

Chapter 6

E-Sports at the Olympic Games: From Physicality to Virtuality

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ABSTRACT

The chapter follows a comparison between e-sports and physical sports in terms of their formal properties as games. Through this approach, it is argued that e-sports differ essentially from physical games due to their spatiality. Specifically, it addresses how the virtual space of e-sports undergoes a different process of production from that of physical space in the sense that it does not adhere to social rules and the power of the hegemony, but rather to the code of the machine. This results to a negation of the physical body of the player, which is in dialectical antithesis to the spirit of the Olympic Games unlike any physical game.

INTRODUCTION

In 2016 the South Korea-based International eSports Federation, IESF, along with the British government-backed International eGames Committee, IEGC, submitted a request to the International Olympic Committee, IOC, to obtain information on how to gain inclusion for eSports in the Olympic programme as a medal event in the Paris summer games of 2024 (Graham, 2017). Since then a controversy has (re) sparked whether eSports should be included as part of the Olympic Games or not. The Olympic Council of Asia, OCA, made its position clear when it announced that eSports will be introduced as a demonstration sport at the 2022 Asian Games

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E-Sports at the Olympic Games

in China, the world's second largest multi-sport event recognised by the IOC after the Olympic Games (Brautigam, 2017). OCA promotes eSports as official medal sport on the basis of their popularity among the youth. With a global audience of 292 million and global revenue of \$463 million in 2016 eSports are indeed popular (Graham, 2017). Actually, there are already many events, in which eSports competitions take place, like the World Electronic Sports Games or the eGames of Rio 2016 (Foxy, 2016).

Purportedly, the inclusion of eSports in the Olympics will increase its millennial viewership, something which will in turn boost the value of Olympic programming (Tran, 2017). At the same time, it will help the institutionalization of eSports into a mainstream and acceptable sport (ibid). Apparently, eSports lack in credibility. They are considered by some to not even be real sports, since they miss the physicality that traditional sports feature (Johnson, 2015). Notwithstanding a study showing that people playing eSports are exposed to strains similar to those of conventional athletes, with the difference lying in that for the latter the exertion is caused by bodily action, while for the former due to mental processes, (Moosa, 2017; Schütz, 2016), eSports have not yet managed to acquire the status of athleticism that would land them effortlessly a spot among the Olympic Games. Indeed, the president of IOC, Thomas Bach, has refused for now their entry with the justification that eSports are contrary to Olympic Games' rules and values (Moosa, 2017).

The aim of this chapter is to address this issue. It is not an argument against or in favour of the inclusion of eSports in Olympic Games, since for that decision many factors will eventually be taken into account, not the least of which of a financial nature. Instead, the focus is given on the properties of eSports as games and how these are juxtaposed to those of the conventional Olympic Games. Specifically, the author argues that there are three major discrepancies between eSports and traditional sports, distinct but very closely interconnected: the production of space, the application of rules, and the treatment of the human body. These disparities do not make eSports and Olympic Games non-compatible by default, yet they are intrinsic characteristics that must be taken into consideration and examined thoroughly for the better understanding of how these, for now, separate fields can potentially converge.

GAME DEFINITION

It is not easy to define what a game is. Games encompass so versatile human experiences that to form a single definition is rather impossible. On one hand, if the definition is so generic as to engulf all the games, it will be impractical in the sense that it will accommodate non-games as well. On the other hand, if the definition is too specific, it is bound to exclude many activities that are games. Literature

remains inconclusive. Indeed, it was only in the late 1930s that Johan Huizinga was the first academic to treat the subject. Huizinga (1949) talked about *Homo Ludens*, the playing man, examining play as a cultural phenomenon, whose formal characteristics he summed up as a free activity outside ordinary life connected with no material interest and profit, taking place in a secluded time and space zone according to fixed rules (p. 13).

Roger Caillois (1961) followed on Huizinga's thought and expanded on it by demarcating the different categories of games. According to him, Huizinga succeeded in formalizing the fundamental characteristics of play and demonstrating its cultural role. However, he points out that Huizinga deliberately omitted the categorization of play into distinct areas, since to Huizinga *they all respond to the same needs and reflect, without qualification, the same psychological attitude* (p. 4). But for Caillois play has more than one facet and so as to rightly define it, these facets must be examined and explained. Nevertheless, he adopts most of Huizinga's characteristics of play as an activity essentially free, as in not obligatory, separated by specific limits of space and time defined and fixed in advance, with uncertain course, creating no wealth nor goods, governed by rules that suspend ordinary laws, and finally make-believe; *accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life* (pp. 9-10).

Caillois added the element of uncertainty and make-believe to Huizinga's definition. Especially for the latter he analyzed it by suggesting that there are some forms of play that do not need rules, but rather improvisation and this feeling of playing a role, as for example when children play 'school', a game in which one of them is the teacher and the other player or players are the pupils. Caillois stresses the fact that make-believe games create a fictional situation in which *the sentiment of as if replaces and performs the same function as do rules* (p. 8, emphasis in original). Indeed, for Caillois rules and make believe are mutually exclusive, a game can either be ruled or make believe but never both. That is because rules already create their own fictions. When someone plays chess or polo *by the very fact of complying with their respective rules, is separated from real life where there is no activity that literally corresponds to any of these games* (ibid).

He goes on to categorize make believe games in a separate and distinct category from other types of games. As a matter of fact, he proposes:

a division into four main rubrics, depending upon whether, in the games under consideration, the role of competition, chance, simulation, or vertigo is dominant. I call these agon, alea, mimicry, and ilinx, respectively. (p. 12)

Agon is a game in which two or more opponents compete so as to determine who the best is in a single trait, for example in swimming, fencing or in basketball.

E-Sports at the Olympic Games

Usually, *agon* is a physical game and in this case it can be equalized with sports (p. 14), but it can be of a mental quality as well, such as chess. *Alea* describes games of chance, in which the player has little to no influence on the outcome and *winning is the result of fate rather than triumphing over an adversary* (p. 17). *Alea* games are most often betting and gambling games. *Mimicry* is the game of make-believe, of taking on an illusory (in *ludo*, in playing) identity that dictates how the player will behave. The aim of the game is itself the success and retention of this make believe by the player herself or by others as in theatrical performances. Finally, *illinx* is the kind of play that through physical activity one aims to create a sensation of vertigo: *to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind* (p. 23). *Illinx* includes dancing, swinging, and roller coaster rides in amusement parks.

Caillois is very particular in examining how the different categories of games can entwine with one another. In that he proposes a further demarcation of play, which he calls *paidia* and *ludus* (p. 27). The *paidia* is the play which is infused in improvisation and joy with total absence of rules. Once this free-spirited play is institutionalized with rules, which gradually become more intricate, sophisticated, and complex, is transformed into *ludus*, a form of play that is completely rule-based. Caillois' *paidia* and *ludus* are positioned in the opposite sides of a spectrum, they constitute play in its absolute, and the different types of games can oscillate from one end to the other. As Caillois points out *the first manifestations of paidia have no name* (p. 29), since they are free, improvised ad hoc play,

But as soon as conventions, techniques, and utensils emerge, the first games as such arise with them: e.g. leapfrog, hide and seek, kite-flying, teetotum, sliding, blindman's buff, and doll-play. At this point the contradictory roads of agon, alea, mimicry, and ilinx begin to bifurcate. (ibid)

Nevertheless, according to Caillois, there are some games that combine elements of more than one category. There are many games that share characteristics of both *agon* and *alea*, such as backgammon or most card games, and almost all of *agon* games, because are based on competition among equals so as to make the result as unknown as possible, random even, can become the object of *alea* games, which is essentially what betting is. At the same time, some forms of play are mutually exclusive. Caillois emphasizes how *agon* and *mimicry* can be combined but only when it comes to the spectators and not the participants. The participants of *agon* must not pretend: *it is a spectacle, which, to be valid, excludes simulation* (p. 22). The spectators, on the other hand, simulate the game by identifying themselves with the players in the same way that they could identify with the protagonists of a novel they are reading or the film stars of a movie they are watching. Sports many a time

invoke features of an intrinsic rite: *with costumes, solemn overture, appropriate liturgy, and regulated procedures. [...] The nature of these spectacles remains that of an agon, but their outward aspect is that of an exhibition* (ibid).

Even from a superfluous reading of the theory of play it becomes apparent that sports and eSports do not belong to the same category. ESports are digital games and as such they constitute simulations, which Caillois segregates from agon games, to which sports belong. However, this discrepancy cannot be taken at face value, especially because Caillois' taxonomy did not accommodate for digital games and as a result his use of the term simulation does not encompass the application of the word in computerized systems. For that, both physical sports and eSports need to be examined further so as one to reach a safe conclusion regarding their affinity or lack thereof. Here the approach taken is that of an analysis of their characteristics in terms of their most basic and essential properties, which are closely interlinked, namely their spatiality, implementation of rules, and employment of the body.

GAME SPACE

Caillois' theory remains still the prime philosophy of play that has influenced a number of academic fields (see for example Armstrong, 2000; Milam, 2000). It continues to be the point of reference of most contemporary takes on play (like in Rowe, 1992; Sutton-Smith, 1997; Motte, 2009). Indeed, in an analysis that encompasses eSports it is particularly essential, since it has been employed by theorists of digital games as well (Juul 2003; Salen & Zimmerman 2004). Arguably not all digital games are applicable to eSports competitions, at least as those have been formed until now since most of the times eSports include games that demand high dexterity and eye-hand coordination. For example, in the 2017 Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games in Turkmenistan, players competed in Fifa 2017, and MOBA, Multiplayer Online Battle Arena, and RTA, Real Time Attack, gaming genres (Graham, 2017).

Nonetheless, Caillois' theory is not without its faults. Its most problematic point is that it segregates games and play from real life in terms of space and time. In that Caillois follows Huizinga's claim of the magic circle. Huizinga's proposition is that play has a certain locality and temporality, which separates it from ordinary life and where the rules of play reign. For Huizinga this segmentation of space for play has no essential difference from the demarcation of sacred places or places for all kinds of rituals, which include practices of art, law, commerce, and science. 'The turf,' he writes, *the tennis-court, the chessboard and pavement-hopsotch cannot formally be distinguished from the temple or the magic circle* (p. 20). Even though Caillois disagrees with Huizinga in equating the sacred with play, he takes for granted that play and games are separated from the real or ordinary life in terms of time and space.

The trouble with the magic circle is that it creates bubbles of practices that are isolated from everyday life. One bubble of space and time is play, another is the religious ritual, another is work etc. But if that is true, then what does it remain for the everyday life to consist of? As many critics against both Huizinga's and Caillois' view have argued (Ehrmann, 1968; Motte, 2009; Calleja, 2012), play does not work like that. When a game is played, this activity is part of the everyday life by means of both time and space. Games are not something separated from life, but a part of it. In turn, they formulate life's consistency, since reality is not something stable but morphed by its various practices, one of which is games. Indeed, games belong to the repertoire of human experiences and activities and they cannot be segregated from real life. The reason for that are players themselves, who are neither spatially nor timely segregated from real life but experience their existence in continuum.

Rather as Thomas Henricks (2010) points out, even though he finds this criticism against Caillois and Huizinga unfair, the *players decide how seriously they will take the game* (p. 164). By that he means that by agreeing to play, the players give their consent to follow the rules while the game lasts and at the same time they promise that they will not let the outcome of the game influence their behavior afterward, for example by getting angry in case they lose. Hence, it is this ludic attitude, this 'sportsmanship' as he calls it (ibid), that creates players and games and not the other way around. This is a very important distinction to show that games are not already conceived spaces that the moment a person enters or encounters is transformed into a player. On the contrary, it is the intention of the person that allows games and play to form. Since their origin is the intention of one person and this person can have more intentions than one, and most of the times at once, then games cannot be separated in terms of space and time. They can surely dictate or superimpose other intentions of said person so as to define her actions and attitude, but they never have spatial and timely boundaries of their own.

This can be easily understood by how strongly games' influence follows them even after they finish. Michael Tiberius (1996) informs us that in ancient Greece people used to demolish their city's walls upon the return of their Olympic champion in a symbolic gesture of respect; if they had citizens of such calibre then they did not need walls for protection. Or the champions would smash a certain part of the wall themselves by passing through it with their chariots so as to create a new entryway; because they were considered demigods they could not use the same gates as common men. Later, in Roman years, emperors and generals continued this tradition and would enter a city through arches and gates specifically designed for this purpose. The arch of Hadrian in Athens, Greece is a construction of this type as it is the Arc de triomphe in Paris, France. In the same context lies Olympic Truce, a treaty signed in 9th century BCE so as 'the athletes, artists and their families, as well as ordinary pilgrims, could travel in total safety to participate in or attend

the Olympic Games and return afterwards to their respective countries' (Olympic Truce). Actually, the Olympic Games are a circumstance in the history of games, in which the stadium and the temple coincide. They took place exclusively in Olympia, Greece, a site dedicated to the worshipping of Zeus and Hera, king and queen of the Olympian Gods (History).

In contemporary times, the Olympic Games have retained elements of the old rituals only as means of a continuation of the ancient traditions and linkage with the past. Instead, most games and sports have turned into full time and lucrative professions. Huizinga denied the status of games to activities that entail profit, but Caillois was not so antithetical to the notion. Even though he also defined games as unproductive, he did not see much of a difference when the player is paid, because she returns to reality once the game finishes. In this aspect, Caillois could not be farther from the truth. It is without a doubt that the reality of professional athletes is completely different to the reality of common people and this is absolutely due to their status as professional athletes. Actually, the top athletes are part of the international jet set, earn fortunes, and celebrate a *modus vivendi* of a star quality. At the same time, while they are playing, they are not only players but corporate commodities serving other functions as well; most importantly that of advertising various merchandise. Their influence is so prevalent that it continues even after their professional retirement. They become public figures and their opinion and example shapes the minds of millions of fans.

For Caillois it is understandable that this deification, basically, of athletes is innocuous, a *harmless compensation to the masses, who are resigned and have neither hope nor opportunity of attaining the luxury and glory by which they are dazzled* (p. 125), since for him it is confined in the space and time of the game. However, this is not the case, because this idolization shapes the conscience of the many and influences their life as a whole. Actually, Caillois himself shows how play is not unique in that by saying that this identification with the athletes can happen also with movie stars, singers, even characters from a book. Therefore, this is a universal tendency people have; it affects their whole life. As games are one of the many applications of this tendency, they must by default be part of this whole, thus part of life.

This is further exemplified if we look at games through the lens of the philosophy of space, particularly the theory of production of space by Henri Lefebvre. In his homonymous book, Lefebvre (1991) argues that space is at the same time conceived, perceived, and lived. A working interpretation of these concepts could equate conceived space with the space of mathematical figures, the perceived space with the space of physical movement, and the lived space with the subjective space of people's sense-making (Zhang, 2006). For example, a playground is designed on paper and then constructed by engineers in its physical form. Its space is first conceived and

then perceived. But when it opens its gates to the people of the city it is experienced. This interaction of the space of the playground with the inhabitants transforms it to something lived and therefore prone to change. The designed on paper playground bears little resemblance to the physical playground after it has been lived in. This new playground creates new experiences of its space and thus new perceptions and new conceptions of what space is and how it should be approached. In other words, people do not simply act in space, but experience it and think about it. It is a dynamic, interactive process that never ceases; a production that shapes space and the people. This is why space cannot be regarded in a vacuum or as a static object. Space is an experience and at the same time its experience is what creates it. Game space, in particular, is produced by the players in every gaming session; it does not exist before, after or without them like the being of the player cannot be without the space that accommodates it.

Let us examine an example of this production in a physical game. A football field is a designated space for playing football. Its space is conceived, designed, with the specific purpose of hosting football matches. Very schematically, a football field has green grass, goal posts, and white lines. In this spatial conception people, players that is, perceive its space, act upon it, with the intention of playing football. At the same time, the players experience the football field, meaning they create its mental image in their mind, according to how they live it, namely by playing football. To this production of the football field one should add the historical and cultural production of football fields, which result to this specific football field. Furthermore, this specific football field contributes to the spatial production of all football fields and the space of humans in general.

It is important to note that one should not equate space with topographical coordinates, constructions and/or physical boundaries. Instead, space is its production. A football game is space not because it takes place in a stadium, even though the stadium is part of its space, but because the players produce its space. The football space is the field and the stadium, yet it is also the bodies of the players, their perception of the game, their actual gameplay, and also the rules of the game which dictate their spatial practice. At the same time, the football space coexists with other spaces. A stadium conventionally has administrative offices, locker rooms, a nursery, and bleachers, where the audience sits, watches the game, and cheers or jeers the players. Just like the voice of the audience, space cannot be confined nor secluded.

With that being said, the production of space is a matter of convention. People are indoctrinated into producing space in a certain way, which is in direct contact with their bodies and in a second, yet no lesser, degree with their society and culture. This is why for Lefebvre the production of space is essentially political, concentrated to the hands of the agents that exercise power, namely society, knowledge, and institutions (Elden, 2004). For Lefebvre, the production of space is power possession

and exercise by the hegemony; an establishment of the norms of how other people, the ones who do not possess power, should treat space. A playground is conceived by the state with the intention of people playing in it. On the contrary, a hospital ward is not. How spatial conventions come into place and how specific spatial conceptions match spatial practices is a whole different subject. The crucial thing to keep here is that even though the production of space is arbitrary, adhering to natural laws, it is infused furthermore with social rules, which transform it to social space, the space of social interaction or of communication, as Lefebvre calls it (p. 19).

Since social space is a product of communication between the people that produce it, it is understandable that it is not stable and pre-ordered. On the contrary, it is in a state of flux. At the same time, some spaces are more institutionalized than others, meaning that for various reasons their conception, perception, and experience are so systematized that have become a norm or tradition. This does not mean that they are spatially segregated, because even in those cases the social rules that hold them together can still break or accommodate other meanings. In an Olympic stadium, for example, an athlete participates in 200 meters sprint. The space allocated for this sport is regulated to detail. The runners start behind a common line and the first to reach the finish point wins. The winner perceives this game space to win this game. Yet simultaneously she may break a World or Olympic record, hence transforming the same space to a different game space without negating the first.

Of course, there is a scale that regulates the appropriateness of each spatial practice according to their distance from the designated purpose of a space and the social conventions. Playing football on a dangerous minefield has lower acceptance from playing football on a deserted alley, which in turn has lower acceptance from playing football on a designated football field. This system of relations and acceptability, what Lefebvre calls 'spatial economy' (p.56), is a complex construction fashioned by many variegated factors that depend, in turn, on how space is produced. The institutions of power regard the spatial practices of the public and in case of divergence enforce the return to the supposed production with an infliction varying in severity according to the acceptance scale. At the 1968 Summer Olympic Games in Mexico City American sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos stood atop the medal podium and raised black-gloved fists during the playing of the national anthem in a symbolic gesture of black power (Cosgrove, 2014). In that case, the Olympic space became synchronously a game space and a political space. At the time, their behavior was considered atrocious and it resulted in their suspension from the U.S. track team and death threats (Davis, 2008). Nowadays, people see them as pioneers of the Black Lives Matter movement (Brown, 2017).

So, in the context of social space the obedience to the game rules has something of a sacrifice in it. In Olympic Games these rules are extended to the general conduct of an athlete. The Olympic Games, and their space, are not superimposed on people.

Rather people comply with arbitrary and conventional rules, in order to participate in the games, both as competitors and as spectators, and thus produce them. In this sense, games are indeed a presupposition of culture as Huizinga wanted them (p.1). People conform to rules that have no outside meaning than the one assigned to them by people themselves so as to be able to organize the chaos of their existence to sustainable order. When these rules become institutionalized they form the Law. Playing, therefore, is an unconscious study to social being, interaction, and order. People come together and agree to a catholic consensus, which demands a part of their freedom in return for the guarantee of coexistence with the sole purpose of the success of this coexistence. The more institutionalized a game, the more strict and rigid those rules; sports being probably the most institutionalized of all with federations, international organizations, and a specialized branch of the Law engaging only with the implementation of the sports law with its own jurisprudence (see Court of Arbitration for Sport).

Things are different when it comes to eSports. Unlike physical sports, eSports are digital games so they constitute virtual spaces; they are coded simulations that are actualized by the player the moment she is playing by her input commands. The machine translates these commands according to the code of the game and outputs the results so as for the player to respond and so on. It is obvious that digital games differ from traditional games in terms of materiality. This affects their production as spaces in multiple ways, but what matters the most here is their being social spaces. While physical game spaces are the product of social interaction between people, virtual game spaces are de facto the product of interactivity between the human and the machine. Even in multiplayer games, the spatial communication between the players is always mediated by the machine through the code of the game.

This creates itself a distance between eSports and physical sports. Caillois, as it was shown previously, places sports under the category of *agon* as formal competitions of a physical nature. In *agon* the communication is between humans. One person strives to defeat others in a specific skill. A person cannot compete alone. As Henricks points out: *people want to be well regarded by others. They wish to interact and to be watched, and they understand themselves by comparing what they do to the achievements of others* (p. 170). Even when an *agon* game is played alone, it is done with a competitive attitude. According to Caillois, this is what differentiates *agon* from *ludus*, in which *the conflict is with the obstacle, not with one or several competitors* (p. 29). This holds true particularly for the Olympic Games. In 2016 the Russian pole vaulter Yelena Isinbaeva, who had been banned from taking part to the Olympic Games in Rio due to a doping scandal regarding the Russian Federation, uploaded an Instagram video that showed her jumping over 5.06 meters, which is her world record, alone in her hometown of Volgograd (Kouroupaki, 2016). She then announced her retirement during a press conference

saying that she congratulates the Greek gold medalist, Katerina Stefanidi who had jumped to 4.85 meters, though she did not exactly win the gold medal, because she competed without Isinbaeva there (ibid).

In eSports, on the other hand, the competition is first and foremost with the code and secondarily with the other person. The winner is the one who will beat the code better and first, so there is always a medium, an intermediary in the form of the machine. Arguably, physical games may also include solitariness, like puzzles. Yet in this case there is no social communication with a medium, but rather a handling of a tool, a toy. Instead, digital games are simulations and as simulations they are systems that communicate with the player and the player must in return communicate constantly with them (Frasca, 2003). They are spaces and not static objects. However, unlike physical sports they are produced on the basis of a code and not of social rules, a feature that influences their production as spaces in an essential manner.

GAME RULES

One discerning feature of games is that they are comprised by rules. These rules are conventional and meaningless, yet meaning inducing. They are there so as for the game to have a distinct structure and purpose. This is why they cannot be imposed; they have to be respected. In Caillois' words, play entails *rules that are respected for their own sake* (p. 157). It is telling that in most – if not all – sports there is at least one referee or judge so as to make sure that the rules of the game are followed. In basketball it is forbidden by the rules of the game for players to start kicking the ball with their feet. Yet they can do it, they have the physical ability, even though they do not do it, because they respect the rules of the game and they know they will get penalized in case they do not. Not only that, but if they start kicking the ball with their feet they will have formed an altogether different game. In digital games this respect of the rules is not consensual. The player can only perform those actions that are permitted by the code of the game. If the code does not allow a certain spatial practice, then the player cannot actualize it. If in digital basketball the kicking of the ball is prohibited, then the player simply cannot perform it. It is not any more about sportsmanship or consensus, but rather an ultimatum, a take it or leave it situation.

Unlike in physical games, where the rules are social conventions, in digital games the rules of the code are translated to natural laws. The participants of eSports do not consciously acquiesce to a certain number of rules so as to play a game. The rules of the digital game are hard-programmed in its code and unless one breaks that code she cannot overpass the code's rules. Even when it comes to glitches, one takes advantage of gaps in the code, in order to perform actions that are considered illogical in the context of the said game yet are still permitted by the code. The

production of the virtual game space depends on its conception by the code, which dictates what this space allows and demands from the player regarding its perception, and how the player experiences it. In a digital rendering of Sudoku, the designers and programmers of the game code conceive its spatial production, which then the player actualizes the moment she decides to play the game. The code of the game dictates what the spatial practice of the player may be; filling the empty slots with numbers. Through her spatial practice, the player experiences Sudoku and its lived space completing thusly its production of space.

Furthermore, the code of the games is digital, meaning that it either allows or not allows something. They are no gray areas that are open to interpretation, but rather a continuous understanding of the machine. This holds true also for games that invoke affective or evolving bottom-up game design, namely games that adapt more to the player's feedback than just being rigid pre-established blocks of coding. Affective computing and quantum game design is still a work in progress so it is not as of now part of the eSports. However, even in that case it is the communication with the machine that is further developed, so the mediation of the code, albeit in a different structure, cannot be overpassed. The same applies when digital games are influenced by the physical space rules in the sense that the players adapt their ludic behavior according to social standards, in spite of them not being imposed by the digital game rules.

This happens often in online games. As Tristan Donovan (2010) mentions, when *Ultima Online* (Origin Systems, 1997) was first published, many players utilized the game system to turn against other less experienced players and rob them or kill them. Despite the moderators' efforts to control the phenomenon, their intervention was insufficient. As a result, players started to organize themselves in vigilante online groups that protected the community from in game attacks banning in reality the sly players from continuing the way they behaved inside the game; an action that in spatial terminology is translated to a prohibition of their spatial practice, and their enforced compliance with the spatial practice of the many. However, this spatial practice conformed to social rules that are exogenous to the game itself. Respectively, a similar situation can be seen when a group of friends are playing a multiplayer digital game and one of them pushes buttons at random ridiculing, in result, the game. This player will most probably face the wrath of the other players that will force her to behave or else stop her from playing. This ludicrous behavior is not constrained by the game code, but by the social rules that the other players impose.

As it was argued before, the digital game space, as space, is not confined to a certain locality. Naturally, it is influenced by the physical space, since it is played by players, who are physical beings. It is understandable, therefore, that the players bring along social spatial conventions which they have been conditioned to obey

so as for games to be functional and meaningful. The difference lies in that this applicability in digital games is once removed, namely this physical fair play is imposed on digital games only because the players have learnt to treat physical game space in that manner. If they had not been exposed to the social rules of the physical space in the first place, then the digital space would not have elicited these responses from them because its production follows different principles. Even in this scenario, what the social rules can affect remains in what the code allows. If the code does not allow in game robbing, then the player cannot conform to not rob other players. In this, the social rules are an optional super-structure over the basis of the code rules. The player can still choose to ignore them or bypass them, yet she does not have the same choice with the rules of the code.

It has to be noted, nonetheless, that even in the most rule-based digital games players have the ability to dissociate themselves from what is expected from them. Yet, here the compliance with the rules is not a matter of goodwill or choice, because if the player does not perform the spatial practices that the code demands, then there is not a different production of space, as it would be the case in physical games, but the negation of production of space in total. In most games this negation is realized as the death of the player. Alternatively, it can mean that the production of space stops until the player complies with the intended spatial practice. As Olli Tapio Leino comments (2012) to play a digital game means that us, the players, *must find out what the designers wanted us to do in a game. If we fail to figure this out we are most likely to get stuck or find ourselves in front of a game over screen.* So instead of providing meaning to space, we have to discover the meaning that someone else, the designer, imposed on this space.

Since games are the ‘residue of culture’ (Caillois, 1961, p. 58), we are actually talking about a shift in culture. In a meaningless world where nothing is for certain we need the reassurance of directions, thus most physical spaces show their intended use, defined by the institution of power, through signs that we are culturally conditioned to interpret in the right way; because if we do not the counter effects can vary from absurdity and lack of communication with our space to social exclusion and correctional – or not – punishment. Digital games still punish us for not complying with the hegemony, but in their case the hegemony is the code and not the abstract power of society. In this sense, digital games do not involve the social dialogue of learning to play by the rules in order to exist in peace and harmony with one another. Instead, they train us to better understand how to operate a machine, how to acquire an individualistic trait that deems society obsolete.

Indeed, when it comes to eSports one does not even need a human opponent. The machine can take up this role. Actually, the human element in eSports as of now is rather subdued. Certainly the players do not need to share the same physical space,

E-Sports at the Olympic Games

since they do not have to interact with each other. It is only in the game space that they compete. This applies to members of the same team as well. Their exclusive channel of communication is the headphones with the attached microphones. It becomes apparent that in order to win the game, the players have to be infused as much as they can in its virtual space, what in digital games is called immersion or incorporation (Calleja, 2011). This is why in eSports tournaments the focus is given on the screen, where the true action takes place.

Instead, the physical bodies of the players are more or less static. The players sit on chairs in front of said screens and, their mental processing notwithstanding, they do not show much physical motion apart from their hands and specifically their fingers. If their movements were to be extracted from their effect, they are nothing more than repeated pushing of buttons. Moreover, their physical activity does not have one to one equivalence with the activity performed on screen; they merely press different buttons for the various virtual spatial practices. Hence, theoretically, a champion in one digital game can easily become a champion in another digital game. This is why we talk about eSports in general and not about one specific digital game as it is the case with physical games, in which one person is a runner, another one is a wrestler etc.

Hence, if eSports become part of the Olympic Games, it will not be on the same condition as any other physical sport. It will not even be the same as chess or bridge for that matter. The discerning point is that unlike physical games and sports, the result of the action in eSports is moved from physical space to virtual space. This is not to say that eSports are not real sports. As it has been shown the virtual is not in dialectical antithesis with the real, but with the actual (Levy, 1998; Aarseth, 2007). Caillois himself did not differentiate between games that involve primarily mental or primarily physical skills. Yet in eSports it is not so much about physical or mental skills, but rather about physical and virtual space. In eSports the virtuality is not only introduced, it also takes central stage. In this it takes away emphasis both from the physical space and from the physical body.

THE BODY IN GAMES

Since ancient times the focus of Olympic Games has been the body itself. In most Olympic sports we celebrate the bodily idolization, the body reaching unachievable limits, breaking barriers that up to that point were considered impossible. As Eugen Fink (2016) writes, in competitive play the body is linked with health and beauty, and essentially with philosophy. It is a different essence from play as a 'technical occupation', which for him is the play when technology is implemented, like for

example in Formula 1 races (p. 247). In eSports this difference is by default more prominent, because unlike other physical sports that entail technology but still take place in the physical world, in eSports the focus is moved from the body to the results of its extension to another materiality, the virtual space of the screen.

Indeed, eSports negate the physical body. This is self-evident if we compare the body image of an Olympic athlete to that of an eSports champion. ESports competitors train as many, if not more, hours as traditional athletes, yet their physical activity is inconsequential (Schütz, 2016). Even though it is due to the physical body that they are able to use and communicate with the machine, once that happens their physicality is reduced to a mechanical movement and it is instead the machine that comes alive. They, as bodies, are transformed into a new existence that participates in the production of the virtual space. In that respect, eSports share more elements with mimicry than with agon; the what-if of mimicry becomes systemized. Caillois informs us that:

In one way or another, one escapes the real world and creates another. One can also escape himself and become another. This is mimicry. (p. 19)

Henricks further analyzes this notion as:

Mimicry is connected [...] to the obsessive desire of humans to escape the boundaries and limitations of their own selfhood, to lose themselves in the patterns of the world. (p. 160)

This affects eSports both as a form of play and as a form of spectacle. In physical sports, the spectators do not participate per se in the game, yet they share the same physical space with the players and the game space. Since as it was aforementioned space is a production, the spectators may not actively participate in the game, however their presence still shapes its space. Many a time it has been emphasized by professional players and athletes how important the role of their fans is for them. Of course, this is also a matter of marketing and promotion of tickets, yet anyone that has ever played, albeit recreationally, a game or participated in a sports event can attest to that. The spectators influence the psychology of the player and thus the game itself.

In eSports the spectators do not regularly look at the players. They may shoot a glance at them, but naturally their attention is drawn where the action takes place, that is the computer screen. In that they do not share anymore the space of the game. Rather the game space is transformed for them into an environment, where a production of space is taking place but it does not communicate with them. They

are part of the production of physical space, but not of the virtual space. They are excluded by default. Their body is limited to a pair of eyes. The players cannot even hear them. They wear headphones and are totally engrossed, immersed to another existence, the one taking part in the production of the virtual space, while their physical self has been limited to mechanic movements that have no referential or even abstract meaning in the world they share with their audience.

In that it could be argued that Huizinga's magic circle in this case functions awkwardly. It is not the game that is secluded from real life, because a game is not something static neither is real life. On the contrary, they are the spectators, the bodies not participating in the game, which are secluded from the spatial production of the game. As Lefebvre argues, experiencing space with the eyes only results in that *the bodies are transported out of themselves, transferred and emptied out, as it were, via the eyes* (p. 98), which in turn is responsible for *the decomposition of the body into localized functions and its abandonment as a totality* (p. 204). Therefore, eSports negate the physical body, both in spectators and players, in principle. This negation continues to exist, albeit not that acutely, also in digital games that implement the physical body as a whole, for example in Wii sports (Nintendo, 2006). The physical activity notwithstanding, the attention of the players is still on the screen, not as an object of their physical space but as an entry point to a virtual space. Hence, this negation of the physical is to be understood as a reduction of the human body to a set of referential movements that have no meaning and no effect on the physical space, but instead are part of the active production of the virtual space.

In this, eSports are proven to be indeed contradictory, if not antithetical, to the principles, values, and approach of the Olympic Games, whose aim has always been the apotheosis of the physical body. In physical sports the achievements of the athletes are tangible and continue to affect the physical space, life, and world even after the game finishes. A physical body that competes and wins is an accomplished body on its own. Instead, a body that wins in a virtual world does not carry these bodily effects on the physical world. That is not to say that eSports are secluded from physical life, because they are not. ESports champions enjoy privileges in the real world as much as other athletes. Also, they still have skills and trained abilities. The difference is that the emphasis in eSports is not given to the body as an object itself, but as a vehicle, a medium for the passage to another space, that is virtual, hence ideological in nature.

If in Olympic Games every time a winner 'steps on the rostrum to be crowned with an olive wreath', we revel in *the glorification of the body, the apotheosis of our sensuous existence [...] which conducts itself like the playing child of the Ephesian thinker* (Fink, 2016, p. 248), in eSports we are dealing with the division of physical and virtual of Aristoteles. This is not a priori negative neither does it

render impossible for eSports to become part of the Olympic Games. Indeed, this negation of the physical body may result to an egalitarianism that is not possible with physical sports. For example, eSports teams can include players of all genders or of various disabilities for that matter. What it is argued, however, is that the inclusion of eSports in Olympic Games will indeed change the nature of Olympic Games unprecedentedly in a fashion that no other physical sport or game could ever do, to the point of altering the deep core of what Olympic Games are. This change, as all changes, will have both positive and negative effects, the degree and actualization of which is a matter of politics and economics and an important subject for further research.

CONCLUSION

In the current chapter the author compared physical and digital games in terms of their formal properties as games in the context of whether eSports can be part of the Olympic Games. Using the theory of play by Roger Caillois as orientation, the author argued that physical games and eSports differ in how they treat space, implement rules, and finally approach the body. Unlike physical games, eSports, being digital games, are virtual spaces, in that they employ a distinct materiality from physical games, which results in them being produced differently as spaces. Following on the philosophy of space by Henri Lefebvre, the author showed that eSports are produced according to the code of the game and not according to social rules and the power of the hegemony like physical sports. The consequence of this is a distancing in the function of play itself. While in physical sports one should respect the rules of the game for their own sake in an appropriation of how society and the law works, in digital games the rules take on the form of natural laws, since if the code does not permit a certain spatial practice, then the player cannot perform it.

In actuality, the focus is transferred from the physical space to virtual space. The physical spatial practices of the player are only a mechanically repeated movement. It is in the screen of the machine where the actual action takes place. In that, eSports negate the physical body and existence of the players in an original and intrinsic to the medium way that no other physical sport does. Hence, eSports are indeed antithetical to the Olympic Games, which since antiquity have always put the physical body as an object at the forefront. This concludes that the potential inclusion of eSports in Olympic Games will irrevocably affect their quality. The nature of this effect can be the subject of a further study through the prism of various paragons, arguing both the negative and the positive aftereffects.

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