

Enacting aporia: Roger Caillois' game typology as formalist methodology

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ABSTRACT

This game analysis experimentally transposes Louis Hjelmslev's linguistic methodology, for logically deducing semiotic schema from a given text, to the analysis of games. Roger Caillois' fourfold model of game type rubrics is therefore reconceptualized, as a logically coherent analytic framework, from which an analysis might proceed indefinitely. Such analysis was practiced on a Dutch translation of the board game *Lord of the Rings*, to observe how this game manifests Caillois' rubrics of agôn (competition), alea (chance), mimicry (role-playing), and ilinx (disruptive play). Game studies methods akin to Hjelmslev's work already exist, and Caillois' efforts are often reconceptualized. However, this present work finds valuable avenues of inquiry in synthesizing these two thinkers. In extending Hjelmslev's work, stratified images of interlinked categories and components now appear at play in games. By reconceptualizing Caillois' efforts, those two axes, along which his four rubrics seem divided, now point to valuable lines of future inquiry.

Keywords

game studies, formalism, semiotics, glossematics, game type rubrics, agôn (competition), alea (chance), mimicry (role-playing), ilinx (pursuing vertigo), board games

INTRODUCTION

In his well regarded *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, linguist Louis Hjelmslev (1969, 3-20, 114-127) proposes a formalist methodology for the logically coherent and comprehensive deduction of analytical schema. These serve to further the study of language usage, and of semiotics more generally. Even if the spoken word was then generally favored in his field, he promotes a field of linguistics capable of addressing all forms of language, by provisionally schematizing how language forms derive from the purport or substance addressed. Hjelmslev's adherence to logical deduction for this seems driven by an intent to be thorough and comprehensive, when he provisionally defines a stratified set of categories and components, that describe how language schema and language usage inform one another.

Recent game studies efforts, such as those by Ian Bogost (2006, 3-20) and Colin Cremin (2016, 14-30), can be seen to take up a similar formalist methodology. Both describe games as semiotic forms, and both formulate a stratified set of descriptive components and categories that address their communicative usage. Bogost (2006, 3-20) promotes the

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study of those unitary agents that operate in a given game system, to see how these define games from limited and often contradictory inside perspectives. This is meant to prevent those reductive analyses, which so often end up interpreting games as closed systems with a singular meaning in a given analysis. A transposition of Hjelmslev's (1969, 33-41) methodology to Bogost's work would offer a more expansive formal terminology, for describing those functions that a unitary operative in games could be seen to contract, in its relations to other operatives. Specifically, Bogost merely addresses that function whereby a unit operation is seen to relate to game systems at all. Hjelmslev's methodology, in this same case, would lead to a stratified image, comprising at least those sets of game components that a unit operation is seen to account for under a shared category. Hjelmslev's methodology would also account for whether a unit operation subsumes other units, or if units reciprocate one another's operations, or if they are seen to operate separately from a larger system.

In taking up the line of thinking that philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 43-45, 57, 99-108, 502-503) admittedly derived from Hjelmslev, Colin Cremin (2016, 14-30) likewise calls for a formalist consideration of games. Concordantly, he formulates several stratified analytic schema, of isomorphic components and categories that are seen to play into one another. In his initial efforts, Cremin (22-30) extensively defines four components of games, and some arbitrary selection of functions that these components are seen to contract. In defining a game's player, and the unpredictable lines of action projected outwards for them, and the unknown game system that they might explore, and the prescribed possibility space they might then chart out, Cremin neglects to develop the logically coherent analytic schema that might lead him to other conceptual planes for further game studies work. Moreover, I see these four game components, that Cremin outlines, as already defined in a more logically coherent manner, in the earlier efforts of sociologist Roger Caillois (2001). It is to Caillois' work that I therefore turn, for this initial attempt to transpose Hjelmslev's methodology to game studies work.

In the foundational game studies work *Man, Play and Games*, Roger Caillois (2001, 4-14) deduces four rubrics for his typology of games. He bases his efforts on Johan Huizinga's definition of play behaviour, by its imposition of arbitrary agencies and affordances on a section of actual reality. Caillois terms his four rubrics *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry* and *ilinx*, respectively referring to those aspects of games that facilitate competitive, risky, imitative and disruptive play. He then develops a typology of those games that favor one of these forms of play, as well as a typology of societies favoring one or two of these game types. Sociologists such as Joseph Royce (1972, 138-139, 149-151) have since validated the logical coherence and comprehensive applicability of this typology. Even so, literary scholar Warren Motte (2009, 25, 31-34) sees opportunity to collate Caillois' notions of productive competition and disruptive pursuits of vertigo, in defining literary forms of earnest playfulness. Likewise, cultural historian Yoshida Mitsukuni (Linhart et al. 1998, 11-13) conceptualizes a fifth game type to account for certain nature rituals that simultaneously exhibit imitative and disruptive play, relating to the actual and immediate reality of its performers. Hanson Douglas Sessoms (1963, 334-335), Brian Sutton-Smith (1989, 33-42), Thomas Malaby (2009, 205-218), and David Golumbia (2009, 179-204) can each in turn be shown to complicate Caillois' analytic premise, that improvisational and unpredictable games inevitably give way to organized forms of play, as people gain adulthood and societies develop. Jacques Ehrmann (1968, 32-34, 37-38, 52-57) extensively critiqued Caillois' model of these four game type rubrics, and the concomitant axis that denotes how an organized drive for play emerges out of a drive for improvisational play. Caillois can be seen to assume this development

instigating his fourfold of game types. To Ehrmann, Caillois problematically neglects to acknowledge this ideologically charged promotion of organized play, to the detriment of improvisational play, and this promotion of collectivity over individual play behaviour.

More recently, Peter McDonald (2012, 1, 4-12) outlined the semiotic structure of Caillois' arguments, and again took note of this ideologically charged assumption. He notes the presumption of an inherent tension, between the organized and competitive play that games might facilitate on one hand, and the unpredictable chance operations that incite improvisational play on the other. McDonald, however, charted the logical coherence of Caillois' model of game types, and concluded that other assumed aporia, or irresolvable conceptual tensions, might well replace Caillois' essential presumption. Such potential, for exploring other tensions between uncertainties and epiphanies in games, are what McDonald (2012, 11-14) sees Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, Espen Aarseth, and Brian Sutton-Smith respectively honing in on. Such other essential uncertainties might then be investigated, as they are seen to manifest in games, by using this same model of four game type rubrics, but without assuming that this essential tension is demonstrably solvable within any given game. Caillois' four game type rubrics of *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry* and *ilinx*, appear organized along two axes in McDonald's work. The aspects of competitive play and chance operations, *agôn* and *alea*, draw attention towards the universalizing and organizing components of a game, as well as to any apparent essential aporia. The aspects that invite role-playing and disruptive play, *mimicry* and *ilinx*, draw attention to how a game is enacted by individuated and particular agents. Along another axis, the competitive and role-playing aspects might be said to emphasize what's intelligible in a given game, while the pursuit of vertigo and chance operations draw upon the unknown.

To my knowledge, barring perhaps a forthcoming DiGRA publication (Zagal, 2015) that seeks to reexamine Caillois' works, his fourfold model of game type rubrics was never expanded on as intended in this present work. In the following ten paragraphs, after reconceptualizing each of Caillois' four game type rubrics, and those six functions that they might logically be taken to contract amongst themselves, I take note of how I experienced each of these ten aspects materializing in the Dutch translation of the board game *Lord of the Rings* (Knizia et al. Sophisticated Games, 2000). In this board game *Lord of the Rings*, according to my experiences with it, Caillois' four game type rubrics each play crucial roles, when taken as four aspects of this single game. None of these aspects dominates the experience of the game. Rather, the tensions between each set of aspects determine the game's dynamics. Many of the functions that these aspects contract amongst themselves are even physically manifested, or otherwise purposefully left unstated. In order, then, in the following paper, I will go from describing the game's more universal categories for competitive elements and chance operations, being *agôn* and *alea* and the tension between them. I then analyze the individuated manifestations of chance and the competitive, as these appear in the aspects of *mimicry* and *ilinx*, or in its affordances for role-playing and for pursuits of vertigo. All the links and tensions that might logically be assumed between these aspects are addressed as the analysis proceeds. This basic analysis of functions and functives (Hjelmslev, 1969, 33-41), as contracted according to Caillois' fourfold model, is described for *Lord of the Rings* without regarding any narrative contextualization or outside interpretations of other kinds. The following, then, is taken as a first step in transposing Hjelmslev's semiotic efforts to the field of game studies.

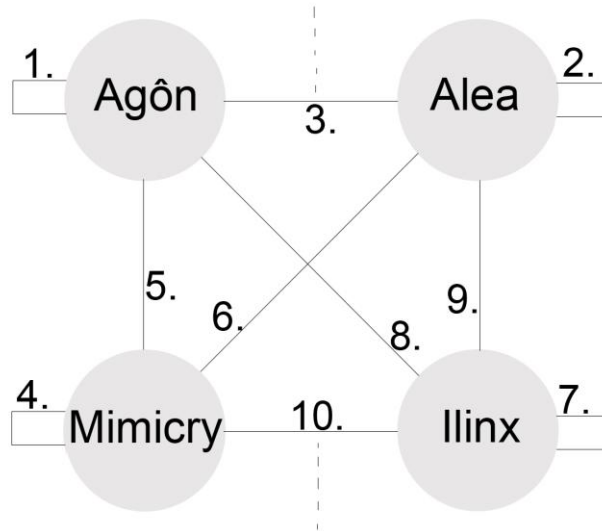


Figure 1: A diagram of the following analysis. Numbered labels imply how each subsequent paragraph pertains either to one of Caillois' four game type rubrics, or to one of the six functions that these contract.

1. AGÔN IN LORD OF THE RINGS

Following the rubric he calls agôn, for his taxonomy of game types, Caillois (2001, 14-17) first describes those games that are defined by their capacity for artificially actualizing an apparent equality amongst the forces they put into play. The games he classifies by following the rubric of agôn emphasize fair and overt competition between players, and a clear division of roles and agency amongst them. In his examples, Caillois exclusively mentions those fair competitions constructed for human participants, but his definition might also cover equal matches between other types of actors. Such artificially fair competitions can never be maintained for the entire extent of a game, seeing as how any imposition of game rules onto actual reality is arbitrary to a certain degree, in Caillois (2001, 9-10) conception. Caillois consequently observes that chance elements or arbitrary outside agents are often used to maintain the illusion of fairness, be they the rulings of a referee, the flip of a coin, or some other form used to defer such judgements. The fair competitive aspect, as emphasized by those games classified under the rubric of agôn, is then always seen to be in tension with the aspect of chance, even as both of these aspects also necessarily select for individual agents that act out their prescriptions, in order for a given game to be put into play.

The board game *Lord of the Rings* immediately confronts its players with this competitive aspect, as the game is unpacked and set up, and as players familiarize or refamiliarize themselves with the game's rules, even before its actors have been assigned their roles. Each of the game's physical elements serves to express the game's affordances, goals and rules through explanatory texts, illustrative imagery and manipulable tokens. Each of these elements, then, furthers the illusion of a fair, or highly overt and intelligible, competition. All of the game processes left unstated neatly represent the influence of chance operations on this conflict. Human players in *Lord of the Rings* only compete insofar as they are each individually scored higher at the end, depending on if they pulled their player character through all of the game's adventure tracks, if they were the last one to bear the ring token that all players are tasked with bringing, and depending on the

amount of defensive capacity tokens they've held onto. Players are more decisively tasked with cooperating, in a competition against the game's many unpredictable hazards, as they help each other traverse a series of fixed adventure tracks to bring an assigned ring token to the end of the final track. A permanent progress tracking board points out the order and amount of adventure tracks to be traversed. This board also records the corruption score that players inevitably accumulate, due to the game's hazards, which puts them at an increasing risk of being overtaken and barred from playing, by their mounting proximity to game's non-player antagonist character, who represents the leader of all the game's antagonistic forces. In turns, each player flips and adheres to one of the shuffled event tiles from a stack, which might prove detrimental or advantageous to the group. Then they either collect action cards or play them, to move the group along on main or optional adventure tracks. Each step taken here rewards the acting player with defensive capacity tokens, or with merit tokens and special action cards at rarer intervals. Everyone needs these, so some chances at rewards have to be deferred. Some positions on the adventure tracks ask players to perform unpredictable actions that might prove detrimental, and then there's a separate track on each adventure board where a fixed series of detrimental events might be triggered in order. Such events might mean that players have to sacrifice supplies, that they might be pushed to the next adventure track unprepared, or that their player characters might become more corrupted, or even that the antagonistic non-player character becomes a greater threat for all players. These physical representations of game rules, goals and events, organized by players themselves with instructions from the game's rule book, render the illusion of a fair competition against the game's challenges, in an intelligible and adaptive form. Given the high degree of physicality to this game, there is a strong sense of overt and fair competition, as all of these physically manifest or consciously enacted game elements are seen to contract into a cohesive and coherent whole.



Figure 2: All those physical game components that render *Lord of the Rings* as an overt competition, wherein cooperating players engage in equal conflict against the obscured chance operations opposing them.

2. ALEA IN LORD OF THE RINGS

Games categorized under the rubric of alea in Caillois' (2001, 17-19) work, are defined by their emphasis on unpredictable chance operations and obscured game processes, are experienced through the withdrawal of their operations from perception by a player. They express disjunction between a player's efforts to engage with the game, and the game's unpredictable responses to those efforts. The influence of chance and this rubric of alea are exhibited by all games, as they point players to look for a competitive approach to such games, and to look for whatever fair elements might be found in the game's chance operations, in order to unite them in a competitive conceptualization of the game. Chance operations might also point players to simply give in to the individuated role that the game affords them, or to play along with chance's disruptive functioning. In itself, the aspect of chance and unpredictability alienates a player from a game's underlying logic, and it trivializes a player's efforts as well as the game's competitive elements. Caillois (2001, 18) describes this aspect as without merit in itself, aside from its encouraging players to cope with the limits of their predictive capacity, and with the inequalities that the world would impose on them. I would posit that this is enough merit. Tokens or pawns that might seem to express chance operations in a game are, to Caillois, merely to feign the affordances for a competitive approach. They are not representative of the actual form of chance operations, which are by definition uncanny and imperceptible.

Players practice the roles of player characters assigned to them in *Lord of the Rings*, and they intermittently take on the deferred roles of other active game elements that influence their efforts. They progress with their group along those several adventure tracks that provide equal and overt chances at staying uncorrupted and carrying the ring token across. Or they might become corrupted and overtaken by the antagonist non-player character. In all this, players will inevitably come across more and more unpredictably debilitating or corrosive chance elements in the service of that antagonistic force. The game's persistent progress tracking board allows for less resupply breaks further on, and the corruption tracker will inevitably bring the non-player character antagonist closer to overtaking player characters. Meanwhile, as players progress along adventure tracks towards the game's positive end state, they'll come across an increasing demand for detrimental dice rolls, along with more damaging sets of events that might emerge from the shuffled event tile deck. Lingering is needed to gather those supplies that allow them to overcome these events, but it also increases the chances of getting caught in them. Even if a player calculates their chances at drawing positive results from the event tile stack, by the tiles already drawn or by their memory of its contents, and even if they calculate their small chances at an inconsequential dice roll, there's still those outside forces that finally determine the outcome of these increasingly influential unpredictable elements. In addition, these physically manifest game elements alluding to chance operations don't account for whatever lack of communication or dishonesty might unpredictably occur amongst the game's human players. The tension between an initially fairly honest competition and the increasing share of chance operations affecting player progress makes for a sustained sense of dread throughout *Lord of the Rings*, which urges players to take the game's competitive elements more seriously, in the face of unknown adversity.

3. LINKS AND TENSIONS BETWEEN AGÔN AND ALEA

As mentioned, the competitive aspect emphasized by the rubric of agôn always already implicates those chance operations required to maintain the illusion of fairness, where competitive elements fall short. In any competitive game, some affordances require players to acquiesce to the unpredictable and obscure rulings of chance operations or

outside agents. At its edges, for Caillois (2001, 15) competitive possibility spaces are always either revealed as arbitrary artifice, rendering a given game meaningless, or the aspect of alea is foregrounded to maintain the illusory competition. On the other hand, games that emphasize chance, classified under the rubric of alea, are described as uncanny by Caillois (2001, 18), and as dependant on a player's belief in the hidden fairness of their operation and in their affordances for a competitive approach. As individual actors work to interpret a given game, they'll always recognize themselves as engaging simultaneously with an explicit system of fair competition and with an obscured and uncanny system of chance operations, since both of these aspects implicate one another. This tension, in whatever comprehensive game space is recognized by players, implies the essential aporia that Peter McDonald (2012, 1-2, 12, 14) points to in Caillois' work, as indicative of the ideological value of games. Aporia, here, means an irresolvable uncertainty. It gives individual actors the freedom to deduce their own roles and agency within a game's systems, and in contrast to literary texts it allows them to formulate their own solution to a problem that remains otherwise unresolved. Caillois (2001, 53-55, 58-61, 74-79) problematically implies, as criticized by Jacques Ehrmann (1968, 32, 37-38), that games are most conducive to the organization of society when they impose clear rules and equality on players, especially so in games of overt competition. The essential tension between competitive and chance aspects not only encourages individual players to deduce their own role in a given game system, through what Colin Cremin (2016, 24-25, 70-72, 80) would describe as the ludo-diagrammatic function of this negotiable aporia, or as the controlled chaos that requires the participatory individuation of actors for it to make sense to them. By encouraging what Hjelmslev (1969, 93-96, 123-125) describes as catalysis, or the provisional induction of an irresolvable category from a given set of components that enter into it, as the basis of a given deductive analysis, but also of potential analyses in other language systems, this tension encourages players to consider the connection between a perceived game system and the actual milieu or other language systems that might surround its illusory world.

In *Lord of the Rings*, chance operations and overt competitive elements do indeed seem to be played out against one another, in a manner that invites further interpretive participation on the part of the players, with either the game in itself or with outside conceptualizations such as a narrative interpretation, or a comparison to the popular book series by Tolkien (2005), which the game is based on. The adventure tracks and general progress board allow players to organize and plan ahead for upcoming chances at rewards or dangerous events, and the game allows for as much deliberation as players want. Still, there are incentives that pit players against one another at unexpected turns, even as they're encouraged to increase the group's chances by deferring reward opportunities and keeping each other uncorrupted. Each detrimental event that unpredictably appears can be countered in various ways if players collaborate. Some dice rolls can even be avoided by using the ring token at the risk of player character corruption. Chance operations always seem imbricated with competitive affordances, in ways that appear narratively apt and dramatically effective. Those incentives that might turn players against one another are in keeping with the player character corruption motif, for example. The repeated need to balance resupply breaks with travel aligns with those antagonistic forces that imply constant pursuit. Furthermore, the gradual increase of unpredictable chance elements seems personified in the inevitable encroachment of the non-player antagonist on the persistent progress board. The competitive aspect of *Lord of the Rings* seems pitted against uncanny chance operations to give a player group the impression of limited power, but power nonetheless, over their own progression through the game. This

juxtaposition also seems to have a dramatizing effect, that encourages active and perhaps narrativizing interpretations of the game's proceedings.

4. MIMICRY IN *LORD OF THE RINGS*

To Roger Caillois (2001, 19-23), mimicry denotes the rubric whereby games can be seen to invite players, to not just partake of the imaginary milieu that competitive and chance elements set up for them, but to actively take on an illusory role in that milieu, and to temporarily shed some measure of their actual personality. Following the conceptualization of a structure of chance elements and competitive elements imbricated in an aporia, then, the aspect of role-playing might be what draws players into a game at the next stage of engagement. In line with narratologist Gerard Genette (1983, 161-211), we might construe such an invitation to mimicry as focalization, or the function through which relatable and personified individuations emanate from a game to draw players in. These roles should be recognizable to such a degree that a game's otherwise abstract affordances for competition and gambling appear as roles that players themselves can take on, or otherwise relate to. Mimicry, or the invitation to role-playing, can be seen to define a range of games preoccupied with puppetry, masquerading or dramatized theatrics, but it also appears as an invitational inherent to any game. As Caillois notes, elements of mimicry appear when one's role is assessed in the pretend-conflicts of predominantly competitive games, but also in the pretense of pursuing a competitive approach to games of chance. He doesn't directly address mimicry's link with disruptive play and the pursuit of vertigo, or *ilinx*. However, he implies that the drive to hold an audience's fascination through mimicry requires a loose and improvisational approach that is not unlike the pursuit of a loss of control in games of *ilinx*. The role-playing aspect of a game, then, appears as what linguist Louis Hjelmslev (1969, 72-74) would term a connective, or a particular indication that the aporia of *alea* and *agôn* leads as much to the definition of mimicry in games, as to whatever alienating and disturbing individuations are its opposite. Consequently, mimicry is here taken to first materialize out of a game's tension between competition and chance, after which it's connection to those unifying aspects might be intuited, before the aspect of *ilinx* appears to players as the opposite of experiences of mimicry. The order of the following paragraphs reflect this assumption.

In *Lord of the Rings*, after individuated human actors will have been addressed by those paratextual elements of a box to be opened, of rule book instructions to memorize, and of setup preparations to perform, each of the two to five human players is then to take on the role of one of the game's player characters. This division of roles is determined by the chance operation of a deck of character trait cards being shuffled and handed out. Each character has an illustrative portrait on these cards, as well as their name and a special active or passive ability that differentiates them from other characters. Following this assignment, a player is asked to start inhabiting their role by first taking the player character token that matches their card, and then placing it at the positive end of the corruption track on the game's persistent progress tracking board. This is an explicit invitation to mimicry, whether or not players subsequently take their player character into account when making decisions to hoard or share supplies, to prepare or rush ahead, etc. Depending on individual disposition and group dynamics, role-playing is allowed to varying degrees, with the game including lengthy story and character descriptions for enthusiasts to contemplate. There are other individuated elements in the game, such as the hefty and bulky antagonist token that always threatens to overtake player characters on the persistent corruption track, or those flimsy cards that might be played for fleeting support from certain non-player characters, or the angular and dangerous event tiles, and the rounded and rigid player merit tiles. To enact these personified or abstract thematic

elements, players shift into their roles when the game's proceedings demand it, in a manner strictly prescribed by the rule book. As such, all roles outside of player characters are governed either explicitly by chance or by the game's predetermined instructions, even if these roles have to be enacted by players.



Figure 3: Some discrete game components from *Lord of the Rings*. These groupings respectively designate player roles, deferred non-player roles and antagonistic chance operations, going from left to right.

5. LINKS AND TENSIONS BETWEEN MIMICRY AND AGÔN

Caillois (2001, 15, 74) describes competition, or games of *agôn*, as dependant on mimicry. They depend on players taking on roles or proposing roles for others to take. Competition depends on this perceived individuation of game elements, not least because opponents and cooperating players need to recognize one another's abilities. A fair competition wouldn't materialize without individual actors being recognizable. Staffan Björk and Jesper Juul (2012) explored the notion of games without human players, as conceptualized in mathematical proofs, for example. They describe how such games would at least lack any relevance to the human condition, and any affordances for expressions of agency, as well as intelligible temporal or aesthetic forms. On the other hand, for Caillois (2001, 21), the competitive element enters into games of mimicry as the prime motivator for taking on another's appearance. The clarity of one's prescribed role determines what chances one sees for holding an audience's fascination in that role.

With any role that players take on in *Lord of the Rings*, be it the deferred roles of non-player actors, or their personal roles as cooperating main player characters, these roles are clearly imposed from within a fair competitive space interspersed with chance operations. Out of this competitive space, various types of actors emerge in clearly recognizable categories and forms, which align with the various types of functions they perform for the competition. Each role appears doubled in its placement within the game's rule system as a whole, while each also clearly depends on players enacting them in specific ways. All main player characters are enough alike, for example, to bring emphasis to the cooperative approach encouraged by the game. Any differences draw attention to how

each character's unique abilities supplements those of others. Non-player personifications in the game are differentiated from these main player characters, in that they lack either a character portrait, or a token to represent them. The antagonist non-player character has its intimidatingly heavy and bulky token, that's similar to player character tokens and also placed on the persistent corruption track, even if it's more abstract and lacking a complementary character portrait. Supportive non-player characters are each represented by character portraits and descriptive texts only. Other non-player characters only appear in those explanatory texts accompanying game instructions beside the game's adventure tracks. Non-personified non-player forces are each individuated with properties that don't resemble player characters.

6. LINKS AND TENSIONS BETWEEN MIMICRY AND ALEA

Caillois (2001, 22-23, 73) dismisses the possibility that role-playing aspects and chance operations, defined respectively as mimicry and alea, could be linked in games. He states that role-playing requires an organized milieu, if an audience is to be addressed. In these same passages, though, he concedes that competitive equality is never fully maintained in role-playing either. A player must at all times feel encouraged to captivate an audience, and consequently requires interpretive freedom when inhabiting a role. In a transparent competition, the audience can predict anything an actor might do, rendering the experience stale and irrelevant. Even if mimicry appears mainly derived from the competitive aspect of a game, it still requires players to inhabit their roles unpredictably. As Peter McDonald (2012, 8-9, 11) notes, in his semiotic analysis of Caillois' efforts, the dismissal of this relation appears to further Caillois' argument that the history of games exhibits an inevitable development, of organized and conscious play behaviour out of more primitive forms of improvisational play.

Lord of the Rings never fully prescribes how a player should directly or indirectly inhabit their roles. The game allows players to role-play to various degrees that remain unstated in the game's instructional elements. Moreover, player characters are randomly assigned as the game is set up, resulting in at least a brief moment in which players are confronted with an unfamiliar and unexplained role. Such moments of abstracted mimicry allows players to contemplate what various actors are at play, especially while they wait on others to perform their turns each round. The lack of instructions on how to perform, besides creating a sense of distance and interpretive spatiality between actors, also creates a constant tension and a kind of allure, when those other actors are seen exploring the limited improvisational capacity afforded them. Players might also note the aforementioned need, in *Lord of the Rings* and other such games, for holding the continued attention of other participants while one performs a role. Each action that each player takes builds towards a group effort in this case. Each performance will be noticed, and one's actions might not sit well with others. It might also, however, inspire them to come to one's aid in some unfortunate turn of events later on. Having established how mimicry relates to a tension between competition and chance, the following paragraphs describe how similar functions might bring out the aspect of ilinx in games.

7. ILINX IN LORD OF THE RINGS

Having previously noted how the role-playing aspect in games, their invitations to mimicry, are an indicator, following Hjelmslev's (1969, 72-74) methodology, of a simultaneous and similar individuation of disruptive and estranging elements, a revision of Caillois notion of ilinx seems needed to account for those elements in themselves. To Caillois (2001, 23-26), the rubric of ilinx implicates a range of games primarily played for their disruptive quality, whereby one loses sight of one's own bodily capacities, to

then play into that loss of control. Caillois exclusively illustrates this with games that physically manifest that estrangement, whether in a given player or in others. Toppling over a set of dominoes is such an example, or hunting one another in a game of tag. To examine how this aspect manifests in a game such as *Lord of the Rings*, which requires little physical exertion, I would follow up on Caillois' (2001, 13-14) purposeful disregard of differences between more physical and more mental forms of games. Concordantly, I would lean towards describing the ilinx aspect as a purposeful pursuit of disruptive play, which incites a mental state of vertigo as well as a physical one. Such mental vertigo is provisionally defined as the nonlocalizable vertigo, or dizziness, that's often diagnosed in psychology, as relating to experiences of anxiety, and to the onset of forms of depression through overstimulation (Savastano et al. 2007, 148-149; Best et al. 2009, 58-65; Clark et al. 1994, 151-153).

The ilinx aspect of *Lord of the Rings*, or its invitation to a pursuit of vertigo, manifests as those elements that disrupt competitive play and role-playing, and which draw out chance operations as individuated and identifiable elements, which a player might choose to pursue. These pertain mostly to the vertigo of a moral order that Caillois (2001, 24) alludes to, as one is invited to play uncooperatively and according to uncompetitive and risky intent. Physical vertigo might insignificantly emerge when rolling a die or shuffling supply cards and event tiles. Physical actions are otherwise subtle and constrained. This again emphasizes the more conceptual competition going on, and the mental vertigo that renders sensations of contiguity and mediation. Players are implicitly motivated by a lack of governance, and by the incentive of individual final score ratings, to unfairly compete against each other, and to impede cooperative progression through the game. If they haven't collected certain merit tokens before a given adventure track is passed, their player characters are corrupted, increasing their chances of being overtaken by the game's antagonist character. There's also a chance on every adventure track board to appropriate the one ring token, with its abilities and drawbacks. It gives the ability to skip over steps on adventure tracks, but it also makes its owner's lack of corruption crucial to the group's ability to traverse the game successfully. Then there's those optional rules that rate players for how many defensive tokens they've stocked, and the rule that allows a fully corrupted ring-bearer to immediately declare themselves as sole victor. This physically and permanently registered scoring competition, and this scramble to stay uncorrupted, both draw players to opportunities for unpredictable acts of solidarity or antagonistic play, even if they agree to deliberate for each of their actions, and even if they agree to be open about their individual character's abilities and resources. As a player takes on their own role in *Lord of the Rings*, they're repeatedly confronted with this sense of contiguity, of the unpredictability of the actions of other players and those individuated non-player actors. This sense increases as supplies dwindle, as player characters get corrupted, and as the influence of chance elements and non-player roles increasingly mediate the group's efforts.

8. LINKS AND TENSIONS BETWEEN ILINX AND AGÔN

For Caillois (2001, 72-73), any relation between competition and vertigo, or the aspects of agôn and ilinx, is a disjunctive one that dilutes the fairness of a competition, or which otherwise provokes a distinctly uncompetitive attitude in players. I'd posit that any game affords a measure of disruptive behaviour in the pursuit of vertigo, at least in the interpretive gap between conscious player behaviour and their exploration of what agency is afforded them. While the pursuit of vertigo might not appear conducive to fair competitions, I take it to be a requirement in games, in the sense that players need an incentive for negotiating their role alongside other actors. This inherent uncertainty of

one another's motivations for playing often serves that function. Moreover, Caillois (2001, 23) describes the pursuit of vertigo, or *ilinx*, as either dependant upon an initial order that players mean to disrupt, or upon an initial chaos that a player is seen to purposefully enter into. The former, here, implies a link between *agôn* and *ilinx* as well.

Lord of the Rings explicitly affords a disruptive approach, to at least some of the roles it puts forth. To supply the game's antagonistic forces with a fair chance against the cooperating players, antagonistic roles are deferred in equal measure to both the chance operations of a dice roll and a shuffled deck of prescribed events, and to the players that shuffle the deck and draw events, and which cast the die. These individuated elements make the role of chance in *Lord of the Rings* intelligible and relatable to players, even as they're fittingly visualized by mere obtuse icons, such as those on the die, or by a stack of events tokens turned face down. This relation between disruptive actors and a competitive ruleset is also visually expressed in those dense and chaotic representations of the game's hazardous fictional world, on the various player progression boards. Another manifestation of *ilinx*, as related to the competitive space of this game, is in how players are never sure of one another's motivations for playing and performing in certain ways. Consequently, each player action has to be negotiated. Playing *Lord of the Rings* becomes a theoretical practice in this sense, as players have to acquiesce to those specific uncertainties they encounter, until they become familiar enough as to afford internalization into one's style of play.

9. LINKS AND TENSIONS BETWEEN ILINX AND ALEA

Between *ilinx* and *alea*, or the pursuit of vertigo and the influence of chance operations, players are drawn to not only defer the causal logic of a game to the unknown, but also to the personal pursuit of irresponsibility, in the face of that acquiescence to uncertainty. For Caillois (2001, 18, 24, 73-74), any engagement in a game of chance involves this disruptive and irresponsible pursuit of vertigo to at least some degree. Such players need to acquiesce to the fact that, in games focused on the operation of chance, one is never fully accountable for predicting the game's consequences. Moreover, the events of games of chance are held to be no one's responsibility in particular, so players are taken to actively seek out irresponsibility by the simple act of engaging with such games.

In *Lord of the Rings*, such a link between *ilinx* and *alea* appears to further a form of sincerity, in relating to the game's conjunction between encroaching chance operations and that majority of actors that bear an unpredictability in themselves, feeding into this influence of chance. Players might feel an increasing pressure to perform well, in the face of increasingly uncertain adversities, but they are like, at some point, to acquiesce to this unpredictability, to then resume playing with a renewed focus. Some individuated elements in the game emphasize this conjunction of chance operations and individuated elements, with their aforementioned abstracted visual representation. The main antagonistic non-player character is an abstracted monumental shape, for example, whose movements are mostly governed by bad dice rolls or unlucky draws of game event tiles. The abstract icons on that die is another example, as are the event tiles, being stacked face down until revealed. While the presence of these representations encourages a competitive approach to such elements, however, their relative obscurity and the general absence of clearly individuated antagonistic actors emphasizes the general uncertainty, that even players in themselves bring to the game's proceedings.

10. LINKS AND TENSIONS BETWEEN ILINX AND MIMICRY

As a final function to be examined in this paper, and the last one taken to be implied in Caillois work, this tension between invitations to role-playing and disruptive play implies potential for further analyses along these deductive lines. It also points back to the essential aporia, implied by the function that the aspects of competition and chance seemed to contract. The link between role-playing actors and their simultaneous pursuit of vertigo might be construed as the experience of conjunctive movements between actors in the game, or alternatively the sense of a confrontation occurring. One experiences oneself playing a given role and exploring one's freedom to formalize that role, amongst other actors that inevitably exhibit both predictable cooperation and unpredictable disruption. For Caillois (2001, 22-23, 26, 75-76), vertigo is inherent in any role-playing experience, as a player inevitable experiences a gap of some sort, between their own personality and the persona that they've taken on. He also imagines the pursuit of vertigo as inevitably leading to some form of escapism in exuberant mimicry. This link between ilinx and mimicry is a dangerously debilitating one, to him, associated with a kind of primitive and unproductive religious illusionism. For Caillois, as McDonald (2012, 7-8) describes, the combination of ilinx with mimicry represents a contradiction to the conjunction of chance and competition, a form of play that's too far removed from actual reality for it to be productive. Caillois seems to retain this antithesis of organized society, to maintain his promotion of those forms of play that he sees directly applying to the organization of actual reality. I would argue that some forms of role-playing, such as in minimalist tabletop role-playing games, require a conscious and deliberate pursuit of vertigo, directed at a freeform exploration of one's ability to improvise and fantasize within a given role. Mimicry and ilinx might be imagined as representative of how games demand the individuation of discrete actors at the highest level. Following Hjelmslev's (1969, 28-41, 117-123) semiotic methodology, this individuation in the performance of games might be further analyzed, with descriptions as exhaustive and simple as possible at each stage of the operation, until those most minute agents at work in games are seen to point back towards the ontological assumptions underlying the analyses. The aspects of mimicry and ilinx each point to further sets of game components working on other strata. Colin Cremin (2016, 14-30), in his Deleuzoguattarian efforts, develops a stratified concept of this type, of single human computer game players. Ian Bogost (2006, 3-20) developed a similar formal game analysis methodology that encourages a more extensive tracing of actors in games by their unitary operations. The sequence of analytic operations that Louis Hjelmslev describes, though, might prove more structured and comprehensive, with its emphasis on deductive reasoning and isomorphism at each stage of an analysis.

In *Lord of the Rings*, as mentioned, one needs to negotiate one's own role in the game with a range of unpredictable actors. This means maintaining the trust of other players and adapting to their role-playing styles. Players have to repeatedly adapt to new roles imposed on them, depending on their chances at being overtaken on the persistent corruption track, and on which player holds the ring token. In doing this players also work together to overcome the game's unpredictable and adaptive challenges, whilst charting their efforts based on those overt competitive elements open to them. This individuated interplay of predictable and unpredictable actors acting, crucial to understanding the game, has to be continuously marked, tracked and negotiated by those players pushing to bring the game's ring token along until all challenges of the game are overcome.

CONCLUSION

With the preceding analysis and reconceptualization, I hope to have shown the potential value of transposing Louis Hjelmslev's semiotic analysis method. I've made efforts to develop a comprehensive stratified conceptual framework, initially based on Roger Caillois' presumption of an aporia between competitive elements and chance operations. This aporia was further shown to be individuated, on a plane of affordances for role-playing and for disruptive play. Taken as the foundation for a formal analysis of the board game *Lord of the Rings*, in this case, this fourfold model of game type rubrics, and its six concomitant tensions, led to the description of those ten functions seen operating in the game. This initial analytic schema might well be expanded on, to include further strata of categories and components, as they might apply to the future case study of a given game.

The competitive aspect, or *agôn*, of *Lord of the Rings* was shown to invite player participation and to present the game as an intelligible, comforting and coherent whole. Those operational elements that aren't as well articulated, they point to unknowable chance operations, or to the aspect of *alea*, as it increasingly influences the game's proceedings. Together, these competitive and unpredictable bases for play invite players to consider what outside forces might be seen to influence the group's interpretation of *Lord of the Rings*. In turn, the competitive elements of the game seemed to invite individuated actors to participate in mimicry, due to implicit or explicit assignments of roles, by way of unitary and relatable elements. Where those roles were taken up by intangible or unknowable actors, or when a player's actions aren't be recognized by the game, the competitive aspect seems to manifest as elements of *ilinx*. These incite the pursuit of vertigo and disruption. Role-playing in itself, then, appears as a pursuit of self-definition. If the player isn't busy personifying their own player character to a certain degree, they're likely keeping up appearances in front of other players. Even when taking on the deferred non-player roles that don't maintain themselves, a player will want to do this properly, if they're to be able to make sense of the game's web of interconnected actors and actions. The lure of disruptive play is always there in *Lord of the Rings*, however, adding both tension and a sense of fun and improvisation to the role-playing action. Players might secretly pursue some of the optional goals of the game, or they might respond to given situations unpredictably. Furthermore, there's the unpredictable non-player actors to account for and react to. Regardless of being clearly individuated, these disruptive elements are so abstracted as to allow for a dizzying multitude of player interpretations, whereby they indirectly point to the encroaching influence of chance in *Lord of the Rings*.

This sense of moral or mental vertigo, manifested more clearly than any physical experience, led to a valuable reconceptualization of Caillois' concept of *ilinx*. The non-physical variety of the *ilinx* aspect, needed to render Caillois' model as a more coherent whole, might prove valuable grounds for further inquiry in future projects. The same holds for my slight reconception of the concept of mimicry; taking the player's mere participation in a game to signal their immediate imbrication with that game, instead of holding to the notion of roleplaying as a conscious mode of distanced engagement with a game. In all, Caillois work has proven extensively applicable in the preceding analysis, and the transposition of Hjelmslev's semiotic methodology seems fit for further expansions or applications in future efforts. Following this extensive practice of an experimental methodology, I feel that the method itself can now be clarified in isolation, and proven applicable to other games in general, and the contemporary popular form of computer games more specifically.

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