah, Walter."
Esther walked up the steps, grabbing for the railing as her feet slid sideways on the ice. Snow clung to the hems of her pants and filled her shoes. She stopped a moment and looked around. The snow was so bright. The trees seemed etched on the sky; capillary branches cupped blossoms of snow. Snow coated the roofs and the top of the sign: Lakeview Home for the Elderly.

She pushed the double glass doors and stepped inside. Warm air from the vents melted the snow in her hair and the dampness ran down her neck. She took a deep breath; in a few minutes that odor would fade.

"Good afternoon," the receptionist greeted her. Esther smiled briefly and turned the corner on her right. Down the hall, past the yellow walls, past the wheelchairs, Room 106, 108, 110—that was it—Room 110, on the corner. An old man sat rocking in a chair shoved between the window and the bed. A cloth restraint was looped around his waist. On the bedtable in front of him stood his radio and a photograph taken on his wedding day. His hair was so white, Esther thought, whiter even than it had been the Wednesday afternoon before.

"Hi, Pa." Joshua didn't respond. "Walter sends his love," Esther said. Walter hadn't, but Esther spoke that line every week. It was one of those things she had to say. She seated herself on the edge of the bed. "Snowed again last night. Walter would've come, but you know how he hates driving on icy streets." That wasn't true either. Walter had never visited his father; it was as if Joshua had already died to him.

"How are you, old man?" Esther continued her monologue.
"Is that you, Maria?" Joshua finally spoke. "I thought you'd never get here. It's almost time for dinner."
"It's Esther, Pa."
"Your hands are so cold, Maria. I was beginning to worry. Why, Maria, are you crying? Don't cry, Maria. It's all right. We got such a fine boy, Maria. Walter's such a fine son."
"Yes, Pa, just sit quiet now." Joshua's head nodded once, twice. His eyelids fell and a snore rumbled in his nose. Esther disengaged her fingers and stood up. Then with one more look at him as she paused at the door, she walked down the hall and out into the snow.
The Lone Ranger's gun sang off rocks when he missed:

- the pitch of cars
- stinging the grandstand at Indy drippings in a millisecond pte ne ptingu.

A. J. Foyt drifts into the pits with his coyote car is out of the pits in eleven seconds out of the radio behind the cash register hardware store morning where Uncle Jim and I bought briquets for the backyard Memorial Day picnic.

But Silver rears back and whinnies away.

Down from the rock roost the bandit revolver blasts over network lines to our family room. From Saturday morning, the vision of shots ricochets through a week of American backyards.

After school we ease between garages thinking the soft walk of Indians on oak leaves through the forest. We can't even hold down a rustle.

We walk chaik chauk chaughk look in front and back trying to make our headquarters hideout in the bushes.

We stop against the garage wall waiting for DJ's face and arms to pop around the corner. I almost begin to stare at a rake hung from a nail above the window.

Slow, we edge along the north wall where the sun never shines where moss gets dug by lawn mower tires to the bushes. "Get down quick!"

"There, he's going around to the front."

We duck by the bird feeder into the bushes, make plans with wet knees drawing with a stick or squeezing dirt. We dig our dirt bombs that puff when they hit the sod while Bobby licks the zinc barrel of his plastic pearl-handled Western revolver.

"Hey, I'm Machine Gun Mike, okay? You say, 'Go around and check the munitions dump.' 'In the front yard by the porch?' "Yeah. You say, 'I'll guard here,' so you can't cover me. I go around the front and get hit in the open, get hit bad but not wasted, then you come grenade the pillbox and drag me around the corner, okay?"

"Yeah, and then we'll come back here and wait for the truck convoy to come between the garages."

Then, machine gu-u-h-u-h-u-h-u-hn.
The best part was always falling making the gunner's noise yourself.

The croquet mallet skips to the grass. You jerk spastic, fall, roll, stop.
The gunner rips through a final check, tears through your green jacket shoulder of staff sargent stripes. Eh-eh-eh-eh-eh. Your arms jump off the lawn.

Body rotates past the yard light in the smell of fresh-cut grass. to the "bad but not wasted" driveway "but not wasted man!"

Down the driveway to the sidewalk, the body stops sprawled across cracks that break your mother's back where we leave the bikes and wagons when we go around back to play, where Dad swerves to get around when he comes in with the car.
After we wash our station wagon,
Dad lets me hose off the driveway.
Clods of dirt and pebbles roll in the spray.
"Get the hose down close, get the right angle son."
Stones pop to the sidewalk and street.
I shoot the narrow spray in the cracks tearing away lines of moss.
A cover of sand moves down to the gutter.
Thumb cold on the nozzle,
I drop the hose, walk up to the garage,
get the chrome nozzle trigger spray attachment while the hose flips back and forth gouging the lawn.

Our guns were always fifty caliber.
Fifty caliber meant you had to hang on the back end and hope it didn't kick you off the edge of the jeep popping wheelies over the dunes to the dark spots of desert rats under our eyes like football players. With the heavy beating of the big play the gun banged across the armored hoods of jeeps coming down the sidewalk Radio-Flyer knocking hard rubber over the cracks in time

to the singing mechanics of our voices and the whistling steel hot metal voice of the coming-over kid next door singing "JOHN-Knee" through the screen door into the neighborhood of kitchens calling you out to an ambush.

Mom's yodel called us into supper while Dad cracked through the newspaper. We washed our hands of the afternoon and wiped the soap-dirt on the towel. We folded them before the sound of forks and knives on our plates cleared to dishes on the counter and the Bible rolling back under, and silverware in the sink scraping and rinsing for the dishwasher. Then Dad would roll up the drop rug in the doorway way to the den, shut out convulsions of our maid machine. Then I'd sit on his lap or snap Lego blocks into trucks from my junkyard at his feet, and we'd watch the evening news.
Toch-toch-toughk-tok-tik-tike-toch-type
warm teletype machines from New York,
from announcer, from Cronkite,
from Huntley to Brinkley,
to screen behind white words:
"Morley Safer in Quang-Tri Province,"
single black and white photo
scratched focus tree lined trail
of men with stretchers.
The static voice recites
body counts and tonnage drops.

Dumping the box is the best way
to start playing with Legos,
We rake flat the pile with our hands.
I build a bulldozer with long bricks
and start pushing out a road.
My sister Joan and I sort the blocks
by color, size, number of dots
—twozes, threezes and fourzes, count them
and arrange them for storage.
Then I haul them with a truck
to our construction sight
in a far corner of the room.

Footage from the delta:
line of men runs, in field
all-fall-down gun to shoulder
flopping like fish then stiff.
Tut-his head pops back.
Tut-his head pops back.
View down road of thick bushes
tall trees on each side.
Charred vehicle in foreground
hood in middle of road
rear tires on shoulder.
Smoke in distance rises from left over road.
A couple of thuds close smoke to yellow sky.
Correspondent stops talking.
Footage of men running across road.
Tat, tit, daq-daq, rik,
rat-ruk, tik, tut-tut.

My brother likes to build his mansions
and department stores with secret passageways.
Once he begged Dad to let him up to see
into the push door of the closet ceiling.
A board surrounds the hole inside.
Strips of insulation between beams
go out to the walls and sloped roof.
Dad told us not to walk out there,
said of we did and missed a step
we would fall through into the house.

In the north: exclusive report
from tunnel outpost of Vietcong.
The camera centers down to sand
and water through brush into hole.
Black, then light turning
in flooded storage room.
Switch to earlier footage: the capture,
soldier throws grenade into hole.
Smoke backs into his face.
He helps Vietcong out,
lays them on the ground
hands behind their backs.
"How many tunnels?" the reporter asks.
He talks about the tunnel under trees
threat-of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.
Switch to dirt piles, crater, and water
at the feet of bodies lining the side.
Most of the flat white Legos we use for car roofs, ceilings, and wings have been put together so many times they don't snap together anymore. When our dotted block airplanes come in for landings a fuselage falls away or if we bank a corner sharp the wings slip off.

"In the north, heavy fighting along the DMZ..."


Camera in a helicopter out the side door to gunner behind his gun looking down to the jungle ignoring the camera. He talks little to the says-what? newsman. "There, those trees," Dak-dak-dak-dak-dak.

His smooth cheeks tighten to show his teeth —no beard. Then fisseau, fseauw out the door. A couple of jets drop support, white tracers to a red burst to quick shot on the ground pulling men through door while gunner hangs on the back of the big gun dak-dak-dak-dak.

Back to New York,

"Later in our program, an exclusive interview with the President at his Texas ranch."

The earth rotates into Gulf Oil orange globe. Gusty Irish seamen sing a super tanker into Prudhoe Bay. They stand on catwalks looking to the burn off stacks of refinery coast where the potato people paved fields of green Yeats with asphalt. Sand banks round the tanks balled heads to orange globes to Middleton's Oxidol housewife

to briefing at Pentagon to briefing at White House with correspondent spy in trenchcoat on the blacktop reflections of white columns in rain. Then, "a pre-recorded interview with the President on his ranch outside Johnson City, Texas."

LBJ stretches back in his Caddy guns out of the yard gravel drives down the lane with one hand. He streaks white fence posts and pops a beer. Dad smiles, after all he owns the road.

LBJ talks about his youth points out his school house talks about steers behind the picket fences tells his fellow citizens how it feels to be President of these United States. He draws not looking much at the road. "Goodnight Chet." "Goodnight David, and goodnight for NBC News."

Dad chuckles, "Once a President gets away from the office, he's just a man too."

Dad had to go to consistory at church. He sat ahead in his chair and asked me, "Remember when we saw the President at church in Washington, D.C.?"

I shuffled a couple of blocks and nodded.

The President slouched through the service. His arm bent in the aisle over the bench with his hand on the side of his head.

Mom always poked me for that. The secret service man peeked in a window near the front of the sanctuary. The preacher took the President with him up the aisle. I squeezed out fast to see the black car round the corner and a man on a roof across the street holding a sub-machine gun.

Dad opened the door to the kitchen, rolled back the drop-rug on the floor. He ran upstairs and came down with some papers. At the hall closet light he put on his coat with sharp whispers. He told mom it'd be late. Then he sang me good-bye going into the garage. The dishwasher cut into its last cycle.

Hot smells of the kitchen came into the den. The garage door came down in rumble-hum scrapes to the dead jolt like grandfather clock striking one. "Truth or Consequences" went into its first commercial. I threw a Lego truck to the blocks on the floor, changed channels to "Let's Make A Deal," pushed the button. The tube fizzled grey-green again. Then I went down to the basement and tried to study junior-high geometry listening to my first rock 'n soul.

Bob Boomsma
Thinking Play Seriously

A critique of Johan Huizinga’s book on Play,
Homo Ludens

End of the day
Factory whistle cries
Men walk through these gates
With death in their eyes
And you better believe boy
Somebody’s gonna get hurt tonight
It’s the working, the working,
just the working life.
—Bruce Springsteen

Maybe the factory is modern culture’s Tower of Babel? It
could symbolize modern man’s sinful attempt to gain
technological control over God’s world. Man’s task in these
factories is to run the machines—to make and produce. What
has happened is that man’s making and producing have
been placed in the center of life. Man’s reason for existing,
according to modern technological society, is to produce
marketable goods. All the other ways in which man acts—
singing, voting, and praying, to name a few—have been set
aside as not important and/or irrelevant. Man’s role, accord­
ing to modern Western culture, is to be part of the big
 technological machine that views work only in terms of pro­
duction and economic justifiability. Thus, any working condi­
tion can be justified—even if it means reducing man to a cog
in a factory wheel—as long as he is part of a system that is
economically productive.

The ebb and flow of factory work is such that man, literally,
becomes part of a machine. From top to bottom, this kind of
work is playless. The worker lacks true engagement, playful
busy-ness, in his work. In fact, working eight hours in the
factory makes it mighty difficult to be in the mood for any type
of playful activity once the work-day is over. The play forms
of after work life become perverted. Like the song says—“And
you better believe boy/Somebody’s gonna get hurt tonight.”

Small wonder that a culture that can be symbolically repre­
sented by a factory has not put much emphasis on play. The
counter-culture of the Sixties, in revolutionary reaction to the
 technological society, was in many ways a play at cultural
 theater. Their public protests might be seen as demonstra­tions or stagings of the folly of the American social/
political system. The counter-culture helped to make America
aware that there is more to life than just the working life. But as
we watch many of the counter-culture leaders integrate back
into the blue- and white-collar world, we are left with doubts
concerning the meaning of the spontaneity, creativity, and
playfulness of which they were so fond. Is there no place for
play and celebration in this industrial, technological society?
The existentialists don’t think so; laughter for them is ironically
beside the point.

However, back in 1938, before many of the counter-culture
leaders were even born, Johan Huizinga put together a book
entitled Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture.
In his foreword he writes:

There is a third function . . . applicable to both human and animal life,
and just as important as reasoning and making—namely, playing. It
seems to me that next same level as Homo Sapiens, Homo Ludens,
Man the Player, deserves a place in our nomenclature.1

The focus of his book is a study of play forms as they have
existed throughout the history of world cultures. His main
effort is to understand the place of play in culture and society.
As he does this, he works out a certain understanding of what

1Homo Ludens, Johan Huizinga, Beacon Press: Boston, Mass., 1950, from
the foreword. All future quotes will be indicated by page number in par­
theses.
The child, when he plays mommy, daddy, or wicked witch...creates images that are out of the ordinary.

He views the nature of play to be. Although his arguments are often not well developed, his insights into the nature of play are invaluable. What I'm going to do in this article is present Huizinga's theory of play and then critique it. Hopefully, this theoretical examination of play will touch upon some helpful points in regard to the meaning and nature of play. Certainly, celebrative play must have a place in the Christian life of joy, a joy which this unfresh age of ours so badly needs.

Characterizing Play

The title of the first chapter of Huizinga's book is "Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon." He proposes that play is a "significant function," that play means something as play.

It [play] goes beyond the confines of purely physical or purely biological activity. It is a significant function—that is to say, there is some sense to it. In play there is something "at play" which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action. All play means something. (p. 1).

Huizinga argues that play has a place in man's life because one aspect of man is that he is a player. Psychological and biological explanations for play are misleading, for they reduce the true meaning of play. For instance, if we were to view play in terms of a form of wish-fulfillment that restores man's sense of personal value, then we would be reducing the true meaning of play to the fulfillment of a psychological need. (p. 1)

Although Huizinga holds back from defining play outright, he does discuss various characteristics of play. Here is a list with a note on each.

1. Play is a voluntary activity. It is marked off from the natural, mandatory processes of life. "Play is a function which [man] could equally well leave alone. Play is superfluous. The need for it is only urgent to the extent that the enjoyment of it makes it a need. Play can be deferred or suspended at any time. It is never imposed by physical necessity or moral duty. It is never a task. It is done at leisure, during "free time." " (p. 8)

2. Play is not "real" life. It is a "sphere of activity with a disposition all its own." Play is "only pretending" but this does not mean that it is unimportant, or not serious. "Any game can at any time wholly run away with the players. The contrast between play and seriousness is always fluid. The inferiority of play is continually being offset by the corresponding superiority of its seriousness... Play may rise to heights of beauty and sublimity that leave seriousness far beneath." (p. 8)

3. Play requires order. In play there are rules of order which must be followed. In relating the order of play to the aesthetic concept of beauty, Huizinga suggests that maybe that is why play, like art, enchants and captivates us. (p. 10)

4. Play means tension. When a man washes his face, he takes for granted that he will succeed. When he plays, however, success is not guaranteed. In play there are strong elements of uncertainty and risk which make play a tense activity. When we play, we go after something that is elusive. (pp. 10–11)

The man down the block playing hopscotch illustrates these characteristics. First, he voluntarily becomes involved in the game. He doesn't have to do it, and the reason he is doing it is because he wants to. In terms of the life of the family he supports, it makes no difference whether or not he plays. Secondly, his game of hopscotch is not "real." The struggles he experiences within the game have only to do with the game itself. This does not mean that his game is not serious, for he can be very caught up in his game. Thirdly, the game has certain rules of order—our neighbor must land within the chalkdrawn boxes; he can have only one foot in a box, etc. Also, the game requires a certain ordered response on the part of the man. His body and mind must be working together and be focussed on the rhythm of the game if he is going to make it back to the beginning after picking up his stone. Fourthly, the game causes tension in the man for he is not sure whether or not he will be able to make it up and then back with the stone in his hand without losing his balance or stepping on a line.

Imagination and Play

In his discussion of the function of play, Huizinga, I think, comes very close to proposing a definition for play. The core meaning of the peacock's playing when he displays his gorgeous feathers is, according to Huizinga, that he parades something out of the ordinary. In the same way the child when he plays mommy, daddy, or wicked witch, also creates images that are out of the ordinary. For Huizinga the child's representations are not a sham-reality but "realizations in appearance: 'imagination' in the original sense of the word." (p. 14)

These representations are for Huizinga what play is all about. He feels that we encounter play in one of two modes: as a contest for something or a representation of something.
(p. 13) He makes this comment about the two modes—
"These two functions can unite in such a way that the game 'represents' a contest, or else becomes a contest for the best representation of something." (p. 13) Unfortunately, Huizinga does not elaborate on this thought. But I think he is touching upon something profound.

What does he mean when he says "the game 'represents' a contest"? The world in which a game is played is imagined. Your opponent in the game is not your opponent in real life. The boundaries are boundaries only because they stand for borders which can't be transgressed. So, the game takes place only because the players agree to recognize the game as such. This "unreal" world of game is meaningful as long as the players willingly agree to become involved and to compete with one another. The meaningful tension of a game is present only when the players imaginatively acknowledge it.

Huizinga's second mode of play—"the contest for the best representation of something"—is a little easier to understand. The tension here concerns the struggle that goes on between man and within a single man when together they try to represent or imagine to the best of their ability. We have all experienced joking matches where two people are trying to get the best one in on each other. These are, in a sense, nothing more than two people trying to "imagine" each other as the bigger fool.

The profoundly of Huizinga's approach to play is that it emphasizes the element of imagination (representation) as one of the integral elements in man's play. Play, and games, according to Huizinga, are not only qualified by physical or psychical exertion but also by imaginative involvement. True, man is physically involved in play but what characterizes play is that man imagines when he plays. Art—one way in which man plays—is an obvious example of imagination as play. However, what about a game, like jacks? In what way is a child imagining when he bounces a ball and picks up jacks? I'm not sure what Huizinga's response would be, but I think he would point to the "non-ordinary" characteristic of play discussed above. When a child makes a serious and involved game out of picking up jacks and bouncing a ball, doesn't he become imaginatively involved in a different, unique way—distinct from the everyday world?

Now, I'd like to examine Huizinga's discussion of the relationship between play and poetry. Huizinga opens his discussion by referring to various instances in earlier cultures where poetry was used as play. One example would be the age-old game, played by young men and women, of attraction and repulsion. The parties would act out this game through exchanging verses back and forth—sometimes woing, sometimes refusing. (p. 122) This example typifies the way in which poetry can function as a social game. The parties playfully contest to see who can make the best verses.

More fascinating, I think, is Huizinga's discussion of the play element of poetry. He views the process of poetry as a way of playing. "What poetic language does with images," Huizinga writes, "is play with them. It dispeses them in style, it instils mystery into them so that every image contains the answer to the enigma." The poet, in the process of writing the poem, is playing with images—associating, juxtaposing, and wrapping them stylistically in clever words and phrases, puns, rhymes, and rhythms. The poem itself does indeed become a mystery with which the enchanted reader must playfully bend and stretch along. Huizinga's point is a good one, for poetry is playful in the sense that it is full of "plays."

I'd like to suggest, though, that there is something missing in Huizinga's understanding of play in relationship to poetry. The root of the shortcoming is Huizinga's problematic view of play. This shortcoming is related to Huizinga's attempt to make play an end in itself as the source of the sacred.

The Sacred Source?

I will go about my critique of Huizinga's view of play in a roundabout way. The critique will include, in conclusion, a short discussion of some of my own notions of the meaning of the relationship between play and poetry. Meanwhile, in zeroing in on how Huizinga views play in relation to ritual and poetry, I will try to bring out the distortions in Huizinga's theory of play. My main objection is that he sees play as something more than aesthetic, existing in a sphere of its own.

Before I begin my interpretation and critical analysis of Huizinga's theory of what play is, an important point needs to be clarified. The focus of Huizinga's book is not primarily to theorize about what play is but to discuss the play-forms that have been developed throughout the history of several different cultures. However, his presentation of the various play-forms is done within a certain framework that presuppesses certain fundamental ideas about the nature and meaning of play. I have here chosen to limit myself to a discussion of his ideas on the nature and meaning of play and its implication for aesthetic theory.

It is noteworthy that Huizinga includes his discussion of ritual and play in his first chapter, where he explores the nature and significance of play. Huizinga's willingness to characterize ritual as play (p. 10) points to a certain understanding of the significance of play. Huizinga himself writes: "In the form and function of play... man's consciousness that he is imbedded in a sacred order of things finds its first, highest, and holiest expression. Gradually the significance of a sacred act permeates the playing" (p. 17-18). Huizinga is saying that within the sphere of play man most fully experiences the "sacred order to things." The question that arises in my mind in response to this line of thinking is "Why does man experience the sacred order (which I take as similar to the Calvinian notion of Creation order) any more fully in play than
in, for instance, political activity or social relationships?" Is play some kind of higher activity? Let's look deeper into the development of Huizinga's argument.

Huizinga works with anthropologist Frobenius' ideas on archaic ritual and play in developing his own. Frobenius' main point regarding the meaning of archaic ritual is that archaic ritual is the expression of archaic man's experience of being "seized" by nature. "The reality of the natural rhythm of genesis and extinction has seized hold of his consciousness, and this, inevitably and by reflex action, leads him to represent his emotion in an action." (Frobenius as quoted by Huizinga, p. 17) These "seizures"—referred to, by Frobenius, within the context of ritual as "play"—have ultimate meaning in the expression of something outside itself, namely, the acts of nature. (p. 17)

Huizinga's criticism is that Frobenius emphasizes in the ritual act of play that which is being dramatized (the "seizures") rather than emphasizing the act of play itself. "But the very fact that the dramatization is Played is, apparently, of secondary importance for him. Theoretically, at least, the emotion could have been communicated in some other way. In our view, on the contrary, the whole point is the playing." (p. 17) Something very subtle is going on here. Frobenius' notion that man expresses in ritual his experience of "being seized" by nature is, I think, on the right track. He is saying that man through ritual re-presents what was revealed or shown to him in his experience. This is the base of the Christian concept of revelation, namely, that God speaks His Word to man, and then and only then, man is able to respond in truth.

Huizinga, on the other hand, doesn't tend to think in these terms. For him, play (the essence of the ritual act) isn't primarily meaningfully holy in its re-presenting of a creation.
order. Man’s play, according to Huizinga, is meaningful in
and of itself. It is interesting that Huizinga turns to Plato as his
final reference in discussing the nature and significance of
play.

Play consecrated to the Deity, the highest goal of man’s endeavor—
such was Plato’s conception of religion. In following him we
in no way abandon the holy mystery, or cease to rate it as the highest attainable
expression of that which escapes logical understanding. The ritual
act, or an important part of it, will always remain in the play category.”
(p. 27)

The important thing here is that although he rejects
Frobenius’ notion that ritual-play expresses archaic man’s
experience of being “seized” by nature, he refers to ritual-
play as the “highest attainable expression” of the “holy mys-
tery.” I think a deeper look into Huizinga’s discussion of the
relationship between play and poetry will provide us with
some insights concerning the nature of this “holy mystery”
which play expresses which will, in turn, lead to a fuller
understanding of what exactly Huizinga understands the
nature of play to be.

Huizinga views poetry as man’s most exalted expression
because “for the utterance of solemn or holy things poetry is
the only adequate vessel.” (p. 127) Once again Huizinga is
referring to play, and poetry in particular, as spheres which
are “in touch” with the holy as are no other life-activities. I think
we can gain perspective on Huizinga’s view of play only when we
examine how he sees play in relation to the aesthetic side
of our life. Play, I think, is an aesthetic activity. Huizinga goes
wrong when he separates play and the aesthetic. This separ-
aration is evident in his discussion of the origins of poetry.
Poetry, he writes, is “born in and as play. . . . There is of yet no
question of the satisfaction of the aesthetic impulse.” (p. 122)

done. Everyone in J & L has a dirty,
out-of-the-way hole or corner to hide in
when he’s done with his work. But
Jonesy hides before he’s started his.
The rest of us reluctantly gather our
gear and head up the greasy yellow
walkway of the Millfloor (known as the
Yellow Brick Road) toward the furnaces.
And at last it’s time to work. We enter
the sultry furnaces in groups of four or
five for fifteen minutes at a time. The
enormous metal slabs loom above us,
still a dull red. The jackhammer we man
screams at the hardened metal slag that
collects on the furnace floor. The vibra-
tion blisters hands. Shovels scoop the
broken slag out the door with a steady
rapid rhythm. Goggles fill with blinding
sweat. Wooden shoes begin to smoke.
Fifteen minutes seems like an hour in the
furnace.

Finally the jackhammers and shovels
are silent and we come out sweat-
soaked, black. Our clothes will lie with
the crumpled coffee cups in the green
garbage can at four o’clock.

It’s fifteen minutes in, fifteen minutes
out all morning. By 9:30 my blisters have
broken and the new red skin on my
palms burns with sweat and dirt. I can-
not grip the jackhammer another min-
ute. Old Jake’s calloused hands take
over when my turn’s up.

Finally the lunch whistle blows and we
hobble back down the Yellow Brick
Road to eat.

Back at the shanty we find that Jonesy
too has been busy while we were at the
furnaces. Our Brown Clown has been
up to his usual tricks: every lunch has
been plundered and every dessert is
gone.

Duke swears vengeance for his de-
parted Twinkie as he takes his lunch to
the locker room for his mid-day nap.

Everyone is quiet while they gulp •

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The reason why it is vitally important to view poetry—and play in general—as part of the aesthetic sphere of life and not part of some holy, sacred sphere of life, as Huizinga suggests, is this: play and poetry need to be grounded in the context of Creation. By this I mean that play by nature is one way of getting to know, of being engaged and involved with the meaningful realities of our day to day life. Furthermore, as such, it is only one of many equally valid ways of knowing and experiencing God’s Creation. The meaning of play for Huizinga is not that it aesthetically involves man in the meaningful realities of creation as we experience them from day to day, but that it involves man in the holy which he views as being separate from the creation.

I discussed above how Huizinga views poetry as man’s most exalted expression of the holy. But what exactly did he interpret the poetic process to be? A key aspect of the poetic process is for Huizinga the process of image-making or imagination. “The most we can say of the function that is operative in the process of image-making or imagination is that it is a poetic function.” (p. 25) Regarding its historical development, Huizinga sees poetry emerging right alongside myth. In fact, according to Huizinga, “myth is always poetry. Working with images and the aid of imagination, myth tells the story of things that were supposed to have happened in primitive times. . . . It may succeed in expressing relationships which could never be described in a rational way.” (p. 129) This understanding of Huizinga’s—that the image-making of poetry is the meat and bones of myth and story—is revealing. He has a hold on something true when he emphasizes that the image-making function which characterizes poetry is manifested in all play forms. Yet I think there is something missing in his understanding of the poetic-imaginative process.

The question, raised earlier, concerning why Huizinga would consider poetry to be “in touch” with the sacred as no other life activity still remains to be dealt with. I have discussed how Huizinga, in contrast to Frobenius (who wanted to see play/ritual as man’s expressive, re-presenting response to his experience of being overwhelmingly seized by the power of nature) emphasized that play itself is meaningful—that play, in a sense, has its origins in itself. Also, I explored Huizinga’s discussion of the play element in poetry,
how play serves to make poetry alive. But yet I ended the last paragraph saying something is missing in his view of the imaginative-poetic process. Well, this is my suggestion.

Huizinga fails to see play as the specifically aesthetic way of being involved in the Creation. Huizinga's tendency is to put play in a sphere of the sacred which transcends creation. For some reason or another, he fails to anchor play in the midst of the day-to-day flow of life. In his emphasis on cultural analysis, he does demonstrate brilliantly that play is and must be part of our day-to-day life. However, although his discussion of the image-forming element of play is headed in the right direction, I think he falls short in his reflections on the relationship between play and Creation.

Engaging Creation

To play is to be engaged aesthetically in experiencing the meaningful realities of Creation. When the poet writes a poem about a tree, he comes to know the meaning of that tree in a unique way. The way in which he comes to know the tree is through his medium: words that rhyme, have rhythm, etc. What he does with the words is imaginatively re-present what he experiences to be the important, noteworthy, characteristic features which make that tree what it is. What the poet is doing, then, is playing with the meaning-realities of that tree within his medium. Through allusion, inference, suggestion, hints, and clues of all sorts, the poet playfully points to what he intuitively senses to be true about that tree. The product (his poem is a record of what the poet imaginatively/aesthetically such, imaginatively representative of that tree. As such, the poem is a record of what the poet imaginatively/aesthetically knows about the tree in the same sense that a man economically knows the meaning of a tree when he sells it.

The actual process of writing the poem is not a matter of the poet simply translating a preconceived image of what the tree is into poetic language. The actual formulation of the image is only done through the artist's language (in this case poetry). In fact, this formulation of the image (imagining) is at the heart of what the artistic process is all about. In the doing of the re-presentation of the tree the poet comes to aesthetically know the tree. Although he regards the image-forming function to be central in poetry, Huizinga fails to explain where the poetic image comes from. He tends to put too much emphasis on the poetic imagination being expressive of the "sacred" without ever mentioning what the "sacred" might be. The imaginative process which is the essence of play and thus, a way of playing, is much less mystifying than Huizinga makes it out to be. It is, rather simply, one way of being involved in God's Creation, one way of getting to know God's Word which holds together every reality that we come across in the course of our day-to-day living.

In summary, I've discussed play in relation to games and poetry with an emphasis on poetry. Throughout I've followed Huizinga's suggestion that "image-making" has a key role in all play. The poet, according to Huizinga, plays with images in his poem. I've suggested that the poetic process is a "playing" with the meaningful realities of Creation through a certain medium. In this way poetry as play is a way of getting to know God's Creation in a unique and distinct manner. My discussion of games and the element of imagination was much less developed. However, I rest my case that games should be viewed within the aesthetic sphere of the very fact that the game world is an imagined one. Like poetry (art) I think games are a way of getting to know the Creation. For instance, we learn a great deal about ourselves and other people when we participate in a team sport. We take risks and expose ourselves in ways that we normally wouldn't. Within the aesthetic/imaginative sphere play forms give us a unique opportunity to explore and discover who we are and also the Creation in which we find ourselves placed. In fact I think the primary purpose for our involvement in the aesthetic sphere of life is to playfully interact within the Creation, bringing to the forefront undiscovered meanings that we've forgotten, suppressed, or never knew existed. This is all done within the context of imagination.

The Christian community should take seriously Huizinga's treatment of play in his book Homo Ludens. Play is one aspect of life which has often been shied away from in Christian circles. The Christian community, however, should not come to see play with Huizinga's slant that play is the finest expression of what is "sacred." The Christian community needs to learn how to play within the context of Creation, where God has placed us. There the Christian community has been given freedom to fearlessly and playfully explore the wonders of Creation as given to us by God. Moreover, we do not need to absolutize play as the counter-culture did and make it our cultural ideal in reaction to our "playless" technological society. The counter-culture was trying to break free from their context and thus developed their view of play in terms of an anarchistic view of freedom and creativity. We should approach play from the perspective that within our Creationalist man, along with being a worker, a thinker, and a church-goer, is also a player. This aspect of man should be given its place with the Christian community for the sake of developing a cultural witness that is fully expressive in the many various ways in which man has been given the capacity to be expressive. The Christian community should be singing and dancing, showing the world that we've got something to sing and dance about—for we do!

For most of the ideas presented in this paragraph, I am indebted to the aesthetic theory of Calvin Seerveld as presented in A Christian Critique of Art and Literature and other writings.

Randy swings on the railing and without looking up says, "Who made you, Meer? Did God made you?" "Yeah, God made me. Hey, who made you, Ran?" He cocks his head and grins at me conspiratorially. "God made me too, Meer!" I grin back and we giggle at the coincidence.