

2012 April: Claude Levi-Strauss fused literary text into ethnography. He saw the tunics the Caduveo wore and called them “knightly Indians.” His imaginative-associative faculties led him to compare them to the court figures in a deck of cards so well parodied by Lewis Carroll in *Alice in Wonderland*: “their civilization is undeniably reminiscent of one that European society playfully invented in a traditional pastime.” (*Tristes Tropiques*. New York: Penguin, 1973. Print. 178.) I remember seeing his underlying desire for all things to be linked enlightening when I encountered it. It obliquely illustrated my push to familiarize the unfamiliar. How strange, though, and trivializing, that he should frame it this way. The similitude he saw between the shape of cards and the shoulder-broadening tunics the Caduveo wore, the designs on cards and the balanced asymmetry of the arabesques in their body-painting, led him to parallel the very structural fabric of their civilization to a “pastime”. He did not look at what the game parodied in the society that produced it: the flippancy of human life, the transparent hierarchy from two to king, the inversion of the ace, the cruel rewards of chance.