The Politics of Playtime

Reading Marx through Huizinga on the Desire to Escape from Ordinary Life

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The author offers what he calls an intervention in the Marxist analysis of the relationship between work and play. As an alternative to some Hegelian and sociological readings of Marx that seek to merge work with play as a means to overcome alienation, he provides an interpretation that emphasizes the importance of maintaining the difference between work and play in terms of distinct modes of experience. Reading Marx through Huizinga, the author argues that the goal for Marx is the emancipation *from* labor not the emancipation of labor. Marx develops this position, the author says, through a close examination of the labor movement's epic struggle for shorter hours of work. Against a particular Hegelian-Marxist view that play in a capitalist context is trivial because it cannot transform the world, the author claims the pursuit of more time for play through the fight for shorter hours of work does indeed change the world. And he maintains that the fight for shorter hours of work is particularly relevant today as more and more jobs become automated and those who still have jobs find themselves working longer hours for less pay. **Key words**: alienation; labor; play; work

Soon we may well reach the point where one can't give in to the desire for a vita contemplativa (that is, taking a walk with ideas and friends) without self-contempt and a bad conscience. Well, formerly it was the other way around: work was afflicted with a bad conscience. A person of good family concealed the fact that he worked if need compelled him to work. The slave worked under the pressure of the feeling that he was doing something contemptable: "doing" was itself contemptible.
—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

O, idiots, it is because you work too much that the industrial equipment develops slowly!
—Paul Lafargue, *The Right to Be Lazy*

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> For if every instrument could accomplish its own work, obeying or anticipating the will of others, like the statues of Daedalus, or the tripods of Hephaestus, which, says the poet, "of their own accord entered the assembly of the Gods"; if, in like manner, the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre, chief workmen would not want servants, nor masters slaves.
> —Aristotle, *Politics*

Introduction

In *Homo Ludens*: *A Study of the Play Element in Culture* Johan Huizinga (1950) offers a conceptualization of the phenomenon of play that remains one of the more thorough philosophical ruminations on the issue. Play is a crucial activity for Huizinga because, according to him, the activity of play makes possible the development of culture. Play, in short, is a culture-creating activity. Therefore, it is important we understand the history and character of play so that we continue to reproduce its possibility.

Particularly significant for my purposes, for Huizinga play lies outside ordinary life and constitutes a free, voluntary activity. According to Huizinga, play "is never imposed by physical necessity or moral duty. It is never a task. It is done at leisure, during 'free time.' Here, then, we have the first main characteristic of play: that it is free, is in fact freedom. A second characteristic is closely connected with this, namely, that play is not 'ordinary' or 'real' life. It is rather stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own" (8).

How should we understand the meaning of ordinary life and its relationship to physical necessity? For Huizinga, as well as for Karl Marx, ordinary life refers to work, an activity that is necessary not only to survive in biological terms (i.e., a physical necessity) but also for the reproduction of a particular standard of living achieved by the labor and technology of human beings working under particular social and historical circumstances. Huizinga appropriates Sigmund Freud's understanding that views work in terms of the reality principle—as opposed to the pleasure principle. Freud (1989) argues that work "attaches people to reality," a condition of existence which he says is characterized by unhappiness ("discontents"). Human beings, according to Freud, have "a natural aversion to work," and "the great majority only work under the stress of necessity" (30). In contemporary vernacular, we engage the world in this way when, after enjoying a weekend getaway to the beach with our friends, we say to one another as

we drive home on Sunday evening, "Well, back to the real world." We construe the ordinary in terms of work, which seems "real" because we spend so much more time at work than we do at play. Play, on the other hand, is often associated with fantasy—as opposed to reality—because as we toil away at work, we frequently daydream about being at the beach or some other spot that brings us pleasure and happiness. "Stepping out of real life" should be understood in terms of a desire to escape from work, regardless of whether work is organized in a capitalist or socialist manner.

This desire motivated the labor movement's heroic struggle for shorter hours of work during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The fight for shorter hours of work became an international movement in the 1880s, and we still celebrate it today as May Day or International Workers' Day on the first day of May each year. The date commemorates the Haymarket Affair of 1886, when workers in Chicago, Illinois, went on strike for the eight-hour workday. Indeed, "Eight Hours for What We Will" was the original slogan in the fight when, at the time, workers worked for twelve hours a day and six days a week (Rosenzweig 1985). Workers wanted more leisure time not just for rest and relaxation. They also demanded more time to pursue artistic and creative activities for pleasure and self-realization. In the United States, not until the Adams Act of 1916 and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 did working hours finally get reduced and become regulated by the state. This history may not be well known, but still today one of the more popular slogans of the labor movement to appear on bumper stickers and t-shirts proclaims "The Labor Movement: The Folks Who Brought You the Weekend." For both Marx and the leaders of the nineteenth-century labor movement, whom he studied very closely, the goal of their struggle was to reduce the amount of time spent working in order to increase leisure time, which I refer to in this article as the politics of playtime.

Some contemporary Marxist theorists, on the other hand, frequently misread Marx on this particular issue and, thereby, mistakenly claim that Marx's principal aim was not the reduction of work but the reorganization of work through revolutionary means in such a way that work somehow becomes a free, self-realizing activity. This would entail an attempt to collapse the distinction between work and play as described by Huizinga. I also address a claim made by particular Marxists that, within a capitalist context, the activity of play is trivial because it cannot transform the world; rather, they say, play reproduces the capitalist social conditions that make the exploitation of workers possible—all of which is at odds with Huizinga's emphasis on the significance of play.

I challenge these arguments. By affirming Huizinga's conceptualization of play, I argue that Marx also understood work in terms of physical necessity and that, therefore, no matter how we organize work, it remains an unfree activity and cannot be transformed into play. Furthermore, I argue that the pursuit of more time for play through the fight for shorter hours of work does indeed transform the world.

Part One

Theorists working in the Marxist tradition will recognize in the passage I quoted from Huizinga at the beginning of this article an affinity with Marx's distinction between what he refers to as "the realm of necessity" and "the realm of freedom," which he most clearly states in the third volume of *Capital.* In a section titled the "Trinity Formula," Marx (1991) writes

> The actual wealth of society, and the possibility of constantly expanding its reproduction process, therefore, does not depend upon the duration of surplus-labor, but upon its productivity and the more or less copious conditions of production under which it is performed. In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labor which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations *ceases*; thus in the very nature of things it lies *beyond the sphere of actual material production*. Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and *achieving this with the least expenditure of energy* and under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of, their human nature. *But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity*. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. *The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite* (emphasis mine). (958–59)

This passage has caused problems for those Marxists who argue for merging work with play (as a means to overcome alienation) because Marx clearly sets the two apart as different modes of experience. I seek to explore this tension.

Of course, the argument in favor of merging work with play is not exclusive to Marxist theorists. The notion that if work is unpleasant, it should be transformed into play goes well beyond Marxist theory. Established theorists in the field of play studies like sociologist Thomas S. Henricks argue that work should be organized and practiced as if it were play. "Work, perhaps with a playful or expressive spirit," argues Henricks (2014), "is the chief vehicle of self-realization" (207). I argue against this notion. Although I agree with Henricks that play is a crucial form of activity because it makes self-realization possible, I disagree with him that work can become similar to play or that we should even attempt such a synthesis in the first place. Furthermore, I argue that he misinterprets Marx when he says, "Marx argues that labor . . . is the *essential* means by which humans realize the spectrum of their capabilities" (emphasis mine).

Henricks' citation of Marx actually comes from Eric Fromm's (1961) *Marx's Concept of Man*, which focuses on Marx's early writings at the expense of later manuscripts like the *Grundrisse* and the three volumes of *Capital*. The main problem I see with Fromm's reading of Marx is that Fromm argues "Marx follows the thought of Hegel, who understood labor as the 'act of man's self-creation.' . . . Marx originally called man's function 'self-activity,' not labor, and spoke of the 'abolition of labor' as the aim of socialism. Later, when he differentiated between free and alienated labor, he used the term 'emancipation of labor'"(40).

On the contrary, in his later works, Marx argued for the abolition of work—if not the radical reduction of how much time we spend doing it—which would mean the emancipation *from* labor, rather than the emancipation *of* labor. In other words, I argue that the main distinction with which we should be concerned lies between work and play rather than between alienated and unalienated activity. As a way to present an alternative reading of Marx, one that emphasizes the importance of maintaining a difference between work and play, I offer a close textual analysis of his later writings. First, I consider a few other Marxist theorists who interpret Marx in a fashion similar to Fromm, especially those who take up the notion of play by claiming it is somehow trivial because it is set aside from ordinary life rather than oriented toward the transformation of ordinary life.

Philosophers like Laurence Hinman (1978), author of "Marx's Theory of Play," dismiss the "Trinity Formula" passage from volume 3 as a mistake made by Marx! According to Hinman, "In this analysis, Marx himself fails to overcome the categories of the society that he was criticizing and thereby falls into traps that he himself had earlier elucidated" (214). Hinman means by "earlier

elucidated" that Marx's (1992) early writings, which date back to the famed *1844 Manuscripts*, where he developed his theory of alienation in a celebrated essay about estranged labor. In this essay, Marx borrows concepts from the German philosophers Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach. The Hegelian-Marxist theoretical tradition understands alienation as the outcome of a process in which humans (subjects) create things (objects—i.e., simple objects like tables or complex objects like institutions) but then become separated from these objects and institutions in a manner that allows humans to be ruled or dominated by their own creations. Dystopian science-fiction literature and film offer good examples of this phenomenon when robots or computers attempt to enslave human beings. The Hegelian intervention suggests that the subject-object split, which is simply assumed by traditional Western thinkers like Descartes and Kant, must be overcome. As Fromm (1961) argues, "For Hegel, knowledge is not obtained in the position of the subject-object split, in which the object is grasped as something separated from and opposed to the thinker. In order to *know* the world, *man has to make the world his own*" (27). Marxists expand the Hegelian position from an argument about knowing objects to an analysis about making objects. The main problem remains similar: how to overcome the separation between the subject and object that creates the conditions for the possibility of alienation. According to Fromm, "Hegel gave the most systematic and profound expression to the idea of the productive man, of the individual who is *he*, inasmuch as he is not passive-receptive, but actively related to the world; who is an individual only in the process of grasping the world productively, and thus making it his own" (29). My aim is not to go into the detail about alienation or how it is possible. Rather, my critique focuses on how followers of Fromm make a fetish of "productive" man and how this fetish prevents them from seeing what is really at stake—namely, the abolition of work. As a result, followers of Fromm place an emphasis on the difference between alienated and unalienated productive activity rather than on the distinction between work and play and the necessity of reducing or eliminating work to create more time for play.

Hinman's reading of Marx affirms Fromm's point of view, insofar as he sees the project of Marx to be the overcoming of alienation at work and leisure, which draws our attention away from an alternative strategy—the reduction of the amount of time we spend at work through the expansion of playtime, as suggested in the passage I have quoted from *Capital*. More importantly, Hinman argues that the activity of play cannot transform the world. Rather, playtime merely reproduces the social relations of capitalism (more on this later).

Unfortunately, Hinman does not provide much in the way of concrete examples about how to achieve the desired state of affairs. The best account we have in Hinman's analysis is "revolutionary praxis." "Only through an overcoming of the dichotomy between work and leisure," writes Hinman (1978), "can the alienation found in either realm be overcome. . . . It remains the task of revolutionary *praxis* to determine whether in fact we shall overcome alienation" (222). The problem with this analysis is not only that it remains very abstract, but that it begs the question: Who will be doing the necessary work after the revolution, and who will be directing it? The experience of workers in the former Soviet Union demonstrates how alienation and unfreedom at work persist after a socialist revolution. Even under conditions where the state—or workers' councils—seizes the means of production, it still remains that the work is an instrumental activity, as Marx makes clear in the passage I quoted. The question then becomes: Does it not make more sense to pursue self-realization in play rather than at work?

The main problem for theorists like Hinman is that the activity of play, as opposed to what he calls revolutionary praxis, cannot change reality. On the contrary, Hinman understood play as merely an escape, as a temporary suspension of the mundane, work-a-day world. This view sees play, because play cannot transform the world, as a form of bourgeois ideology that reproduces the status quo of domination and unfreedom within the capitalist mode of production. The attempt here is to construe play as a coping mechanism of sorts, in much the same way Marx explained the place of religion in a capitalist society. "Religion and play share a common element," writes Hinman. "They both function as illusory paths people follow in the attempt to realize one's species-being" (199).

Under the conditions of capitalist social relations, religion is an expression of an alienated existence. It is, according to Marx (1992), "the sigh of an oppressed creature… it is the opium of the people… the abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is a demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusion" (243). Hinman argues something similar about play. It, too, is an illusory form of happiness, because capitalism creates the conditions of existence that require illusion for those who are oppressed by the system. The illusion keeps them going like drug addicts strung out on their preferred narcotic. Therefore, real happiness can only become a possibility with the abolition of capitalism, which is understood as changing the very conditions that require illusion.

This point of view by Marxists like Hinman (1978) takes issue with Huiz-

inga's interpretation of the importance of play by arguing that play is "*trivial* precisely because it is set aside from the everyday world and not intended to transform it" (emphasis mine) (200). In short, the separation of play from ordinary or everyday life is viewed as an instance of alienation. Viewing play as trivial is a mistake because, as I argue below through my reading of Marx's later texts, the pursuit of play does indeed transform the world. To avoid the mistake by Hinman, we must make a distinction between play as a means toward an end and play as an end in itself. In other words, if what we mean by play is free time spent outside of work for rest so that we can return to work, then play becomes an instrument of sorts (a means toward an end), because it is used to make more work possible. In this situation, play does indeed reproduce the status quo. But this is certainly not what Huizinga means by play, and—as I am arguing—it is also not what Marx had in mind. I return to this issue subsequently.

For Hegelian-Marxists like Sean Sayers (1998, 2002), the union of play and work is made possible through the transformation of work into art. The emphasis is on work (understood here as productive activity) as an essential human quality that sets us apart from animals. Sayers and Hinman share an emphasis on the concept of praxis as the means by which we transform the way in which we work as we intervene in nature and transform it through our work. Sayers (2002) argues that "although work in contemporary society is an alienated activity, it need not be so" (1). What needs to happen, according to Sayers, is the transformation of *how* we work, because "we are *essentially* active and creative beings who can develop and fulfill ourselves only through *productive* activity. In his early writings, Marx describes work as the 'vital activity' of human beings, their 'species activity,' the 'essential activity' by which human beings are distinguished from other animals" (emphasis mine) (2). Sayers summarizes the Hegelian-Marxist view on work.

> Non-human animals, on Hegel's view, have a purely immediate relation to nature, both to their own nature and the surrounding environment. They are driven by their desires and instincts, and they consume the objects they desire immediately and directly. Human beings by contrast, are self-conscious; they have "being-for-self." They can stand back from what is immediately present, both through conscious reflection and in a practical way. Work is a form of such practical being-for-self. In work, gratification is deferred, the object is not consumed immediately; it is not simply annihilated but formed and altered. Thus a distinctively human relation to nature is established. . . . Both for Hegel and for Marx, . . . work is not only a means to satisfy material needs, but also an activity of self-development and self-realization. This process of objectification and self-realization is present not

> only in work but in other forms of practical activity as well. Its fullest development is in the creative activity of art. This is the ideal of creative activity, the highest form of work, for both these philosophers. (3)

In Sayers' account, the difference between work and art is a difference in degree, not in kind; hence his definition of art as a form of work. There are two issues I address regarding this interpretation.

To begin with, there is, in Sayers' account, a fetishism of sorts concerning his emphasis on productive activity. In other words, his humanist perspective suffers from a kind of metaphysics that defines human beings in ahistorical and essentialist terms. Can we say that productive activity is the essence of what it means to be human, or is this position somehow itself a form of ideology, as Baudrillard (1975) has argued? For Baudrillard, "Marxism [not Marx himself] assists the cunning of capital. It convinces men that they are alienated by the sale of their labor power, thus censuring the much more radical hypothesis that they might be alienated as labor power. . . ." (31). I pursue the more radical hypothesis in my reading of Marx.

Secondly, it is important to consider how it can be possible that work and art should be understood as one type of activity. For example, what about coal mining, widely regarded as one of the most dangerous jobs within the division of labor? Is it possible that digging coal—or diamonds for that matter—from the ground with a pick and shovel can be both an instrumental activity and a creative artistic activity? Is such an activity an example of self-realization? To be fair to Sayers and Hinman, they would not make such a case by arguing that the work of mining as we presently understand it constitutes a desirable or fulfilling activity, but they would make the case because they construe the activity of working in a mine as a form of alienation produced by the specifically capitalist organization of the labor process. In short, the problem is not working in a coal or diamond mine per se, but the capitalist way in which we organize this kind of work. Sayers (1998) himself argues that there are "unsatisfactory and unpleasant features of work: long hours and low pay, difficulty and danger (as in the cases of nurses and miners for example)" (62). Precisely my point; the question then becomes, is it possible to remove the unpleasant features of mining and other kinds of dangerous work? Could it not rather be argued that no human being should do that kind of activity, regardless of whether it is organized in a capitalist or socialist or some other manner? Why not turn that kind of activity over to machines? If mining seems too extreme an example, I would argue the same could be said about the work of a college professor. Although it is true that

professors have much more control over their work than miners, it remains the case that if one is pursuing one's work to secure an income, then that activity is instrumental by definition. Only activity that is an end-in-itself belongs in the realm of freedom. The pursuit of a life of the mind takes on a much different character if it takes place in the sphere of leisure.

Part Two

I would like to make the case that what Marx—both the early and late version—had in mind was that all human beings should be set free from any type of activity that, in his words (Marx 1992), "mortifies [the] flesh and ruins [the] mind" (326). How could such an emancipation be achieved? Marx provided two answers, neither of which has anything to do with transcending the difference between work into play as Hinman insists. On the contrary, the emphasis is on the abolition of work and the expansion of play. First, Marx argues that capitalism is already moving toward the eradication of work through the relentless application of technology to the labor process. For example, in the *Grundrisse,* Marx argues that the "historic destiny" of capitalism will be fulfilled when

> the productive powers of labor, which capital incessantly whips onward with its mania for wealth, and of the sole conditions in which this mania can be realized, have flourished to the stage where the possession and preservation of general wealth require lesser labor time of society as a whole, and where the laboring society relates specifically to the process of its progressive reproduction, its reproduction in a constantly *greater abundance*; hence where *labor in which a human being does what a thing could do has ceased* (emphasis mine). (325)

What alienated work activity would be left to overcome once we reach a point that machines replace human labor in all the given industries where the work is characterized by "unpleasant features?" One has only to look at the automobile and mining industries to see that Marx was correct in his assessment that, within the capitalist mode of production, the tendency of development moves in the direction of replacing people with robots in the workplace. Even work not considered particularly unpleasant is currently being automated at a tremendous rate. (I would like to add that it is crucial for automation to proceed in a manner environmentally sustainable if human beings are to reap any of the potential rewards of automation.)

Secondly, Marx argues that the activity of the labor movement ultimately expands automation in the workplace. The "mania" for more wealth that drives the automation of the workplace is a complex dynamic according to Marx, one in which—under particular conditions—automation as a practice *of* capitalists is understood as a response *to* workers who refuse work through the grand struggle for the eight-hour day and the two-day weekend that took place during the second half of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries. Historically, when workers have been successful in achieving shorter hours of work, not only do they receive more leisure (play) time, which is an end in itself, shorter hours of work drive down unemployment, which in turn places upward pressure on wages. If the workers who have jobs dramatically reduce the hours they work, this forces employers to hire new workers to tackle all the tasks that still need to be completed in the workplace. The workers who significantly reduce their time at work effectively create jobs for those who are unemployed. By working less, workers earn more in wages because low unemployment translates into higher wages. Thus. the fight for less work is both a means and an end. It is a means to gain leverage for workers in their negotiations with capitalists and an end in itself, the expansion of time for play.

A feedback loop then emerges in which capitalists eliminate expensive workers with machines, which drives up unemployment and pushes wages down, but then workers respond by fighting once again for shorter hours of work as a means to decrease unemployment and drive wages back up once more, and so on and so on. What I am describing here is not an abstraction, or a utopian form of thinking. On the contrary, this dynamic is based on events in the history of the American and European labor movement. (See Roedieger and Foner [1989] for an excellent history of labor's epic fight for fewer hours of work.) The struggle for less work and more leisure is partly what Marx meant, in concrete terms, by the phrase "class struggle." The conflict is over the length and intensity of the working day.

An empirical analysis of the labor movement's fight for shorter hours of work constitutes the middle sections of *Capital* , where Marx (1976) argues

> The shortening of the working day creates, to begin with, the subjective condition for the condensation of labor, i.e. it makes it possible for the worker to set more labor-power in motion within a given time. *As soon as that shortening becomes compulsory*, machinery becomes in the hands of the capital the objective means, systematically employed, for squeezing more out of labor in a given time. This happens in two ways: the speed of the machines is increased, and the same worker

> receives a greater quantity of machinery to supervise. . . . *Improved construction of the machinery is necessary* . . . since the legal limitation of the working day *compels* the capitalist to exercise the strictest economy in the cost of production (emphasis mine). (536)

In this passage, Marx demonstrates that when workers are successful in their attempts to institutionalize fewer hours of work—either through laws passed by governments or through labor contracts or both—then capitalists have an incentive to automate with "improved machinery." If capitalists are unable to force workers to work longer, harder and faster, then the only alternative to boost productivity in the workplace is to automate. Marx's analysis of this dynamic was based upon his studies of the history of the working day in both the United Kingdom and the United States. According to Marx (1976),

> Capital's tendency, *as soon as the prolongation of the hours of labor is once and for all forbidden*, is to *compensate* for this by . . . converting every improvement in machinery into a more perfect means for soaking up labor-power. There cannot be the slightest doubt that this process must soon lead *once again* to a critical point at which a further reduction in the hours of labor will be inevitable. Agitation for a working day of 8 hours has now (1867) begun. . . . The rapid advance of English industry between 1848 and the present time, i.e. during the period of the 10-hour working day, surpasses the advance made between 1833 and 1847, during the period of the 12-hour working day, by far more than the latter surpasses the advance made during the half century after the first introduction of the factory system, i.e. during the period of the unrestricted working day (emphasis mine). (542)

Marx's empirical studies of the history of the working day demonstrate how advances in labor-saving technology exist in inverse relation to the successful fight for less work. As working hours decrease, advances in labor-saving technologies increase. The faster the rate at which working hours are forced down, the more relatively productive and efficient become the forms of labor-saving technologies. The most complex and most productive labor-saving technology occurs in the context of the rapid reduction of increases in working hours. In this way, the pursuit of play—free time in the sense outlined by Huizinga—is indeed a form of praxis that transforms reality. Here we see Marx offering an empirical, historical analysis rather than the more abstract, philosophical analysis that characterizes the early writings both Hinman and Sayers privilege.

Against Hinman, who insists that play cannot transform the world, we see in the analysis provided by Marx in both the *Grundrisse* and in *Capital* that

the fight for shorter hours of work—as a strategy to increase the amount of life dedicated to play—does indeed change the world in which we live. It transforms both the organization of the workplace and everyday life; indeed life—understood here as artistic activity—becomes possible for the first time when workers enter the realm of freedom (play). So, although play itself may not transform the world in the way Hinman demands, the fight for more playtime certainly does. I would like to refer to this dynamic as the politics of playtime, what Marx (1976) calls "life time" as opposed to "work time" (377). Workers can only resist the attempts by capitalists to shorten their life-span by working them to death by resisting work. (I would like to point out that death from overwork is a very real phenomenon that continues to exist. The Japanese have coined the term "karoshi" to describe the widespread problem). By focusing his attention on the empirical history of the labor movement's fight for shorter hours of work, Marx moved beyond the philosophical abstractions that view humans in essentialist terms as productive animals oriented toward instrumental action.

I want to make one more point regarding the issue of work and art. Rather than consider work as a form of art, as Sayers (1998) insists, Marx argued that art exists as a separate sphere of activity, a distinct mode of experience apart from work. In the famous section known as the "fragment on machines" in the *Grundrisse*, Marx (1993) makes it clear that the sphere of aesthetic activity expands for the worker once he or she steps to the side of the production process. According to Marx

> Capital . . . quite *unintentionally* . . . reduces human labor, expenditure of energy to a minimum. This will redound to the benefit of labor and its condition of emancipation. . . . As soon as labor in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labor time ceases to be its measure and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value. The surplus labor of the mass has ceased to be the condition for the development of general wealth, just as the non-labor of the few, for the development of the general powers of the human head. With that, production based upon exchange value breaks down. . . . *The free development of individualities*, and hence not the reduction of necessary labor time so as to posit surplus labor, but rather the general reduction of the necessary labor of society to a minimum, *which then corresponds to the artistic… development of the individuals in the time set free*, and with the means created, for all of them . . . Wealth is not command over surplus labor time . . . but rather *disposable time outside that needed in direct production*, for every individual and the whole society (emphasis mine). (701, 705–6)

By the phrase "surplus labor" Marx means the amount of time workers spend creating value beyond the point at which employers break even in terms of production costs and investments. In other words, once workers produce commodities—objects or services—of sufficient value to cover all the expenses of the capitalists, then the amount of work they continue to perform above and beyond that point becomes surplus—that is, profit—for the company. Marx refers to the time before that cut-off as "necessary labor time," which is the amount of time necessary for workers to produce enough value to allow the employer to cover all of the costs of production. It is in the interests of capitalists to reduce, as much as possible, the necessary labor time performed by workers, so that more profit can be created by workers during surplus labor time.

It is up to workers themselves how this dynamic plays out, because whenever they are successful in achieving higher wages through shorter hours of work, they increase the amount of necessary labor time relative to surplus labor time, which in turn provides the capitalist with the incentive to automate further. Business leaders today understand the dynamic I am describing in precisely these terms. For example, when workers at the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system in the San Francisco area went on strike in 2013, a local business leader named Richard White advocated automating these workers out of existence. White gave the following advice to the managers of BART: "Give them what they want, then find a way to automate their jobs so this never happens again" (Leonard 2013). Conversely, if workers do not resist work, there is no incentive to automate. Herein lies the problem with Hegelian-Marxist analyses that "glorify labor"—to borrow a phrase from Hannah Arendt (1998, 85). If we make work (rather than play) the goal of human existence, then automation grinds to a halt. If there was one element of capitalism that Marx (1991) viewed as progressive, it would be automation, what he calls the "civilizing aspects" of capitalism (958). In other words, the irony is that capitalists, in their drive to reduce necessary labor time, are creating—by accident—the conditions for a postcapitalist society because capitalism depends on the difference between necessary labor time and surplus labor time as the conditions that make the system possible in the first place. But if capitalists continue to automate the workplace, the possibility exists for approaching a point at which necessary labor time becomes so small a quantity it has no significant relation to surplus labor time, something Marx refers to in the above passage when he says "production based upon exchange value breaks down." (There is not the space here to consider all the industries in the global economy where this dynamic is currently playing out. See Aronowitz

and DiFazio [2010] for a close, empirical examination of this phenomenon). In this manner, Marx argues that the way toward a postcapitalist society involves the abolition of work, not its transformation. I am suggesting here that the history of the fight for shorter hours of work should be seen as a concrete alternative to the abstract concept of "revolutionary praxis" used in the arguments by Hegelian-Marxists like Hinman, Sayers, and others in their tradition.

Here we have reached the place in the analysis where the quote from Aristotle with which I opened comes into play. Aristotle understood the particular condition that makes the class relationship between master and servant (or capitalist and worker) possible in the first place to be an environment in which automation has yet to emerge. To put it another way, once a robot steps between the worker and the capitalist and takes the place of the worker, the class relationship as we know it must cease to exist. Marx, following Aristotle, understood the phenomenon of class to be made possible by a relationship. There is no such thing as a worker independent of a capitalist, and on the other side of the coin, there cannot be a capitalist independent of a worker. Capitalists and workers cannot exist in themselves. This is where Marx is going with his argument in the passage from the fragments on machines. The further we go down the road of automation, the closer we get to a new way of life beyond the traditional forms of capitalism that we have become accustomed to since the Industrial Revolution.

The affirmation of leisure over work is also what Marx (1992) had in mind in the "1844 Manuscripts." In other words, I do not see the break between the early and late Marx that Hinman sees. Rather than interpret the essay on estranged labor in terms of alienated versus unalienated work, Marx argues that the good life only becomes possible beyond production. As he made clear, ideology in modern capitalist society works toward forming the consciousness of individuals in a way such that they believe they are free when they are not. According to Marx (1992), "The result is that man the worker feels that he is acting freely only in his animal functions—eating, drinking, and procreating, or at most in his dwelling and adornment—while in his human functions he is nothing more than animal. It is true that eating, drinking, and procreating, etc., are also genuine human functions. However, when abstracted from other aspects of human activity and turned into final and exclusive ends, they are animal" (327).

Marx describes in this passage the way we may feel free when we leave the workplace to go home at the end of the workday and the irony that, once we are at home, we spend most of our time preparing to go back to work. Further-

more, our weekends are typically filled with other chores—grocery shopping, laundry, and house cleaning. These activities are all part of the realm of necessity according to Marx. We must do these chores to survive and to reproduce our standard of living, but we do not live an authentic life until we move beyond these activities. Activity that has survival as its "exclusive end" is an example of physical necessity not freedom. Thus, when we are doing chores, our "free" time is actually a means to prepare for, and return to, work. Similarly, those who say they go on vacation to "recharge their batteries" so that they can return to work rested, are not enjoying true leisure time, because as Huizinga makes clear, play must be understood as an activity that is an end in itself rather than a means to rest up in preparation for more work.

In short, when we spend our so-called free time resting up to prepare ourselves for more work, we end up living to work instead of working to play. Our life time becomes a means to reproduce—in an unending cyclical fashion—work time. Therefore, if people spend most of their time worrying about how to pay their bills or working for the sake of being busy, they are not free. For Marx, there is more to life than merely surviving, which presupposes the separation of work from play. To be free, we must dramatically reduce the amount of time we spend at work, if not abolish work altogether wherever it is possible to do so. Play, as understood by Huizinga and Marx, is never about merely recharging one's batteries. That would make play an instrumental activity. In the short run, what we would need to escape from this hamster wheel of using leisure time to make more work possible is something along the lines of a year-long sabbatical after a few years of work, a year in which we would have ample leisure time to create new cultural forms that have nothing to do with either survival or the reproduction of the standard of living we have become accustomed to in our particular historical circumstances.

As an alternative to the humanist arguments of Fromm, Henricks, Hinman, and Sayers, rather than reify the concepts of production and productivity by arguing that the essence of being a human can be found in the activity of work, Marx argued that life begins *beyond* the spheres of production and reproduction, because only in play do people create culture and realize their individuality. Workers only begin engaging in artistic activity (play) after they step to the side of production. The general reduction in necessary labor time throughout all areas of society corresponds to the artistic development of all individuals.

I find one more passage from the *Grundrisse* worth mentioning, the one in which Marx (1993) criticizes the ideas of Charles Fourier: "Labor cannot become play" (712). The collapse of play into work is, for Marx, a form of bourgeois

ideology that, as Max Weber (1930) has shown, is rooted in the culture of the Protestant Reformation. In the modern world, people are educated to believe that self-realization and meaning are to be found in our careers, something Martin Luther described to as a devotion to a "calling." The modern belief in the value of a specialized career would have been an anathema to the ancient Greeks. As Nietzsche (1974) argues in another of the quotes that open this essay, the emergence of the work ethic represents a transvaluation of values in the transition from antiquity to modernity. For Nietzsche, it was a profound mistake of modern culture to place such a high value on work because it has led to cultural decay. Marx and Huizinga share a similar position. This brings us back to the beginning, to the emphasis Huizinga places on play as culture-creating activity. To prevent the kind of cultural decay (nihilism) about which Nietzsche warned us, we must keep play separate from work.

Conclusion

I would like to end by drawing attention to a few hopeful signs. One is the case of Sweden, where experiments with the six-hour workday were conducted for two years at a care home for the elderly in the city of Gothenburg (Bernmar 2017). So far, we hear that the experiments have demonstrated great success in terms of better working conditions for the nurses and better care for the patients. In other words, when individual nurses reduced their work hours, it saved money (due to their taking fewer sick days) and residents reported that the quality of time spent with nurses was much better. But the benefits go beyond improving working conditions and making workers more productive while they are at work, for this restricts the analysis to an instrumental question, by claiming that the main goal of working less is to be more productive and efficient at work. The other, perhaps more important point suggests that not only can we have more with less—more efficiency and productivity with less time at work—but also that less time spent at work means more time for play, which is an end in itself. This point is perhaps better demonstrated by the case in Germany, where unionized workers were able to fight successfully for a twenty-eight-hour work week and a raise (Chazan 2018). Here, we see a slightly different framing, because unlike the study in Sweden, where an experiment was conducted to find out whether or not working less is more efficient, workers in Germany's largest labor union, IG Metall (2.26 million members), consider the issue a "fight for a better work-

life balance," suggesting that the main goal is not only increased efficiency while at work, but also freedom from work. Work time and life time are clearly kept separate by the members of IG Metall, much as Marx argued so many years ago. The short-term hope is that the example set by the metal workers—which covers more than nine hundred thousand workers so far—will spread to other industries throughout the German economy and perhaps even other workers in the European Union.

These two examples are important milestones because the discourse on the benefits of working fewer hours has been suppressed for decades in the Western industrialized countries. For example, in the United States, the last time the federal government passed legislation regarding working hours was with the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938, which set the norm for a full-time job at eight hours a day and forty hours a week. Not only have we not seen any further reduction in working hours since 1938, but the situation has gotten worse in recent decades, as workers today are working a full month longer every year than they were in the late 1960s—and for less pay. It seems that now, more than ever, given the sophisticated developments in labor-saving technology, we need a revived movement for fewer hours of work.

I would argue that to launch that kind of a movement, we need to reexamine our cultural values regarding work and play. That means avoiding the mistake of trying to merge the two kinds of activity. The point of workers seizing the means of production was, for Marx, not a strategy for finding happiness at work but for "rationally regulating the interchange with nature . . . with the least amount of energy possible" so that we can have more time for play. Even if we were able to organize work in a more democratic manner—and we should do so—it still remains a realm of necessity. Freedom begins where labor ends.

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