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Roger Caillois and Marxism: A game studies perspective

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Computer games have only recently been theorised and game thinkers have had to reach back in history for suitable concepts and frameworks in order to build a discipline separate from literature, film and computer science. The ideas of Roger Caillois about the role of play and game in society have been useful in this regard, as these ideas seem to provide a workable taxonomy of how we can analyse games. Caillois was a man of letters, an intellectual, who sought to describe our human condition as a scholar as well as a surrealist poet. Caillois' magnum opuses are without doubt *Man, Play and Games* (1958) and *Man and the Sacred* (1959) where he takes a holistic view on concepts and phenomena like games and play as part of society. Naturally, *Man, Play and Games* has become a key text in the development of game studies as a discipline. That said, we argue that the influence of Marxism on Caillois' writings has not been properly researched within game studies and that this omission from scholarship on computer games has consequences not only for game studies as an academic discipline but also for understanding Caillois' thinking about game and play.

As Caillois study has been the starting point for many iterations and expansions (Juil amongst other), it has become part of an established canon within game studies by now. However we find that Marx's theories, which were an intellectual starting point for Caillois, have not been dealt with sufficiently. We have found no analysis that takes the influence of Marx in Caillois' writing into consideration when applying and/or expanding his taxonomy of games and play to computer games/digital games. The structure of our argument will be as follows; firstly by showing how Caillois' thinking has been used by game theorists. Secondly, we will ask to what extent Marxism was ever a part of how Caillois conceived his ideas and thirdly make comparisons between *Man, Play and Games* and Marxist theory, with the aim of tracing the links between Caillois and Marxism. Lastly we seek to examine the consequences that this have on contemporary game studies. Our aim is to contribute to research field of game studies and the sociology of gaming by providing a better understanding for Caillois' taxonomy. If Caillois is key to understanding the functions of play and games, then Marxism, we argue, is key to understand Caillois.

1. Game Studies and Caillois

In this part, we seek to trace Caillois' writings in the formation of game studies. The issue here is to detect and evaluate how computer game scholars use and abuse Caillois' thinking as laid out in *Man, Play Games*. We will need to establish what features are appropriate and why, as well as what concepts and ideas are dropped on the floor in the rush to establish game studies proper. These dropped or adopted feature will bear significance on how we today think about, study and appropriate computer game as part of society. The first part will examine the influence of Caillois on game studies. It will

trace the long line of references made to *Man, Play and Games* by key game studies figures such as Esben Aarseth, Jesper Juul and Gonzalo Frasca.

Computer game scholars have in various ways picked up Caillois taxonomy of play and game and incorporated it into their work. The first text that properly brings Caillois into play is Gonzola Frasca's seminal article 'Ludology Meets Narratology' (1999). In this text, Frasca sets out to explain games break with other narrative forms and hence refers to the distinction between 'game' and 'play' in English through Caillois' terms of Paidea and Ludus. The former is similar to the notion of free play, while the latter to rule-based games. However as Frasca emphasizes "both *play and game* have rules" referring to the philosopher Andre Lalande, who proposes a distinction between game and play which has only one word in French. It is clear that whether games have rules or not becomes key to the division of the two concepts and at the root of this split is Caillois' "neologisms" as Frasca writes (1999). The bottom line is established that "*Games* have a result: they define a winner and a loser; *plays* do not" (Frasca 1999). It is evident that the concepts of rules and outcome are already part of why computer game differs from other forms of play. However, there is no mention as of the basis of the division from Caillois' side. In his thesis, *Videogames of the Oppressed*, published at Georgia Tech, Frasca expands the terms of Caillois linking them to anthropologist Daniel Vidart and child psychologist Jean Piaget (Frasca 2001: 7-9). What is clear from Frasca's use of Caillois' terminology is that rules lead to the computer while play gets reduced to the activity of the player. We move from anthropological and psychological systems where play is an essential part of the formation and the controlling of society to binary codes in computer that control the computer interaction. The loss here, or what is dropped, is the totality of the system. The computer interaction is not seen or analysed as a way of detecting the underlying structures of society, as per Vidart, Piaget and Caillois, but to remove the player from collective interaction. Computer games become separated from society, as noted by Jan Simons (2007). In a footnote Simons expands

although game theory is not very much interested in rules, it is also not interested in the mode of 'unbounded' or 'free' play that games studies scholars in the wake of Caillois, usually refer to as paidea, not because there are no rules in this mode of play, but simply because in paidea there often is no interaction between decision makers and because there is nothing at stake (Simons 2007).

Paidea is reduced to nothingness because of its perceived lack of interaction between decision-making stakeholders of the game, but this is precisely a consequence of focusing on play and rules. Rules here equate with something at stake, i.e. rules produces meaning and thus meaningful play.

In the first issue of *Game Studies*, a year zero in the words of Esben Aarseth (2001), references to Caillois taxonomy is not prevalent. Markku Eskelinen mentions Caillois in connection with his thoughts on particular of a game situation and here the paidea/ludus distinction get further evolved. More importantly, these are grounded on an assumption that games are "manipulatable", i.e. consisting of controllable components, and that games "create different expectations and orientations in terms of goals, sub-goals and rules, and in the dynamics of ends and means" (Eskelinen 2001). Again the totality of

games is dropped in favour of controllable features that bring about certain outcome. In a way, the ludologists are winning the game because they refuse to accept the big abyss of function and ideology of the computer game. In honesty, this is Frasca perspective in *Videogames of the Oppressed* and continued in Ian Bogost's *Persuasive Games* (2007), where the computed system becomes expressive of the larger systems in lived society. However, in these cases, the goal or outcome of the computer game is thrown into doubt, as it cannot be measured in terms of game mechanics. In persuasive games, losing might mean winning and vice versa. It seems that *Game Studies* loses the connection to the social through thinking games as contained within subsystems. Games and play cease to be part of larger systems only researchable through anthropology and psychology.

David Golombia examines the French term 'jeu' in regards to the use of Derrida and Caillois and argues that dividing the term into games and play in English loses "the social, conceptual, and psychological functions of play itself" (Golombia 2009: 181). Derrida and Caillois, Golombia argues (2009: 183), "worry about activities that prescribe play to begin with" and that losing sight of this means that many computer games are far from being about play. Claiming that work is a more appropriate term than play in computer game, "it seems hard on any account to call this sort of activity 'play' and even less to understand why it is proper to see it as a 'game'" (Golombia 2009: 192). In Golombia's account much of computer gaming falls outside Caillois' notion of play. This makes the distinction between game and play irrelevant and instead we should reinterpret Caillois taxonomy according to the division between play and work as significant for appropriation in computer games. Crucially for our argument here is that we thereby leave Caillois' framework and enters into the realm of Marxism.

2. Caillois and Marxism

Roland Caillois, the bother of Roger Caillois, has an entry on politics in his 'Petit encyclopédie cailloisienne' in which he writes that after returning from war exile to France, Caillois kept away from political activities becoming increasingly suspicious of communism, even theoretically, but foremost avoiding any involvement in the political debates at the time (Caillois 1991: 196). This underlies a disinterest in post-war politics, but a disinterest that break Caillois's scholarship into to distinct parts. The first is associated with the surrealism and flirtation with totalitarianism and the the second with the sociological work, which is weary of political orthodoxy (Frank 2003). In this part, we aim is to contextualise Caillois' thinking with regard to debates circulating round post-war communism and late Stalinism.

As an intellectual in post-war France, Caillois could hardly avoid dealing with Marxism or polemics around Marxist ideas, which circulated at the time. Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Franz Fanon, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and many more – they were all active in the discussion of the role of Marxism. However, this blooming of Marxist thoughts in France takes place later than elsewhere. Where issues of Marxism and its relation to Russian communism had been discussed elsewhere in the 20s and 30s, in France this takes place after the Second World War (Jay 1984: 278). The Cold War was beginning to make it felt by dividing Europe into a distinct capitalist West and a

communist East, which meant that Western Marxist thinkers faced different problems than their bedfellows in Eastern Europe. For Western Marxists the aim was to replace a capitalist system that had led to the Holocaust of Nazi-Germany as well as continued imperial colonisation overseas, while for the Eastern communist leaders the aim was to a consolidation of power. Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844* had recently been published in the West, which pointed toward a more humanistic aspect of Marxism (Bien 1973: x), while at the same time Zdanovism was at its height in the Soviet Union – a communism that saw the return of conservatism and moral values of the arts under the guidance of socialist realism. Western Marxism within the arts was seen as liberating the proletariat to from this conservatism – getting free from morality and inherent patterns of the bourgeoisie.

This split led to two distinct and different version of Marxism, which forced left-wing writers into two camps, for or against Soviet Marxism (van der Linden 2007: 2-3). Caillois was firmly against Soviet totalitarianism, or as he called it, dogmatic Marxism (Caillois 1950: 18). Already in 1935, the French surrealists are said to have broken with the Soviet version of Marxism, but it is in the early 1950s that surrealists confirmed their place among the libertarians and against Soviet communism (Jay 1984: 285; Löwry 2009: 25-26). It is also in this context that we have to locate Caillois' thinking on play/game as a scholar on play and games. As Donald LaCoss observes, "those Surrealists who were most actively engaged in Marxist analysis fiercely attacked Stalinism and openly loathed the Soviet state" (LaCoss 2009: xv). Surrealists were libertarians who found in Marxism a framework for emancipation of the human mind. We argue that it is within this notion of human emancipation that we should see Caillois and his post-war writings.

Roger Caillois is not a Marxist in the orthodox sense of the word, i.e. a thinker who follows the writings of Karl Marx. He is certainly not described as an Marxist by those consider themselves Marxists, such as Simone de Beauvoir, who includes considerations to Caillois' *Description du Marxisme* in a chapter entitled 'Right-Wing Thoughts Today' (de Beauvoir 2012: 113-193). In Simone de Beauvoir's opinion, Caillois was belong to the creative right, asserting in a footnote that although Caillois was linked with the surrealists and engaged in left antifascist activities, "he later attacked communism as a form of imperialism" (de Beauvoir 2012 n4, 184). The fact that Caillois is not a Marxist is echoed by S. Romi Mukherjee, a Caillois scholar, who has research Caillois' career as a poet and scholar. Mukherjee writes directly that Caillois "was certainly not a Marxist" (Mukherjee 2009: 131), which casts our argument into doubts. Indeed, Caillois' surrealism and even his concept of the sacred can be seen as anti-communist since it aimed at describing unconscious processes, i.e. the loss of self. Something that Marxists would fiercely object to since loss of self means the loss of political agency.

This is where Marxism diverts over the function and aim of surrealism, which draw more on Freud than Marx (Jay 1984: 285). So what is the alliance between Marxism and surrealism? Following Albert Camus, Martin Jay (1984: 286-7) argues that it is in their vision of totality between the rational and the irrational that Marxism and surrealism can agree on, but only for a while, because soon they will disagree on the function of the irrational and where it comes from. The Marxists will argue for unity between rationality

and irrationality, but only if rationalism conquers the world. For the surrealist it is the other way around; irrationality has to conquer – something that the surrealist will defend to her death. The difference is evident in the work of Caillois, who dislikes the rationalism of Marxism, but will defend the totality of Marxist analysis of society. Caillois' Marxism is not the rationalist, Hegelian version where logic and the Spirit progress history, but the surrealist's version where "an unmediated juxtaposition of seemingly discordant elements" forms a new totality that was not otherwise imaginable. For Caillois, Marxism, in the face of the Soviet Union, is "too rational, instrumental and utilitarian" (Frank 2003: 279). Caillois claims that, as devised by the Communist Party, Marxism has "instrumentally imposed a Loyolan belief system [that] becomes a form of enslavement; when voluntarily adopted in a secular setting, it is the means to achieve a free and civilized society" (Frank 2003: 280). This is one reason why Caillois insists on the play and game being voluntary.

Caillois's thinking about Communism is the similar to his thinking about play/game. In order for the player to voluntarily be liberated by play/game as a means for a free society, the game has to project a belief system that is beyond a known reality. The player has to willingly disregard disbelief and the game has to remain separate from reality. Caillois writes, 'le jeu [play/game] is no less arduous a school; it commands the player to neglect nothing in order to triumph, while remaining detached at the same time' (Caillois, quoted in Frank 2003: 279). This 'detachment' from self is the transgression potential that play/game has as it can transform life. This is the Marxist potential in Caillois' thinking about games. Different from Marxism, Caillois see transgression imbued with unconscious processes, which ties the ludic to the non-Marxist sacred. Claudine Frank asserts that '[...] both ludic and sacred attitudes here frame the profane, utilitarian attitudes of work. However, ludic transgression is a fiction or simulacrum, and the contemporary power of the sacred rests in the individual conscience and its capacity for absolute commitment rather than the collective orthodoxy of the *ordo rerum*' (Frank 2003: 45). The objection to the collective, the commitment to individuality and libertarian ideals cannot be ascribed to Marx, but the interest into transgressive potentials of human beings is certainly within the reach of Marxism. "The play/game sphere is one of 'creative license', of playful transgression; it is an entirely human and formal creation marked by the freedom of deliberate self-constraint and self-defined norms" (Frank 2003: 45).

Furthermore, we argue that Caillois's concept on games and play resembles the Not-Yet-Conscious of Ernest Bloch, which he describes in *The Principle of Hope*. Bloch says,

A central task [...] is the discovery and unmistakable notation of the 'Not-Yet-Conscious'. That is: a relatively still unconscious disposed towards its other side, forwards rather than backwards. Towards the side of something new that is dawning up, *that has never been conscious before*, not, for example, something forgotten, something rememberable that has been, something that has sunk into the subconscious in repressed or archaic fashion (Bloch 1959: 11, our emphasis).

In Bloch's the Not-Yet-Conscious, we see a similarity to Caillois' vision of play/game as based on its transgressive potentials. For Caillois' concept of play/game, as well as for

Bloch, it is about capturing what has not been conscious before. A process of intellectual thought that is formulate in a synthesis of thesis (game) and antithesis (work). Play/game, thus, can only be productive as a result from considering it as antithetical to non-play/game. Only then can our conditions of being gamers and not being gamers be transgress and thus transformative in a Marxist sense. In Bloch's writings, the Not-Yet-Conscious has utopian potential, which is also the case with Caillois' early surrealism, but foremost it is in *Man, Game, Play* that we detect in Caillois the search for utopia – a place and space that can reveal the not-yet imagined, or that which 'has never been conscious before' as Bloch writes.

3. Marxist dialectics in *Man, Game, Play*

In this section, we seek to carve out the influence that the Marxist totality has on Caillois. The goal is on the one hand to discuss some structural and fundamental arguments that Caillois puts forth and how they relate to the writings and ideas put forth by Marx. Moreover, we will point out similarities between a Marxist dialectics and *Man, Play and Games*. It will be argued that there is a direct linkage between the taxonomies proposed and Marx's analysis of labour. We will divide our discussion into two categories for analysis. Firstly we will look at the concept of voluntary, i.e. that games have to be conducted out of free will and that the activity of play is separated from work. Secondly, we examine the productivity of games and play in order to establish a linkage between Caillois' difference between games and gambling, which can be view as similar to Marx' consideration of capitalism and surplus value.

As has been observed, quite a few commercial games of today replicate hierarchical structures such as feudalism. It is common that MMORPGs for instance, mimic and reflect societal structures that are based on classes, races, economic inequalities and exploitations of natural resources (Catronova 2005). The thesis that MMORPGs fits neo-liberal strategies of accumulation and governance has been explored by Sal Humphreys (2008; 2009) and Adam Ruch (2009).

Caillois states that one of the prerequisites for something to be defined as a game or the act of playing is that the player voluntary participates in it. Play is necessarily an act and expression of the player's free will and he must not be forced into the act of playing. If that happens it is no longer play but becomes something else and different.

It is also no doubt that play must be defined as a free and voluntary activity. A game which one would be forced to play, would at once cease being play. It would become constraint, drudgery from which one would strive to be freed. As an obligation or simply an order, it would lose one of its basic characteristics: the fact that player devotes himself spontaneously to the game, of his free will and for its pleasure, each time completely free to choose retreat, silence, meditation, idle solitude or creative activity. [...] One plays only if and when one wishes to. (Caillois 1958: 6-7).

For example, Jesper Juul (2005: 31-33) does not seem to take the Marxist dialectics into account when he addresses that games according to Caillois shall be voluntary to participate in.

Roger Caillois claims that games are voluntary. The problem is that it is quite unclear what this means. Is it not a game if social pressure forces the player to play? Because human motivation is too complex to be simply explained in terms of its being voluntary/involuntary. I believe that it is not possible to meaningfully describe whether games are voluntary or not. However, it could be sad that games are primarily autotelic; that is, they are mostly used for their own sake rather than for an external purpose. It is very hard to set this up as a clear criterion – the game definition- I am proposing at least partly explain why games are such that this issue cannot be settled (Juul 2005: 31-2).

From a dialectic perspective, the idea that games are voluntary is not in any way unclear. According to Marx, capitalism is based on the illusion that a worker voluntarily enters an employment in an enterprise owned by a capitalist to earn her living. The illusory part of this is the fact that the worker really has no choice but to do this. Either she works or she starves. In a well rehearsed quote by Marx, he says, ‘in the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production’ (Marx 1859/2011: 107). To work is therefore not a voluntary act but a forced necessity imposed by the capitalist structure as such since the capitalist owns the production facilities, the raw materials and the distribution channels. When Caillois says that participating in a game is voluntary, the underlying idea is that the relation between player and game is similar to that between a capitalist forcing a worker to work. The illusion of voluntary from the perspective of the worker is crucial for how we should interpret Caillois’ meaning of “voluntary”. Our interpretation of the aspect of voluntary found in Caillois’ taxonomy of games is based on this Marxist context. He explicitly criticizes Wundt’s statement that play is the child of work saying that such views are ‘decidedly and empathetically in error’ (Caillois: 1958: 163), because it neatly conflates the two concepts. One major reason for Caillois’ attempt to keep forced gaming at bay is the productivity of play/game.

In Caillois’ writings the unproductiveness of games is also to be understood from a Marxist dialectics. On the one hand it is obvious to us that unproductiveness of games as Caillois explains it, is the opposite of the forced labor of the working class producing goods for the capitalist. It is also quite clear that games of chance are particularly unproductive from this perspective. Games may serve as a redistribution of resources, but, as Caillois points out, they do not in themselves produce anything material in contrast to work.

This dividing line between play and work is essential to understand games from a Marxist point of view. The idea of forced labor is put in contrast to the free and separate activity of play. Caillois goes as far as to quote Friedrich von Schiller when he discusses psychological approaches to understand the role of play/game in society: “For, to speak out once and for all, man only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man, and *he is only a completely a man when he plays.*” (Schiller quoted by Caillois, 1958: 163). What Schiller observed was that in industrialized societies enjoyment becomes separated from labor and it is upon this that Marx based his analysis of capitalism.

production. Caillois thus inherited a German tradition of critical social thought where human creativity is outside industrial production.

In its extreme, this would mean that all but play is depriving man from being man and the free will to play lies at the essence of man as a social being, making man completely a man. Work will alienate man from himself, and since the working class does not work out of free will for the employing capitalist, play is the sole remaining escape from the suppressing bourgeoisie. At the same time as Caillois embraces Marx' dielectics on labour, he is highly critical of the Soviet Union and Stalinism despite suppressing games of chance and making them illegal:

The Communist ideal for governing society carries this principle [gambling] to an extreme. It may be debated whether it is proper, in dividing the revenues of the state, to pay each according to his merit or according to his need, but it is certain that payment would not be according to birth or chance. [...] The whole problem is to know therefore whether the complete elimination of the grand chance, unexpected, irregular, and fantastic is economically productive, or whether the state, in suppressing this instinct is not depriving itself of a generous and irreplaceable source of revenue, which may be turned into energy (Caillois: 1958: 158-9).

While one certainly detects the strong influence of surrealism in the way chance can bring about new energy, the unknown as we have elaborated on above, Caillois is also aware of the economic interest that play can have.

In certain of its manifestations, play is designed to be extremely lucrative or ruinous. This does not preclude the fact playing for money remains completely unproductive. The sum of the winnings at best would only equal the losses of the other players. Nearly always the winnings are less, because of large overhead, taxes, and the profit of the entrepreneur. He alone does not play, or if he plays, he is protected by the law of averages. In effect, he is the only one who cannot take pleasure in gambling. *Property is exchanged, but no goods are produced* (Caillois 1958: 5).

This assertion is, in our view, based on a Marxist analysis of capitalist production, since in gambling.

The reading of Caillois with this Marxist context makes it fully understandable that the activity of play is for the player's own pleasure. It is the player alone that out of her own free will enters the separate space and time of play. Separate from everyday work, separate from the production tools owned not by the worker but by the employer, the capitalist. It is not on the direct order of the employer, the capitalist, that the player plays the game. The act of playing is in essence a means for the worker to cease being a worker, for a limited time, and to become, in a surrealist sense, 'something else' than a slave in the bounds of the capitalist. The player needs still to adhere and succumb to the rules of play, that lies within the act of playing, but the worker that becomes a player can freely choose which game to play and hence is free to choose the rules to which she needs to succumb. Playing games are therefore to be understood as an act of voluntary activity in which the worker that becomes a player can throw the bounds of capitalism and be her own master by mastering the game she engage. Playing games voluntary could

be viewed as the antidote needed in order to develop freely his physical and mental energy and not to mortify her body and the ruination of her mind

4. Are computer games anti-Marxist?

Our attempt here is to make a synthesis of the above, pointing towards the implications of Caillois's 'Marxist' social anthropology and totality of play/game (Jay 1984: 281-2). The question that we want to answer is whether this omission has consequences for how we view digital games and play? Are games inherently anti-Marxist since they perpetuate capitalist society? We have shown that Caillois' taxonomy of play and game is widely used in establishing the study of computer game as an academic discipline, but that little attention has been directed at the social totality that Caillois seeks to describe; a totality that bears resemblance to Marx's analysis of human labour. We will introduce the concept of the amateur as a way of defining new markers of gameness and playability.

Caillois asserts that: "As for the professionals ... it is clear that they are not players but workers. When they play, it is at some other game". Just as Marx left it to others to describe and theorize leisure, Caillois excludes the professional gambler and involuntary play. For Caillois this does not exist, because it will remove the most essential part of play/game, the discovery of a Blochian not-yet-conscious. Thus gambling is not considered part of play/game in Caillois' thinking, just as leisure is not part of labour in a Marxist totality. When it is not "meaningfully describe whether games are voluntary or not" (Juul 2005: 32), then it has implication for how we approach the computer game. In a non-dialectic definition, play/game can be anything and everything, since there is no ending to the game. We argue that such definitions of games fail to produce meaning of what play/game is. Labour does not give any meaning outside leisure and play is only meaningful outside work. In this sense, we must apply a Marxist analytical toolbox to understand the essence of play/game.

Involuntary gaming, or professional gaming/gambling, should be equalled with work and labour and nothing else. We believe that Marx's perspective on the amateur as pleasure seeker is at the foundation of Caillois' thinking about play and games, but leaving out this side of Caillois also diminish his search for newness that play/game can reveal. Human creativity was the objective of Caillois when he created his taxonomy. Once we surpass that goal, game studies becomes the lip service to capitalist industry where surplus value is landed at the game company and not with the player. Computer game can produce that surplus value in the player, but the vast majority of the computer games are in fact making the player work rather than play. More often than not, material forces of production make us play computer games, our bodies need the next doze of adrenaline or yet another freemions. Thus, we cannot call this play/game as it is produces more capital to copyright owners of the game rather than the game player. Accepting Caillois dialectics then "if the game produces no goods (or wealth), then professionals or superstars sports do not play, as amateurs do, but work (Groot 2000: 33-34), paid gaming produces only spectacle that can be capitalized through audiences. This is why Caillois keeps insisting on games as unproductive. Some studies on human labour want play to be associated with creativity, e.g. scientists at work are less inventive than those at play

(Styhre 2008: 137), but Caillois would strongly disagree, arguing that a paycheck in fact kills creativity. The distinction is crucial as paid play is little more than professional gambling, work masqueraded as free voluntary play.

Communism was in some sense meant to ‘signal the age of the amateur’ (Brown 2014: 202); a Marxist paradise where we will refuse the identity of labourer bestowed on us by capitalism. Overcoming capitalism means becoming amateur. Once we have surpassed the professional gamer and money gambling we will reach a Cailloisian gaming paradise, which favours redistribution of wealth rather than accumulation of capital. We see an advantage in looking at play/game through the prism of professional/amateur. Workplace gaming can only make sense with such a dialectic – it can never achieve the not-yet-conscious that Caillois saw as the highest goal of play/game.

Conclusion

Roger Caillois was not a Marxist. In fact, he was the opposite – a French patriot, a Gaullist, who fiercely fought against communism and its associated political orthodoxy. Walter Benjamin has carious about Caillois and his tendencies toward patriotism and unity, pointing toward a “pathological cruelty” in the thinking of Caillois (Cheng 2009: n7, 83-84). However, coming from the Emile Durkheim School of sociology, Caillois was aim for a totality in which play/game should be considered. This school of thought was closely connected with the analysis of societies and civilization, making Caillois produce classical imperialist assertions, but which also makes his analysis a totality of human living. This, we argue, is compatible to Marx’s way of analyze the function of labour in capitalist society. Marx’s division of labour is formulated on the premise of exclusion and hierarchy, where one class exploits another with the aim of accumulating capital. The factory owner will, according to Marx, favour exploitation of the work force to accumulate more capital. The system is based on a difference between the working class and the bourgeois class. In order to explain play/game is the same form of totality, Caillois utilizes differences to frame his concept: voluntary/involuntary, productivity/unproductivity and professional/amateur. These dialectically constructed differences allow for Caillois to explain a system within which games are a vital part. It does not mean that Caillois has theorized everything, but that he has looked at a whole, a totality, as Marx did with his theory of labour, and made incursions into where play/game starts and ends.

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