The Game Culture within the Power of Tradition

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This report is devoted to some considerations upon traditions concerning the culture of games which transmit from generation to generation centuries-old collective experience which people get while understanding and perceiving the world through games. In the present report we will speak on the following points: the definition of "traditions" within the framework of culture of games, the principles of their psychological analysis, the empirical data, the methods of game analysis, the psychological invariant of game traditions.

The main standpoint of my report is based upon the statement that games in general should be viewed as one of the oldest cultural achievements of the humankind. I would like to give only two examples to prove that games undoubtfully have cultural value, which was already recognized centuries ago. Thus, Stuart Culin (1897) [1], an American investigator, defined a game as "chapter in the history of culture no matter how or in what manner they are played, we find their underlying objects and principles precisely the same". Another scholar E.A.Pokrovsky, a Russian anthropologist and a collector of folk games (1895) wrote about entertaining and educational children's games which exist in every race and tribe, in every religion notwithstanding the level of civilization and cultural development. He spoke about games and toys which "go from generation to generation, from one century to the next one, from one ethnic group to another"[2].

The brilliant proof of vitality of games can be found in numerous archeological, ethnographic, iconographic, literal materials rendering the culture of different peoples of the world.

Among such games are **Top ('kubar' ('volchiok', 'yula'), Doll, Kite, Soap Bubbles, Swings,** many of them was used by adults in some cults primitive cults or in other practics ancient times and later, in Middle Ages became a children's game and was depicted in the iconographic scenes. They strike us by remaining preserved, unchanged, and stable as if to verify the stability of our culture. Now Many of them are used in psychotherapy practices, sports industry, tourism, entertainment, recreation spheres, and in the highly-technological industry of games. Now the leading position in the preservation of game traditions undoubtfully belongs to children.

Another important point of the present report is that the traditions which have existed and still exist in the game culture can be studied within the framework of the theory of V.Vernadsky, who said that the development of science should be not according to a specific field, but according to a specific problem. It must be acknowledged that there are integrated studies of games involving the scientists of different spheres, collaborators representing various non-governmental organizations.

They carry out the realization of some international and cross-cultural projects which aim is to study and preserve the game heritage of the world, to realize the right of a child to games. Since 1973 this idea has been the main one in the activities of TASP (the Association for the Study of Play), as well as I hope it is the main idea of the present conference which represents collaborators from different branches of

science and from different parts of the world. I want to stress the achievement of Russian scientists in this sphere: psychologists: N. Rybnikov (1924), D.Elkonin (1977), ethnographs: Gr. Vinogradov (1930), O.Kapitsa (1928), Dm. Zelenin (1947), Leo Orshansky (1911), philosophers of culture: M.Bakhtin (1965); the collectors of folk games, the authors of encyclopedias of Russian folk games: Eu. Pokrovsky (1895), D.Dushechkin (1903), Vsevolodsky-Gerngross (1933), V.Grigoriev (1985).

1. The term 'traditional' is used in connection with games and toys which are old archaic, or folk, or traditional for a certain ethnic group, or applied to children's. Then such variations are used 'traditions of children's subculture' (in Russian scientific) or 'traditional children's games', 'children's play folklore' (in American or European). Scientists try to apply various criteria to the phenomenon of game culture according to which games can be called 'traditional'. The notion "a traditional game" was accepted at the International Conference on Traditional Games, held in Belgrade in 1985 [3]. It implies **several criteria:** a game should belong to folk traditions, it should demonstrate the spiritual potent of the ethnos, it should be accepted as non-official culture of non-ruling social strata, it shouldn't be fixed in the form of written documents, the creativity of players should be collective and anonymous. **According to the criterion of the historical age** traditional games are described in works of Russian psychologists A.N. Leontiev (1957) and S.L.Novoseolova (1998). **The criterion of patterned similarity in games** which helps to preserve one and the same games throughout centuries, is very important in cross-cultural studies as it

demonstrates that games in different cultures are similar. **Ethnic criterion** singles out traditional games, toys, playing material and forms of playing activities for children and adults typical for peoples of the world and for various epochs. Some games are considered to be part of national heritage, national symbols. They are: cricket for Great Britain, golf for Denmark, chess for India, lapta for Russia. The game awele is officially acknowledged as the symbol of the republic of Cote-d'Ivoire, Mancala – the national game for Africa.

The above mentioned criteria of being traditional have some limitations. The dynamic development of contemporary social culture leads to the neutralization of game traditions, to the fact that they lose their specific characteristic features of being traditional. The oldest, the most ancient, the eternal games and plays which came to life at the very beginning of the development of spiritual culture now coexist with younger in historical aspect and with more traditional or acceptable within a family or ethnic group games and toys, but which only begin their existence, and so their fate is unpredictable. Traditional games, which express the ethics, aesthetics, mentality of an ethnic group are included into the process of civilization, and it wipes out the distinction between ethnically specific and universally common. The fact that we no longer transmit games from generation to generation makes children the main holders and 'keepers' of game culture. The change of the mechanism to transmit game experience leads to the fact that direct and immediate human game contacts exist only in a narrow local group (play ground, family, school), whereas virtual games which lack the direct human contact attract more and more people all over the world.

All these give us grounds to say that the approach to game studies as process is more preferable than that of criteria. First of all, it gives us the opportunity to use the definition 'traditions', which characterize the process of transmission of game experience from one generation as a law of anthropogenesis instead of more static and conservative term 'traditional games'.

2. **The Principles of psychological studies of the traditions of game culture.** The Principle of development in appliance to studies of game culture leads to several psychological approaches to the problem: historical, phylogenetic, ontogenetic (L.Vygotsky) and functional (O. Tihomirov).

The principal of development in appliance to studies of the traditions of game culture is described in the works based on the two approaches to the game analysis: phylogenetic, ontogenetic (K. Gross "the Animal Games", 1896; "The Game of People", 1922; N.Ladygina-Kots "A Chimpanzee's Child and A Human Child in their instincts, emotions, games, habits, and gestures", 1935). The first attempt to use all the four approaches or levels in the analysis of games was made by Avedon E., Sutton-Smith Br. (1971). Sutton-Smith Br. (1997) in the work "The Ambiquity of Play" analyzed the peculiarities of children's play folklore and found out the general regulations of the development of game culture starting from games of animals to children's games and then to adult games.

The use of the principle of development, S.L.Novoseolova says, offers an opportunity to study the most significant levels (time spans) in the development of games: games of animals (the ritualized automatic

mechanisms of playing, games-contacts, games-exploration of the material world); games of humans on the level of anthropogenesis; games of primitive people; games of contemporary people; games of people of the present day historic epoch [4].

The principle of determination is connected with the analysis of psychological phenomena, which determine the existence of a man, his life (L.Vygotsky, S.L.Rubinstain, Ya.Ya. Roginsky, B.F.Porshnev, V.S.Mukhina). In our research the psychological determiners of the traditions of game culture are studied within the framework of historically-limited realities of life: the reality of nature, the reality of material; the reality of social, the reality of symbolic existences of a man (V.Mukhina, 1999).

3. **Empirical data.** Analyzing the process of the development of game culture which forms the game traditions, we base our investigation on the statement by L.S.Vygotsky, who says, that in order to understand to the full degree any level in the development or the process of development itself we must know the result, the direction, the final form into which the basic one has developed [5]. To achieve that aim we used the method of reconstruction of various stages in the development of game culture using the data of empirical material. As a result the empirical material can be divided into 4 chronological historical stages: the stage of ancient history, the Medieval stage, the stage of early modern history (past facts) and contemporary stage (present-day facts). We view the compiled lists as game biographies of generations. For the practical usage, the empirical material is organized as lists of names of

games and toys but not their descriptions, although we have their full descriptions.

The list of the first group is represented by games and toys of Ancient Greece (P.F.Lesgaft [6]; G.Wais [7]; E.Kohlrausch, G.Wagner [8]) and Egypt (G.Wais). In our analysis we also use the list of 'basic' toys (by E.A.Arkin), the list of children's toys of all times, D.Anon [9], the list of 'eternal' toys in the metaphor by M.Tsvetaeva [10].

The Medieval Epoch is represented by lists of European games and toys: the encyclopedia of culture by A.Violle-le-Duke [11], the novel by F.Rable [12], the historiograpgic materials by F.Aryes [13], and also lists of games and toys represented in the iconography: German engravings of the 17th century, the picture by P.Braigal "Children's Games" (Holland, 1560), the engraving by Jacob Heidan (Germany, 1632).

The games and toys of early modern history (past facts) are represented by the list of games in the collection by Ya.I.Dyshechkin (1903) [14], by the list of traditional Don Kossack games, which is based on the data collected from literature at the junction of the 19-20th centuries, and collected from oral descriptions of residents of the Rostov Region born from 1915 to 1950 [15]. These games constitute the stage of the time span from 1920's to 1950's.

The last 'contemporary' stage includes the years beginning from the 1960's of the previous century up to the present day. The sources of information are: the lists of games and toys mentioned in the diaries about the twins by V.S.Mukhina (1960's, the USSR) [16], games and toys of the years 1970's to 1980's from the site "76-82"- 'The

Encyclopedia of Our Childhood' [17], the list of manufactured games and toys (2004, Russia) [18], the list of flash-games on the internet sites [19]. Another source of information is represented by lists compiled by the author of the present report in the period 1995-2005 which include games of the Rostov Region. All in all the material under analysis includes more than 2000 descriptions, pictures of games, toys, which provide the environmental context of game culture. These data are also representative in quantitative, chronological and regional aspects.

4. **Psychological invariants of game traditions**. The comparative analysis of the collected lists of games and toys enables us to come to the conclusion that there are some games and toys repeated in every stage mentioned above: A ball, a rattle, a cart, a top; socio-dramatic games, hide-and-seek, marbles). The field of our special interest was how game traditions are maintained. The cultural invariant singled out and defined in the works on structural anthropology (Levi-Stross, Ivanov, Toporov, Bakhtin, Bernstam, Zelinsky) is understood as the essential condition of preserving traditions in the process of development of one cultural form into another (rituals into games). The game invariant is singled out in the result of the analysis of several components: *meaning or sense (*the closeness of meaning in games and holidays, world outlook, sacred values), *content* (the roles, archetypal cultural texts), *operational* (the set of signal forms and action forms of game expression, the rules of game behaviour, the set of typical game actions). I consider that the psychological invariant of game traditions is an action. We will illustrate this by the analysis of the game 'Boyare' (Russian title of nobility in Medieval Russia). The game is based upon

making the choice of pair which is described in the manuscripts by Nestor in the 15th century. In the Russian youth marriage game 'Boyare' (17-19th centuries) a group of young men stands opposite a group of young women, then they move towards each other choosing a partner, a bride or a bridegroom. The later versions of this game are 'Broken Chains', 'Who you want', 'Whose heart you wish', in which the choice of a bride is regulated. In this case we have the development from traditional role-play in its open form to its compressed form in which content is generalized into a rule. In games of similar type which demonstrate the close connection with ancient rituals we witness the process of deactualisation of traditional ethnic content. The essence of the content is preserved and transferred into a regulation or rule in a new generalized form. What is left unchanged invariable is a set of game actions.

The general analysis of all the games and toys collected shows the existence of 4 generalised groups of actions which preserve game traditions: locomotional, instrumental, life-reflecting, symbolic. The acquirement of locomotion actions mean to use your body and physical environment, the acknowledgement of the order of things in the environment, the distance, relationships, interdependence between them within the framework of the system 'subject – object – subject' and the construction of the corresponding level of reflection.

Instrumental actions connected with dealing with objects reflect the ability to enter the world of objects both related to games and non-related or neutral. The world of objects provides conditions to experiment and manipulate with objects thus forming skills to go from

the stage of object-non-specific actions to object-dealing or instrumental actions. Game culture oriented to the world of objects forms children's fundamental motor skills, operational actions, which enable to deal with dimensions and sensori-motor coordinations, involving the complex of muscular and nerve systems (eye-object, eye-object-hand, eye-hand-object, reciprocal coordination of the left and right sides of the body). These skills are preserved in adult life. The mastering of symbolic actions, which attribute a definite meaning to a originally neutral object, word, gesture, serves as a basis to enlarge the scope of meanings and senses, sign means, 'the parade of all sign systems'. The mastering of life-reflecting actions which originally appear as imitating actions provide for broader understanding of meaning and sense when accepting the role of 'another' in social aspect of the game. In their collective meaning they form the basic game experience. The basic game experience – is the motive and essential condition of formation of individual inner personality, game attitude to reality. Its foundation starts in early ontogenesis through mastering the system of game actions. The basic game experience remains a very powerful factor of creative development of an individual, the condition of his or her entering the world.

Thus, the whole power of traditions of game culture representing human, collective game experience, contributes to and enriches the development of an individual.

REFERENCES

1. Culin St. American Indian Games //*Journal of American Folk-Lore*. Volume XI. October December,1898.N.XLIII.P.245-252
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NOTE: The other 18 references can be funrnished upon request.