

HISTORICAL REFLECTION ON GAME PRINCIPLE ALEA AND ITS PRESENCE IN VIRTUAL REALITY

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ABSTRACT:

The study deals with theoretical and historical reflection on the game principle *alea* and discusses the current trends in applying this game principle in the virtual reality. The key theoretical framework of the text is the typology of game principles by the French sociologist R. Caillois as well as works by other authors who deal with ludological principles. The essence of the theoretical reflection is examining historical development of the above-mentioned game principle and contemplating the use of key features of the principle in the present-day virtual reality, particularly in digital games. The author focuses mainly on the current digital games working with the *alea* principle; mainly on online games of chance and their alternatives. The terminological axis is based on the terms “virtual reality”, “game”, “digital game”, “game principles” and the “*alea* principle”. The key objective of this study is to clarify the current understanding of *alea* on the basis of logical analysis, i.e. to point out its evident occurrence in the media environment, more specifically in the dimension of digital games. The author mentions various metamorphoses of the game principle *alea*, taking into consideration the historical background of media evolution. The ambition of the text is not only to understand and interpret the examined reality, but mainly to specify how the *alea* principle interacts with the environment of virtual reality and digital games. The study works with an assumption that the analysed game principle *alea* has been present in the human society since the times of the Ancient Rome – its occurrence in today’s social and/or individual games experienced in the everyday reality is evident. The author also presumes that R. Caillois’s theoretical postulates are still timely and widely usable – also in new contexts such as the present-day media reality of digital games.

KEY WORDS:

cyberspace, digital games, game, game principle alea, game principles, games of chance, virtual reality

Introduction

Primary physiological needs are the basic needs of every human being. The need for safety, love and appreciation may be considered secondary, but is equally important. Finally, the need for self-realisation is one of the social needs expressing the fact that for humans, creation is a necessity. However, self-realisation should not be interpreted only as a career growth or an exact work procedure. An individual is capable of creation in all areas of life including spare (leisure) time. The process of game can be thus unambiguously classified as one of the areas of interest here. Game represents an important inhomogeneous activity in man’s life; its function



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is not only bound to entertainment, but it can be considered as one of the methods of learning as well as of applying and demonstrating one's experience, social status and feelings. It is an obvious opportunity to develop a certain kind of self-realisation. Games, and even more importantly the realities (socio-cultural, virtual) in which they take place, should not be underestimated and overlooked in terms of scholarly discourse. Their 'hierarchy of importance' cannot be differentiated even by their varied rules or non-uniform essence. It does not matter whether we speak about a game with or without rules, or about a game in which an individual realises himself/herself through competing against other individuals, about a game that includes a transformation of identity, about a group of games having their foundation in 'adrenalin' experience, or last but not least about gambling games, i.e. games of chance. In the all above-mentioned cases, a game is a phenomenon with an added value. It is not just a product of aimless entertainment. It fulfils an important, easily noticeable cultural function, and long time ago it has acquired a sacral character that has been transformed into the present-day virtual reality in many different forms.

The author's attention is focused on the game principle *alea* which belongs to the fundamental typology of game principles defined by the French literary critic, philosopher and sociologist R. Caillois. It is a somehow paradox principle, within which the player himself has little to no influence on the game's outcome – despite this fact the process of self-realisation is still quite significant here. The occurrence of the discussed game principle can be clearly identified already in social life and culture of the Ancient Rome. In this historical period, games based on the 'gambling' principle appeared, at least at the first sight, in different forms, but with identical essence and in high frequency. The aim of our theoretical reflection is to point out various parallels and connections between the game principle *alea* in the Ancient Roman society and in today's virtual reality.

Defining Terminology – “Game”, “Virtual Reality”, “Game Principle Alea”

The sphere of games was studied and discussed by different authors (J. Huizinga, R. Caillois and others) in the first half of the 20th century, i.e. much earlier before digital games, in their present form we can experience nowadays, came into being. Back then, a game used to be perceived only as a part of common socio-cultural reality. Despite this fact various game forms have later projected themselves – in almost unchanged forms – into the virtual reality that has popularised this phenomenon even more. This statement can be applied in the area of game principles as well. R. Caillois categorised his typology of game principles in a certain, unique socio-cultural framework of the 1950s. At present, the digital dimension has formed a brand new communication sphere, an equally important competitor of the 'ordinary' reality. However, the four game principles (including *alea*) have found their use and field of activity even in this virtual, radically different environment.

J. Huizinga's definition of games returns to the idea that a **game** is one of our individual needs, but does not classify it to be a primary human need. He rather claims that a game, already in its most elementary form, is something more than a purely physiological phenomenon or just a physiologically determined psychological reaction. A game represents to him something more than a simple biological or physical activity. A game has, according to him, a meaningful function and its aim is not only the manifestation of a primary self-preservation instinct.¹ A game can be considered as the most natural and the strongest activity in the life of an individual, the activity through which all individuals express their own perceptions of reality and thus adopt a certain attitude – not only to the world, but mainly to themselves.² A. Koltaiová describes fundamental attributes of a game, stating that a game is a “breeding ground” for a number of manifestations – such as preparing for adult life or improving one's own sensory and motor functions. It may even serve entirely different purposes. The author also mentions other, but not less significant characteristics of games, e.g. the meaning of a game as such since a game cannot be understood as a meaningless activity aiming only to entertain. Every game is charac-

terised by its 'activating' nature and contains elements of repetition and ritualization. A. Koltaiová adds that a game is an environment, in which an individual deals with the real world in a different reality.³

Respecting this context, we can speak about the individually perceived socio-cultural reality or about the virtual reality (as has been said, the virtual reality is the one we aim to further discuss here). We, however, believe that the most universal determination of a game is tied to the definition of its meaning from R. Caillois's point of view. He claims that a game activity is a free activity, in which taking active part is never a result of coercive measures. If the opposite was true, a game would lose its entertaining nature and would automatically cease to satisfy individual players. A game is, from his perspective, an unusual activity that is not essential in terms of the daily experienced reality, but is rather an added activity taking place within the ordinary life. It always occurs within exactly specified time and space. As for the studied principle *alea*, the idea that a game is an uncertain activity is definitely valid. It is extremely difficult to foresee any game's future progress, but in case of games based on the *alea* principle it is also hard or rather quite impossible to predict their outcome. Attributes such as unproductive, bound by certain rules or fictional can be considered as negative factors of a game.⁴ In spite of this, games have another prominent positive aspect; they function as a means of defining our 'self'. They allow us to acquire knowledge about our 'mass' nature or about the ways in which we differ from other individuals; it evokes the possibility of free will.⁵ A game is and always has been a firm and (in many cases) also everyday part of the socio-cultural reality. With the emergence of a new, virtual form of reality, a game has changed its outward structure; however, its internal character has remained identical.

P. Lévy sees the **virtual reality** as a type of interactive simulation, in which the user experiences a physical feeling of being absorbed by a situation defined by a database. In his opinion, this virtual world can accurately simulate the real world. At the same time, it allows the users to create their own virtual conceptions that are very different from the actual shape of real world.⁶ S. Gálik also states that the virtual reality is clearly different from the real socio-cultural reality. He defines it as unreal, imaginary or fabricated. However, in philosophical understanding even virtual reality is, to some extent, the reality and, vice versa, the reality – as we perceive and interpret it – is, also to a certain extent, virtual.⁷ The virtual reality is a term that is often understood in relation with cyberspace. “*The term cyberspace (cyber-space) was for the first time used by a sci-fi writer William Ford Gibson in his novel Neuromancer in 1984. The etymology of this word indicates that it is a cybernetic space, which is not identical with the three-dimensional physical space. It is a space that only simulates real space.*”⁸ W. F. Gibson defines the term “cyberspace” as a shared fiction which is experienced on a daily basis by billions of individuals of all nations including children.⁹ L. Rusňáková sees cyberspace as an idealised world of virtual reality which is accessible mainly through digital media.¹⁰ Moreover, S. Gálik draws attention to the obvious ambiguity of these two terms. He claims that “cyberspace” should be clearly differentiated from the term “virtual reality”. We speak about the virtual reality when we describe something artificial, fabricated or possibly less real. On the contrary, the cyberspace is not apparently unreal (e.g. phoning, skypeing). The evident difference between the discussed terms is that virtual reality places emphasis on “reality”, while cyberspace on “space”. Virtual reality includes (in itself) also a space, and that is why we can label it as a superior term.¹¹ However, these terms do have much in common, at least in certain contexts. Both virtual reality and cyberspace may be understood as an artificial world of fantasy and imagination. Thanks to the existence and use of electronic or rather digital technology, our perception of time and space is changing as well; both these factors 'synchron-

1 HUIZINGA, J.: *Jeseň stredoveku. Homo ludens*. Bratislava: Tatran, 1990, p. 222.

2 VÁGNEROVÁ, M.: *Vývojová psychologie. Dětství, dospělost, stáří*. Praha: Portál, 2000, p. 110.

3 KOLTAIOVÁ, A.: Kyberpriestor a hrđina. In GÁLIK, S. et al.: *Kyberpriestor ako nová existenciálna dimenzia človeka*. Łódź: Księży Młyn, Dom Wydawniczy Michał Koliński, 2014, p. 160-161.

4 CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha: Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 31-32.

5 RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L.: Kyberpriestor digitálnych médií a jeho dosah na formovanie identity človeka. In ČÁBYOVÁ, L., JÁNOŠOVÁ, D. (eds.): *Quo vadis massmedia, Quo vadis marketing*. Trnava: FMK UCM in Trnava, 2016, p. 123.

6 LÉVY, P.: *Kyberkultura*. Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2000, p. 64-65.

7 GÁLIK, S.: *Filozofia a médiá. K filozofickej reflexii vplyvu médií na utváranie (súčasnej) kultúry*. Bratislava: Iris, 2012, p. 63.

8 GÁLIK, S.: Kyberpriestor ako nová existenciálna dimenzia človeka. Filozoficko-etický pohľad. In GÁLIK, S. et al.: *Kyberpriestor ako nová existenciálna dimenzia človeka*. Łódź: Księży Młyn, Dom Wydawniczy Michał Koliński, 2014, p. 8.

9 GIBSON, F. W.: *Neuromancer*. Plzeň: Laser – Books, 2001, p. 58.

10 RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L.: Kyberpriestor digitálnych médií a jeho dosah na formovanie identity človeka. In ČÁBYOVÁ, L., JÁNOŠOVÁ, D. (eds.): *Quo vadis massmedia, Quo vadis marketing*. Trnava: FMK UCM in Trnava, 2016, p. 125.

11 GÁLIK, S.: Kyberpriestor ako nová existenciálna dimenzia človeka. Filozoficko-etický pohľad. In GÁLIK, S. et al.: *Kyberpriestor ako nová existenciálna dimenzia človeka*. Łódź: Księży Młyn, Dom Wydawniczy Michał Koliński, 2014, p. 9.

nise' our life and experience. The virtual reality is thus something fictional, a play of dimensions and shapes or imitation of the (ordinary) reality.¹² In general, most theorists have adopted the opinion that cyberspace is a part of virtual reality that balances on the boundaries between reality and fiction. Cyberspace is a term related mainly to the Internet and computers. Despite this generally accepted fact, television and radio can be considered 'virtual reality' as well.¹³ It needs to be mentioned that the Internet and digital media, as they are closely connected to cyberspace, are in some way only successors, i.e. technologically superior versions of the 'older', more 'traditional' means of mass communication (such as television broadcasting accessible through new information channels, devices and multi-media platforms). These 'new' media often integrate all types of traditional media.¹⁴ It is evident that a user 'moving' within cyberspace is, at the same time, a member of media audiences which 'reside' in the virtual reality. Generally speaking, it is a person experiencing two heterogeneous types of realities simultaneously; the already mentioned virtual and also socio-cultural. Cyberspace is a space, in which the user performs certain activities within a reality that is, to great extent, different from the daily experienced (ordinary, common) reality. Such cybernetic environment often induces a strong feeling of 'being real', mostly in the sense of communication via social networks, through the means of the most developed information technologies. Virtual reality, however, offers mainly a space for entirely unreal, fictional, simply imaginary activities. Theorists that discuss this matter place playing digital games among these imagination-based activities, too. Their essence is to offer various options such as representation of the player, being immersed in the story or discovering the chance of winning. The wide spectrum of 'services' offered by digital games is, as we have mentioned above, thoroughly categorised in the typology of game principles.

It has also been stated that R. Caillois is the author of categorisation of four fundamental game principles. These include the *agon* principle (defined by competition, by aspiring to prevail in a combat or discipline in a game, by strict rules and excelling at certain game areas or features), the *mimicry* principle (simulation of another reality, transformation of environment, creation of different identities and imaginary stories), the *ilinx/vertigo* principle (characterised by 'adrenalin' experience, by the emotion of being at risk that is closely related to fear and excitation) and the *alea* principle based on 'fatalistic attitude' of a player who is not perceived as 'active' in the traditional sense of the word as he/she leaves "fate of winning" in the "hands" of the game. Just like *agon*, it also includes the presence of strict game rules.¹⁵ H. Pravdová states that the variant *alea* comes from the Latin saying "alea iacta est – the dice is cast". She considers *alea* to be completely opposite to *agon*. The author also claims that the "fatalistic attitude", which constitutes the essence of this game variant, is in sharp contrast to (*agon*'s) persistence, single-mindedness, honest preparation or improvement of individual skills. Participants become passive players who rely on some kind of "luck in game". Victory is not achievable by the players themselves or their skills – fate is the "judge" here, picking the winners and the defeated. Despite so many opposites, there is an attribute that principle *alea* and principle *agon* share. Both types of games tend to determine very specific game rules for players under identical conditions.¹⁶ R. Caillois, whose work is essential for our study, describes the *alea* principle as a type of games, in which the outcome does not depend on players. Players have little to no power to influence the outcome (result) of the game. It is not about victory in the sense of defeating opponents, but rather about defeating the fate. "Fortune is the only source of victory." The most common examples of 'alea games' in our socio-cultural reality include devices such as dice and spinning tops, playing cards, coin flipping, spinning roulette wheels or drawing numbered balls from a container (lottery). The only hope for the players is to experience 'a moment of being lucky'. Those who play typically do not develop any skills in these types of games; they do not mobilise reserves of their dexterity, physical strength or intelligence. It is a so called "being on a waiting list". What is important here is the extent of player's daring (the risk). The fact is that players risk everything they bet. 'Alea games' are still games

in which players look for justice.¹⁷ The studied game principle shares this feature with the other game variants. The author believes that it is important to bring to attention that R. Caillois specified the game typology during a time period when the virtual reality (as we know it at present) did not exist. The game principle *alea* has transformed in an almost unchanged form from the original socio-cultural reality to the virtual reality, namely to the cyberspace. In digital games of this type – such as Farkle, online poker, roulette or 'classical' Solitaire – players have no power to influence the outcome of the game (the exception here is, for example, so called cheating that still does not guarantee certainty of victory).

In the digital dimension, 'mysteriousness' of a game is conditioned by anonymity of the opponents. This factor is entirely eliminated in all real-life gambling games. If we play against an opponent in the reality, we can clearly define who it is; we are able to watch how he/she reacts. Since players are unable to predicate the outcome, but also the process of the game of chance itself, they try to 'fight the fate' in virtual reality as well. It is a game variant supporting players' spirituality; the players tend to rely on a certain (often religious) belief in something/someone specific during the whole process of the game. They believe that 'something' will help them achieve the victory. In certain circumstances, it can be even stated that there is no need for self-realisation in this game variant. However, card games, for example, force players to think logically, to remember the cards used in the game and consequently predict their opponents' tactics, which in the end creates a high probability of victory. We, in this case not fully agreeing with R. Caillois, point to a certain degree of development of logical thinking and memory training. Nonetheless, taking a risk is still a part of 'alea digital games'. It is evident that players risking in the online environment are more relaxed and even may risk more (since it is often, but not always only about virtual, i.e. non-existent money). In 'alea games' in the ordinary reality players do risk, but there is a higher level of caution that is related to the possibility of losing real money.

Before games based on the analysed game principle became popular in the digital dimension, they had appeared in similar forms throughout centuries, even in the times of the Ancient Rome. The Ancient Rome followed a Latin motto "panem et circenses", i.e. "bread and games", which can be considered a metaphorical expression of living in the contemporary consumer society. The principle of "bread and games" is projected – to a great extent and in an almost identical form – into today's media production of (mostly) audiovisual entertainment. After all, the worldwide popular book and film series Hunger Games that depicts an anti-utopian vision of the future and represents a kind of hyper-modern form of the former 'Roman' social hierarchy (here called Panem), serves as a specific example of using this metaphor commercially.

Historical Reflection on the Game Principle Alea

The very beginnings of the game principle *alea* are dated back to the Ancient Rome. Rome was founded in 753 B.C. when the Roman nation gained control over the territory of Sabins and Latins. Their conflict is, at least in Roman mythology, interpreted as war between the gods of fertility and battle.¹⁸ The Roman Empire copied (and then further developed) a great part of its culture, art (architecture, paintings and sculptures), but also the essence of gladiatorial fights from Etruscans whose homeland of Etruria was located in the area of present Tuscany.

According to Livius, Etruscans came from the lands north of the Little Asia. They created the League of the peoples of twelve cities which were led by Lukumons. Women took part in governing of this state as well. Religious beliefs of this nation were based on determination of fate (interpretations of signs). They used different forecasting methods that helped them make decisions in their lives (observing storms and lightning bolts, flight of birds, examining innards of sacrificed animals). They were able to use the written word in the 7th century B.C. and also were excellent craftsmen.¹⁹ Already during the existence of Etruscan nation, we can speak about the origins of the game principle *alea*. Its essence was not bound to games of dice or card games,

12 VIRILIO, P.: *Informatická bomba*. Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart, 2004, p. 16-26, p. 133-144.

13 SAWICKI, S.: Kyberpriestor a kyberrealita. In GÁLIK, S. et al.: *Kyberpriestor ako nová existenciálna dimenzia človeka*. Lódž: Księży Młyn, Dom Wydawniczy Michał Koliński, 2014, p. 68.

14 PLENCNER, A.: Critical Thinking and the Challenges of Internet. In *Communication Today*, 2014, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 6.

15 CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha: Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 35-47.

16 PRAVDOVÁ, H.: Sociokultúrne dimenzie hier v kybernetickom priestore. In GÁLIK, S. et al.: *Kyberpriestor ako nová existenciálna dimenzia človeka*. Lódž: Księży Młyn, Dom Wydawniczy Michał Koliński, 2014, p. 139-140.

17 CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha: Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 37-38.

18 ELIADE, M.: *Dejiny náboženských predstáv a ideí II*. Bratislava: Agora, 1997, p. 93-94.

19 *Etruskovia obyvatelia Etrúrie*. [online]. [2016-06-01]. Available at: <<http://www.egyptan.sk/clanky/prispevky/zaujimave-prispevky/etruskovia--obyvatelia-etrurie.html>>.

but rather to one significant concept – ‘belief in fate’. Fate and good fortune are some of the main characteristics of *alea*. It could be stated that the belief in forecasting methods and fortune telling as such became the main prerequisite for origins of the analysed game principle.

As we have mentioned above, The Roman Kingdom came into existence in 753 B.C. According to a related legend, Romulus and his brother Remus founded Rome on the seven hills near river Tiber. The period of Kingdom was a period of clearly defined hierarchical structure. The population consisted of Patricians (aristocracy), Plebeians (farmers, craftsmen), Clients (freed slaves), Serfs (free, without property, without rights) and Slaves (not free). The Kingdom was ruled by king who was advised by the Senate; his decisions were accepted by Curiate Assembly.²⁰ Development of the game principle *alea* did not take place in this period.

The origins of the Roman Republic are dated back to 509 B.C. This period could be called a period of democracy, in which conflicts between the poor and the rich were not eliminated. In spite of this we can still speak about partial equalisation of classes of Patricians and Plebeians. Rome’s victory in three Punic Wars against Carthage was a significant event of this period of the realm’s existence. There were also four Macedonian Wars which led to conquering the whole Macedonia (former Greece). Rome became the only and thus leading power in the Mediterranean territory. The end of the Republic in 48 B.C. is related to the murder of Gaius Julius Caesar.²¹ Various ball games (little flexible balls, light balls filled with feathers, big hollow balls, games meant for three people or a kicking game played by a bigger amount of players) flourished during the times of the Republic. The era of the Roman Republic can be considered as the era of wars. The Romans were trying to conquer as much territory as possible. Despite the victories, Roman society was confronted with apparent exhaustion of resources and there was little time for games. ‘Alea games’ were thus not present in two periods of Rome’s existence (the Kingdom, the Republic). The Republic followed Gaius Julius Caesar’s famous declaration “*Veni, vidi, vici*” – “*I came, I saw, I conquered*”.

The last period of Ancient Roman history was the Roman Empire. It was this period that became “the breeding ground” for flourishing of different types of games. It was established around 40 B.C. and lasted to 400 A.D. The Empire was ruled by a triumvirate, i.e. by three imperators, each of them governing a certain part of the Roman territory – Octavianus Augustus (Italy and the West), Marcus Antonius (Little Asia and Syria) and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (Africa). Octavianus was the first ruler who created means of communication that enabled the masses to access information and at the same time supported the established order. He also developed a culture of propaganda; this propaganda included the gods he worshipped. His portraits were often displayed in public squares and temples. During the times of the Ancient Rome, worshipping a certain god was a part of any ruler’s public image. Octavianus identified himself with Apollo, as he considered him the god of order.²²

Roman religion was based on metaphysical tendencies as well as on the interest in historical facts. Roman citizens explained all misfortunes as crises, i.e. disagreements between humans and gods. They therefore used the strength of the gods they believed in to achieve an ideal state of matters in the society. These gods included Jupiter (the god of heavens), Mars (the god of war), Diana (the goddess of hunting and the Moon), Venus (the goddess of beauty, love and fertility), Saturn (the god of crops), Vulcan (the god of fire and blacksmith crafts), Flora (the goddess of flowers and of the season of spring) and Neptune (the god of the sea).²³ The cult of gods was at that time closely related to the cult of the dead. Roman people hoped that a soul of a dead person, once it is freed from the body, takes the form of a god. They also believed that a soul would not be peaceful until there was a proper burial ceremony followed by a burial dinner. The period of mourning ended after eight days.²⁴ J. Huizinga claims that if we speak about sacral, i.e. religious pursuing of happiness and well-being, any holiday in the calendar is important. It is not a coincidence that Roman religious traditions were perceived in the same way as games – *ludi*. In fact, we can even consider them to be specific forms of games. The apparent playfulness

of the Ancient Roman society manifests itself in its sacral nature – even though the factor of ‘playful’ portrayals (flowery, picturesque and lively representations) is more apparent in Greek or Chinese literature than in Roman literary works.²⁵ The origins of the game principle area are closely associated with Roman religion. As has been said above, the Roman Empire had copied the ideas of fate and belief from Etruscans. However, while the Etruscans had believed in destiny, the Romans believed in gods. In both cases it was something intangible, invisible, supernatural, non-material. We may clearly identify an ‘alea sign’ here, which means that Roman people did not see themselves as those responsible for the victorious (or unfortunate) ending, but rather relied on ‘higher powers’, namely on fate, gods and good fortune.

Marcus Antonius identified himself with the god Dionysus (in Greek also called Bacchus). Dionysus and the goddess Aphrodite (the Romans used to call her Venus) were both symbols of Hellenistic generous attitude. To celebrate them, they did not organise feasts, but rather so called Bacchanalia (festivities that included gluttony, sexual orgies and wine-induced violence). One of the most known of these festivals was the extravagant “Lucullan Feast” that satisfied physical cravings, freed from everydayness and strengthened life powers. In fact, all Dionysian cults were strictly controlled rituals. They included various ‘purging’ rituals, reading of religious texts, dancing females devoted to Bacchus as well as unveiling of the big phallus (the reproductive organ of Dionysus) that was supposed to fall on heads of the newly-accepted followers to grant them everlasting bliss. However, instead of rituals, aggressive sexual activities, collective violent outbreaks and criminal acts took place. Dionysus was the god of happiness, intoxication, but also disturbances.²⁶ Similar holiday was Saturnalia, during which nobody worked, taught or fought. Both the free citizens and the slaves had a unique opportunity to devote themselves to feasts, seek entertainment, to go to the theatre, watch gladiators fight or play games. Those were boisterous celebrations, during which lots of people were drunk and drinking competitions were organised. It was these rituals – called religious – that helped gambling games and all games of chance (e.g. game of dice) emerge. During these celebratory days, the slaves were freed temporarily, changing roles with their masters; the masters played servants and obeyed commands of their slaves (they sang and danced for them, showed them obscene body positions). During these days, the slaves could say and do anything without being punished.²⁷ Roman celebrations based on orgies thus became a precondition for formation of the game principle *alea*. All rituals of this kind pointed back to games based on belief in the supernatural. What is more, we can understand them as universally unproductive activities. It is clear that celebrations of god Dionysus were pure entertainment. All people, disregarding their social status, could drink, eat, have a sexual intercourse, punish others, etc. Rituals were means of amusement for all participating individuals. This is exactly how R. Caillois defines one of the key characteristics of the studied game principle. It can be stated that Roman culture clearly created a base for the game principle *alea*, which is also understood as a gambling activity that aims only to entertain and does not produce any valuable qualities related to everyday human life.

Theatre was considered a popular game during Roman times as well. Roman theatres became a space for entertaining performances – mostly during the above-mentioned festivities. The principles of Roman theatrical entertainment related to disguise were adopted from the Etruscans who had not worn masks, but had put on make-up. The theatre quickly became a communication form designed for masses; however, it was not dominated by eloquence, but rather by gestures and mimics. Women could become actresses as well and the number of actors was not limited. Theatrical performances were organised to celebrate military victories, birthdays of emperors and sanctifying of temples. The audience’s favourites were the story of Troy and its fall, music performances, simulations of famous battles or different live demonstrations, e.g. horse rides and appearances of other animals.²⁸ The Romans did not want to perceive the strength of the stories only through sounds. Their pleasure, amusement was mainly associated with the visual stimuli; they liked to watch somebody being close to death, e.g. getting stabbed by a dagger, bleeding and eventually dying.²⁹ Taking into consideration what has been mentioned earlier, it is clear that the culture of the Roman Empire, besides developing the game principle

20 PROKOP, D.: *Bojo média*. Praha : Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2005, p. 28.

21 STEVENSON, J.: *Dejiny Európy. Od najstarsích civilizácií po začiatok tretieho tisícročia*. Praha : Ottovo nakladateľství, 2003, p. 63-71.

22 PROKOP, D.: *Bojo média*. Praha : Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2005, p. 24.

23 ELIADE, M.: *Dejiny náboženských predstáv a ideí II*. Bratislava : Agora, 1997, p. 94-97.

24 GÁLIK, S.: *Dejiny európskej filozofie v kultúrno-mediálnom kontexte I*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2012, p. 64.

25 HUIZINGA, J.: *Jeseň stredoveku. Homo ludens*. Bratislava : Tatran, 1990, p. 339.

26 PROKOP, D.: *Bojo média*. Praha : Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2005, p. 24-25.

27 FRISCHAUER, P.: *Theater – Geschichte. Die Welt der Bühne als Bühne der Welt*. München : M. von Schröder, 1977, p. 423.

28 PROKOP, D.: *Bojo média*. Praha : Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2005, p. 26-28.

29 FRISCHAUER, P.: *Theater – Geschichte. Die Welt der Bühne als Bühne der Welt*. München : M. von Schröder, 1977, p. 423.

alea through various cultural circumstances, also explored new contexts of the game principle mimicry. This principle is, according to R. Caillois, a principle characterised by simulation of a different reality. It involves experiencing several variations of an environment and/or assuming different identities. A game that works with the mimicry principle is thus based on imagination; the players symbolically or literally 'transform' their common identity into a different "self" – a different identity.³⁰ The author considers theatrical entertainment to be one of the oldest games representing the game principle mimicry. Such a complete transformation of identity takes place in the theatre as well – in the Roman Empire, actors portrayed different gods, emperors, common people, but also animals. Theatres, the elliptically shaped buildings made of wood, stone or bricks, often offered the actors various opportunities to represent completely different characters that had nothing in common with their ordinary lives and identities. We have to understand though that theatre differs from a game in its nature; the sense of interactivity that any game is defined by does not take part in theatrical communication. The audience members have no opportunity to step in, only to interpret the spectacles and react to them accordingly.

The previous historical overview proves that the Ancient Rome had its own forms of mass entertainment. If we look away from festivals and theatres to see a broader perspective, it is necessary to mention horse racing in Circus Maximus, hunting of wild animals, watching gladiatorial fights that included men versus men or animals, fights between animals, rhetoric or music competitions, services of female companionship available to high-ranking officials. The most popular, however, was gambling (games of dice and "heads or tails").³¹ J. Huizinga says that during the Roman period, playfulness occurred in the area of literature and art as well. For him, rhetoric was the main characteristic element of Roman literature; Roman fine arts and architecture used shallow decorativeness to mask their clumsy structure. Wall decorations often portrayed scenes and images referring to entertaining genres and their spectacles or bear impression of a dull elegance. The occurrence of entertainment in something as serious as art formed the Ancient Roman society's image of imperfect seriousness. The complex social life of Romans turned into a cultural game, in which the cult rituals were kept as a form that ceased to be sacral. Spiritual stimulation that is typical for art was transformed into ceremonial mysteries.³² The whole society of the given period of human existence clearly indulged in games. The Romans saturated their never-ending hedonic needs by activities ranging from 'action' games based on fighting to stay alive (gladiatorial combat), through role-playing games represented by theatre and actors portraying different characters in difficult life situations, to gambling games based on belief in fate or good fortune.

It was not only adults who sought entertainment and amusement in the city of Rome. Games were a significant part of children's leisure time, too. Their games were not of violent or sexual nature, though. R. Caillois claims that children's game behaviour has two stages, *paidea* and *ludus*, just like the game behaviour of adults. *Paidea* is, in the author's understanding, a primary power that is based on the human ability to entertain and improvise. The second stage, *ludus*, is complementary to the first one and gains its importance at the moment when playfulness no longer relies on pure instincts and becomes organised (when players compete, i.e. fight each other in terms of using physical and/or intellectual skills).³³ As for the essence of children's games, the game principle *alea* is dominant here, too. Roman children often played with walnuts (the aim of the game was to hit a hole), did hoop rolling or took part in running competitions. They also tried to hit stones, solve puzzles ('Which hand am I holding the stone in?'), flipped coins and played "micato digis" ('Guess the number of fingers I will show you for a moment'). It is interesting that it was the children's games that best fulfilled the essence of games of chance (*alea*). Victory in all the mentioned games was presumably based on 'fortune'. It is necessary to point out that contemporary digital games of this type can also be divided into games for adults (poker, whist, other card games) and children's games such as 'the cups and balls' or dice. It is evident that the Roman Empire laid a solid foundation for later development of games that use the *alea* principle; in socio-cultural reality as well as in virtual reality.

The above-mentioned gladiatorial fights were one of the most popular forms of mass entertainment in

the Ancient Rome. Approximately in the 6th century B.C., when Rome was still governed by Etruscans, the Romans were introduced to Etruscan tradition of gladiators. According to the scholarly literature on the topic, the oldest gladiatorial fight dates back to 264 B.C. Another significant clash of gladiators was organised during the burial feast in the memory of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus – it is presumed that 44 gladiators took part. There were already 50 gladiators in 200 B.C. and 200 gladiators in 183 B.C. The number of victims and duration of the fights drew attention of many curious viewers and a new kind of mass entertainment – gladiatorial combat – was born. At the beginning, it was about a man-to-man fight to the death (a part of religious rituals). The gladiators' equipment included a long rectangular shield, a one-handed sword, a helmet and protective plates that covered the most vulnerable parts of the fighters' bodies. Most gladiators were slaves, prisoners of war, criminals, i.e. people sentenced to death or forced labour, and poor people who got paid for fighting in the arenas. Gladiator training was very hard. The winner was given a material reward – a palm branch, a wreath or money. The winners could be granted the right to become free citizens without civil rights.³⁴ Generosity of Roman emperors attending the fights often turned into distribution of food to the city proletariat. Ruins of the amphitheatres prove that they played a prominent role in the city's life and culture – they were always situated in the centre, in the most populated districts. Spanish bull fights, which still exist and remain highly popular, are an obvious continuation of Roman gladiatorial fights.³⁵ Besides the game concepts *alea* and mimicry, the game variant *agon*, also present in Ancient Roman culture, is a centre of R. Caillois's attention. The author says that *agon* is a type of competition that is most often seen in the form of a combat. The opponents enter the fighting ground under the same conditions so the chances of winning are balanced. Those who compete cannot compare their strengths and skills in different disciplines at the same time. It is always just about speed, or endurance, or strength, or memory. The process and, of course, the outcome depend on the players' initiative.³⁶ Gladiatorial fights involved a specific combination of both (presumably opposite) principles. *Agon* manifested itself when the gladiators, as those directly involved in the clashes, entered the fighting grounds with the aim of winning or rather surviving (the possible victory, i.e. survival was only in 'their hands'). Gladiators had to use their strength, dexterity and other physical qualities to prevail over their opponents. The principle *alea* is applied from the viewers' point of view (having the opportunity to place a bet on one of the gladiators – if their favourite one won, they won too). In some cases, the audience eventually made the final decision whether a defeated fighter got to live or die – the Latin expression "pollice verso" refers to a hand gesture used by the Ancient Roman crowds to pass judgment on a defeated gladiator ("thumbs-up" or "thumbs-down").

It is necessary to point out that all game principles proposed by R. Caillois appeared demonstrably during the times of Roman Empire. This period, rich in games, entertainment forms and pleasures, considered games to be a fundamental part of social and religious life. At present, however, these game principles have transformed – in almost identical forms – into virtual reality, namely into dimension of digital games. The author's aim was to demonstrate some degree of similarity between ancient variations of game principles and contemporary games based on the *alea* principle that are situated and played in various realities (e.g. coincidence, belief in a positive outcome, etc.). Today's games in virtual reality can be clearly regarded as the result of media evolution that leads to coexistence, or better said convergence of 'traditional' (mass) and digital media.

Application of R. Caillois's Game Principle *Alea* in the Dimension of Digital Games

The French theorist R. Caillois is the author of typology of game principles. He defines four game principles – *agon*, *alea*, mimicry and *ilinx/vertigo*. Each principle is specific, but there are some features that are shared by all the game variants. The game principle *alea*, to which R. Caillois also attributes individual

30 CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha : Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 40-44.

31 PROKOP, D.: *Boj o média*. Praha : Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2005, p. 26-28.

32 HUIZINGA, J.: *Jeseň stredoveku. Homo ludens*. Bratislava : Tatran, 1990, p. 341.

33 CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha : Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 34.

34 *Tradičia gladiátorských zápasov v starovekom Ríme*. [online]. [2016-06-02]. Available at:

<<http://www.egyptan.sk/clanky/prispevky/zaujimave-prispevky/tradicia-gladiatorskych-zapasov-v-starovekom-rime.html>>.

35 HUIZINGA, J.: *Jeseň stredoveku. Homo ludens*. Bratislava : Tatran, 1990, p. 341.

36 CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha : Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 35.

characteristics, is fundamental for the author of the article. The author uses these characteristics as analytical categories and offers a reflection on alea and its use in present digital games. It is necessary to emphasise that R. Caillois specifies these game principles for everyday (non-virtual) socio-cultural reality; the following analysis aims to prove that they are equally valid for virtual reality.

As has been said above, the games with principle alea are considered to be in sharp contrast to the games based on principle agon. While playing an 'alea game', players are not able to influence the outcome of the game. These games are not about defeating an opponent but rather about 'defeating' the fate or fortune. Good fortune is 'the only hope' the players have. Participation in this kind of games is more passive (in comparison with other game variants), it does not mobilise the players' 'reserves', qualities, physical skills, etc. Risk is a fundamental feature of this game principle – players always put at risk anything they bet during the game. Players are thus 'seekers' of justice and ideal conditions, under which the game occurs. 'Alea games' are about balancing risk and possible gain. This principle rejects concepts of work, patience, skills, qualifications; it eliminates professional values, regularity and training. It can be thought of as a complete mockery of any merits. Games of chance depend on every little detail, on the smallest hint that is considered a kind of 'sign' or warning, on every peculiarity. Playing an 'alea game' means giving up your own will and relying purely on destiny. Gambling games do not tend to bring money to the wisest; on the contrary, anyone can win so the (intellectual, physical, etc.) superiority of certain opponents is eliminated. They are, however, close to 'agon games', at least in terms of certain aspects – since the outcome of the games that use the agon principle can be bet on (alea). 'Alea games' require foresight, imagination, speculation, but also objective and even mathematical methods. Just as other types of games, games of chance are about creating identical conditions for players that are deprived of such fair conditions in real-life matters and situations.³⁷ A fundamental feature of all games, not only the 'alea games', is interactivity. It unveils its true potential within the simulated environment of digital games, e.g. through virtual game characters acting in a certain way. Players directly contribute to the outcome of the game – the amount and degree of influence they are able to manifest is not important here. Interactivity is omnipresent in games; however, its level and scope vary as players, through the virtual character or environment they control, make individual decisions related to using or not using all available interactive options.³⁸ The author has decided to analyse two different types of 'alea games' – poker and game of dice that can be played not only collectively, but also individually.

Poker is one of the most classical and oldest world-famous gambling card games. Just as all other 'traditional' games of chance, poker has been transformed smoothly into virtual reality – into digital games. At present, we may mention specific commercial games such as Texas HoldEm Poker,³⁹ the game taking place directly on social network Facebook, or PokerStars⁴⁰ (also an online poker game) and many others. The rules of poker have not changed along with the change of reality the game is played in; at least not significantly. The most noticeable change, however, is frequent elimination of real opponents, for example in Texas HoldEm Poker. Real persons thus compete against virtual players ('avatars' created by the game producers). PokerStars, on the other hand, also allows users to play the game virtually, but their opponents and the money they risk are real. Based on this fact, the author divides online gambling card games into two categories virtually-virtual (real persons versus computers, no real money) and virtually-real (real persons against real persons, risking real money in virtual reality). In general, both mentioned types of online poker require no physical competence; the players do not meet 'face to face' with their (virtual or real) opponents and have little to no power to influence the chances of victory. Online gambling card games are games of chance (alea) that, at least at the first sight, have nothing to do with games based on agon.

The paradox is that current popularity of digital games involving the alea principle has been built around star personas, i.e. celebrity endorsers such as world-famous sportsmen (agon) who have played these games for real or pretended doing so for marketing purposes. They are sport celebrities who, thanks to direct

participation in 'alea games', helped to intensify the apparent growth of media audience of a particular game. For instance, advertising and promotion activities related to PokerStars include various sport celebrity endorsers – highly successful Spanish tennis player Rafael Nadal, once famous Brazilian footballer Ronaldo, former cricket player Shane Warne from Australia, German tennis champion Boris Becker and other easily recognisable sportsmen.⁴¹

While playing online poker, the players really cannot influence their chances of victory, at least not significantly. If they could, all of them would be able to win and the main purpose of this game – uniqueness and the feeling of 'being luckier than others' the winner gains – would disappear. Despite the fact that online card games allow us to compete against virtual or real opponents, we actually compete against the fate. The players believe that some kind of 'good fortune' influences selection of their cards and cards their opponents play with; they try to 'win' the favour of destiny. A certain religious, ritual character of card gambling can be perceived here. Many players, before entering the game, often perform a specific ritual (for example, imagining the cards to be obtained and so on). Some of them also put their faith in endless types of talismans which they believe will bring them luck.

The hope of achieving victory by luck is not the only consequence of the fact that it is impossible or hardly possible to influence the outcome of 'alea games'. Even though players follow a set of clearly specified rules, they do not remain entirely passive. They always try to use previous experience in order to 'interfere', to (possibly) influence the final result. They use logical thinking, foresight and memory but they may also be physically capable of changing the result. In certain cases they do not only passively wait for the final result of the game. Based on this, they are considered to be 'semi-active'. Some players are even able to influence the outcome of the game they play and the gain itself by cheating (so called bluffing, i.e. breaking the rules). In the virtual reality, it is much more difficult to cheat, though (but not impossible). The element of risking also remains unchanged. It is not always required to risk a real sum of money in the online environment. Less experienced as well as cautious players can play poker using virtual (unreal) money. Poker games do not require any minimum level of 'quality' from their players; that is why 'alea games' are considered to be the most ideal in terms of equal conditions for everyone and preserve a quite high level of fairness. As have been pointed out above, this principle rejects work, patience, qualification, eliminates professional values, regularity, training. The players really do not need to have any considerable physical strength, they are not forced to go through special trainings or courses or supposed to obtain university education in order to play better. The only valid requirement is to know the rules of poker. It is a paradoxical game in which a player's socio-demographic determination (age, gender, level of education and income) brings him/her neither advantages nor disadvantages.

'Alea games' are based on details. In the online environment, however, there is again a slight adjustment of characteristics of this game principle (as defined by R. Caillois). In a poker game played in real social environment, it is the visual part of the game that is important. Players perceive their opponents' gestures, words and feelings; even the slightest smile can trigger suspicion. Facial expressions and ways of gesticulation often allow players to 'read' their opponents' tactics (it may be possible to predict their future behaviour or find out how far they are from victory). In a poker game played in virtual reality, players do not really see anyone, not even their real opponents; any evaluation of the current status, any prediction of 'behaviour' in a specific situation is done only by analysing the cards on the gaming table. This confirms another key feature of 'alea games' – players have to foresee, speculate, imagine, but also employ objective and mathematical measures. In this sense online poker is not a 'typical alea game' as players do not tend to give up their own will. This fact is also quite obvious in so called mini games that are often integrated into bigger game environments based on other game principle. Let us point out an example – one of the most popular digital role-playing games (the mimicry principle), the Mass Effect series, includes various mini games that do not need to be played (it is, in fact, every player's free choice to proceed without playing this addition). One of these mini games, a mini game called Quasar machine (a gaming machine located in virtual casino) allows the players to win or lose credits

37 CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha: Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 37-40.

38 ZLATOŠ, P.: Digitálna technológia a interaktivita. In MALÍČEK, J., ZLATOŠ, P., MALÍČKOVÁ, M.: *Zborník o populárnej kultúre: Popkultúrny hrdina vo virtuálnej realite*. Nitra: UKF, 2008, p. 39-47.

39 *Texas HoldEm Poker* (Facebook App). [Digital Game]. Barnsley: Viral Ltd., 2016.

40 *PokerStars*. [Digital Game]. Ta' Xbiex: Rational Gaming Europe Ltd., 2001-2016.

41 *Five Sports Legends Who Also Love to Play Poker*. Released on 3rd September 2013. [online]. [2016-08-31]. Available at: <<http://www.mirror.co.uk/features/poker/five-sports-legends-who-also-2247887>>.

(unreal in-game money) that can be used for purchasing any goods or upgrades the game's hero needs. One of the non-playable characters the hero meets, Schells, has developed a system to cheat on Quasar by using a device to record wins and losses. His device slightly increases the chance of winning, but gets him thrown out for cheating. Commander Shepard, the main hero has the opportunity to help Schells in perfecting his device by winning several games of Quasar.⁴² This example illustrates how cheating strategies may work in the virtual reality – however, it seems that such kind of cheating is possible only in games where no real money is involved.

The previous arguments indicate that the concept of R. Caillois's game principle *alea* has transformed, but only to the necessary extent, in order to adapt to the (impersonal) online environment. Virtual reality has brought several innovations. Firstly, we need to acknowledge an apparent absence of real-life, physically present opponents; there does not have to be a really existing opponent 'on the other side of the Net', but it may be only an avatar created by the producers. Even real opponents are relatively anonymous. On the other hand, virtual reality has brought additional risks, too. While playing poker or other gambling game in its traditional, i.e. non-virtual form, players (if they do decide to play with real money, of course) play with real money or risk losing other valuable items. On the other hand, cyberspace also allows us to 'gamble' with virtual money so the degree of risk may be zero. This fact poses a possible threat – if a player decides to risk real money (PokerStars) and loses, he/she may perceive this loss as less real or even unreal. Even though the virtual reality needs to be distinguished from the ordinary reality, the possible loss of money related to online gambling is very real and could complicate the real life significantly. The degree to which a player can influence the outcome of the game is also disputable. That is why we do not label players as solely passive or strictly active. The analysed type of digital game thus reflects the current trends in game production, but also clearly confirms the timeless character of the game principle *alea*.

It is once again important to mention that there are digital games that use some aspects of the game principle *alea* but are not based on it predominantly. These are usually mainstream digital games (as in the example we have used above) that diversify their content by implementation of so called mini games – small, voluntarily played entertaining additions that players can (but do not have to) play in order to advance in the game. We are speaking about digital games that work with various genres and game principles – such as massively popular title *The Witcher 3 – The Wild Hunt*.⁴³ This role-playing game introduces a proud and tough fighter – the Witcher, i.e. the monster hunter (the mimicry principle). Authenticity of this principle is based on dialogues the main character engages in – he talks with other virtual characters that populate the fictional world. Players are able to choose questions and answers and make decisions, which creates a certain feeling of autonomy, a feeling of more apparent, deeper identification with the game avatar – the player controls the main character and most of his actions. Within the story, players are able to assume smaller 'sub-roles' such as a boxer, warrior (agon) or a card player (*alea*; the card mini game is called *Gwent*, not poker). This means that despite being apparently categorised into the group of role-playing digital games (the mimicry principle), *The Witcher* also involves elements of *agon* and *alea*.⁴⁴ Other examples of digital games that offer 'alea fragments' are *Caravan*, *Fallout: New Vegas*, *Grand Theft Auto V*, *Final Fantasy VIII* and *XI*, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic I* and *II* and many more.

The author has chosen a similar, but at the same time different type of game for the following analysis – **game of dice** that is also included in the studied game variant. To be more specific, we would like to mention one of the most popular gambling games on social network Facebook – *Farkle*.⁴⁵ Its difference from 'classical' card games lies only in one primary distinction – if a player wants to play a game of dice, no opponent is needed, or at least not necessarily. The player can be his/her own rival; in the sense of improving, i.e. beating his/her previous record (score). The players' aim is to collect as many points as possible in ten possible attempts (throws). Different combinations of numbers or sequences of numbers result in obtaining a certain amount of scored points. Players might choose to play against opponents and are also able to play for chips that can be purchased for real money. This game of dice is a game in which players can choose whether they want to have an opponent or not and also regulate the degree of risk.

42 *Quasar*: [online]. [2016-09-03]. Available at: <<http://masseffect.wikia.com/wiki/Quasar>>.

43 *The Witcher 3 – The Wild Hunt*. [Digital Game]. Warszawa: CD Projekt RED, 2015.

44 BUČKOVÁ, Z.: Problém aplikácie konceptu R. Cailloisa mimikry na súčasnú digitálnu realitu. In ČÁBYOVÁ, E., JÁNOŠOVÁ, D. (eds.): *Quo vadis massmedia, Quo vadis marketing*. Trnava: FMK UCM in Trnava, 2016, p. 148.

45 *Farkle* (Facebook App). [Digital Game]. Barnsley: Viral Ltd., 2016.

The important point is that games of dice, like other 'alea games', are hard to influence by tactics, experience or strategy. This inability to know the outcome is even more apparent than in the previously mentioned online card games. Once again, players hope to get lucky or believe that odds are in their favour, which, as they assume, helps them throw dices to get the ideal combination. This type of gambling game, however, eliminates the need for certain (physical, intellectual) attributes even more than online card games do. While in card games the player's memory, experience and logical thinking are important as well, the people who play games of dice are largely passive and do not need to use any qualities or efforts to play and win. In fact, those who play only throw dice and rely on 'good fortune'. Risking, also typical for the game variant *alea*, fulfils very similar roles in both the online games of dice and the digital card games. Decisions regarding the risk are made by the players; it is their choice to risk or not (and they also determine how much risk they want to take). In case of *Farkle*, there is no opportunity to play with virtual money. Either players play for the highest score or they use chips acquired for real money. Losing is not their 'fault'; *Farkle* is played under ideal, i.e. identical conditions for all players and there is no need for regularity, skills or experience. Players thus temporarily give up their will and let the simple game proceed on its own accord. This type of game also involves paying attention to small, 'innocent' details; players may try to predict the outcome by paying attention to seemingly unimportant elements (the duration of shaking dices in the cup or the superstitious belief that 'third time is the charm' and so on. *Farkle* differs from other games of chance by not including any elements of *agon*. While playing games of dice, no user can predict or directly influence the outcome of the game; the chances of winning are the same for all participants. Game of dice is therefore the most typical example of game principle *alea* – even its online forms.

Taking into consideration the arguments mentioned above, the author sees a clear correlation between the game principle *alea*, as defined by R. Caillois, and the present-day digital games of chance and their alternatives. A particularly intriguing fact is that existence of games of chance and other clearly distinguishable game variants can be traced back to the times of the Ancient Rome, i.e. they had existed long before the year 1958 when R. Caillois defined his thorough game typology. All discussed types of 'alea games' and their features – online card games, games of dice or mini games implemented in different game environments – only confirm the accuracy and timeliness of R. Caillois's schemes. The examined games (*Texas HoldEm Poker*, *PokerStars* and *Farkle*) fulfil, at least to a certain extent, the characteristics of 'alea games':

- players' incapability to influence the outcome (cheating is an exception to this general rule),
- their belief in 'defeating' the fate or good fortune,
- passivity of the player – in card games, it is better to use the term "semi-active player",
- possibility to risk,
- fair and 'ideal' (homogenous) conditions,
- absence of work, patience, qualification, professional values, regularity or training,
- players' tendency to pay attention to details, signs,
- giving up one's free will and the consequent possibility of achieving victory or losing,
- the need for applying predictions, objectivity, speculation, imagination, mathematic competence.

The author therefore considers R. Caillois's typology of game principles to be, on the one hand, a result of thorough analyses of historical facts and life conditions in the past and, on the other hand, a timeless game scheme that is valid also in terms of the present-day digital games.

Conclusion

Games became an essential part of society's life hundreds of years ago, in the ancient past. They cannot be limited only to providing children's entertainment. On the contrary, a game is now perceived as a significant human activity regardless of one's age; game studies focus mainly on lives of adults and their contacts with game environments. Our ancestors did not understand games to have an aimless function; games were considered to be an important phenomenon of religious ceremonies, cultural and social events. Games helped fulfil

primary physiological needs but mainly – in scope of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs – the highest-positioned necessity of self-realisation. This need has, in an almost unchanged form, transformed into a completely different reality – the virtual reality. Games have not changed their elementary essence. However, the environment has changed, or rather a new environment for games has been created – the cyberspace, the new existential dimension, the main part of virtual reality.

Within this study, R. Caillois’s categorisation of game principles became the fundamental theoretical outline. We focused our attention on the game principle *alea*, taking into consideration its wider socio-cultural contexts. We were able to find examples of its occurrence already in the times of Roman Empire. A deeper analysis of the past showed that the presence of the discussed game principle could be traced back to the Etruscan nation and its period of existence, i.e. to the culture which the Romans later continued to shape and transform. Etruscans used the *alea* principle in religious and forecasting rituals. However, the Roman Kingdom and Roman Republic were not ‘fertile’ periods regarding games and their development in general. It was the culture of the Roman Empire that saw games in terms of their essential socio-cultural functions. Ancient Roman citizens’ relying on fate or on the signs of nature or divinity was transformed (to a great degree) into religious rituals and social games. We can observe game elements not only in all religious ceremonies adopted from Etruscans, but also in widely popular Dionysian cults, theatre, children’s games, gladiator clashes and, which is highly significant for this article and its aim, in games of chance too. The *alea* principle has been transformed smoothly into the present virtual reality. ‘Classical’ card games, games of dice, board games, so called ‘slot machines’ and other games of chance have gone through this transformation without losing their basic principles and rules; however, this metamorphosis has brought many new contexts and circumstances that need to be discussed.

Each virtual version of these games is still based on a certain ‘belief’ – either in fate, fortune or other spiritual entity. The risk remains essential here; although we have to point out that money or other assets put at risk are not necessarily real. These games tend to be simple and easy to play; they occur under the fairest possible conditions, require no additional physical skills or values, only the presence of (virtual or real) players. Players’ (inter)activity may not be so evident in these cases, but definitely does exist. The relatively lower level of interactivity does not exclude the possibility of players being strongly engaged and dedicated to such a game; their interest in games of chance cannot be underestimated, not even in comparison with (relatively) more interactive digital games based predominantly on other principles (agon, mimicry or vertigo).

The theoretical reflection used to define the fundamental terms – game, game principle *alea* and virtual reality – was based on knowledge offered by R. Caillois (and his ground-breaking publication *Man, Play, and Games*), J. Huizinga, S. Gálik, D. Prokop, P. Frischauer, M. Eliadeh, P. Lévy, P. Virilio and other cited authors. Considering the discussed theoretical framework and the current practical application of the game principle *alea* within the dimension of digital games, the author came to a conclusion that there is a clear connection between the games of chance occurring during the times of the Roman Empire (i.e. the original meaning and definition of the game principle *alea*) and the present-day virtual gambling games. The article placed emphasis on the strong status of games and rejected their ‘reduced’ labelling as unrefined, simple entertainment. The ‘seriousness’ of the examined games, whose existence dates back to the times of the Ancient Roman Empire, is thus associated with various aspects of the virtual games of chance – these cannot be labelled as ‘careless’ or ‘irresponsible’, despite their ‘gambling’ character. It is not only validity of R. Caillois’s game typology (the other three game principles are widely used, too) in the context of digital games dimension that needs to be reconsidered and continually revised through a deeper discourse; as the author believes, it is also necessary to use knowledge on the past to better understand the contemporary meaning of game variants in terms of the cyberspace.

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