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PART TWO

Intermedial
Exchanges
between Video
Games and Other
Media

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Game and Match: GAME AND WATCH

Machinimas, Let's Plays, Streams, and the Linearization of Digital Play

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"We all play occasionally, and we all know what playing feels like." Thus Brian Sutton-Smith opens his book *The Ambiguity of Play* (1991).¹ This opening sentence suggests that play is an inherently embodied activity, something that should be *done* in order to be understood. Playing is doing or, following Sutton-Smith's intuition, playing is the only way of understanding what play is. While the author of *The Ambiguity of Play* was certainly preoccupied with the implications and characteristics of analogue play, scholarship on digital games has rarely challenged this stance. Video games are said to be "ergodic," a term that defines them as textual machines in need of activation or, if we settle for a much maligned term, "interactive" objects that require a user for their actualization.² This is certainly a convincing rhetoric, if not a product of a player's common sense. There is no play without activity. Nevertheless, occasionally, we all watch someone else play.

Whether it is a sports game on television or in an arena, the unruly play of children in a park, or a speedrunner streaming a record attempt at *Super Meat Boy*, play has a magnetic quality: it constitutes a specific type of performance in which spectacle and athleticism seem to converge, and, at the same time, it invites a specific type of spectatorship.³ According to Johan Huizinga, game studies' undisputed forefather, play and spectacle are inextricably connected,

and their relation changes according to specific historical, social, and technological conditions. The public games of the Romans, for example, invited a vicarious form of play, in which “the competitive impulse shifted, at an early period, from the protagonist to the spectator, who merely watches the struggles of others appointed for that purpose.”⁴

This chapter seeks to understand what I will define as the linearization of digital play; that is, its reduction to a linear audiovisual object, stripped of its ergodicity and thus ready for spectatorial consumption. My chapter will unfold following three paths: a historical reconstruction of the phenomenon, a description of three forms of linearization (machinima, let’s play, and live streams), and three theses concerning their larger meaning. Along the way, I argue for the relevance of analyzing the conditions and meanings of spectatorship in the context of video game studies, as in many cases this practice constitutes an integral part of the playing experience and of game culture in general.

A Short History of Video Game Spectatorship

In his article “Slots of Fun, Slots of Trouble: An Archaeology of Arcade Gaming” (2005), Erkki Huhtamo traces a connection between arcade video games and other forms of popular entertainment, dating back to the end of the nineteenth century. Huhtamo’s thesis is that instead of being born out of technological innovation in the early 1970s, arcade video games actually fit within a tradition of other practices such as electro-mechanical play (e.g., pinball machines) and, more interestingly, non-interactive forms of spectacular entertainment, such as the use of automata to attract customers in department stores.⁵ If we are to adopt Huhtamo’s media-archaeological perspective, we may think of video games as spectacular—and thus potentially *spectated*—devices since their inception as commercial products. The wealth of photos from the so-called golden age of arcade gaming readily available on the web testify to this legacy. These images almost invariably depict a player with a variable number of onlookers looking over his shoulder, trying to catch a glimpse of the game being played while waiting in line or, in other cases, simply acting as spectators.⁶ The complex interweaving of play and spectatorship and the resulting social interactions and tensions found in arcade rooms has been described in a number of ethnographic studies,⁷ but is condensed with remarkable precision by Carly Kocurek, who writes:

The most popular games are surrounded by clusters of onlookers, some of whom may have added a quarter to the top of the cabinet to hold their

place in line . . . The fluorescent lighting is low in much of the space to maximize the visibility of the machines' cathode displays . . . The unoccupied games play in the attract mode, displaying top scores and titles and short bursts of simulated play. The screens tease.⁸

Both in their design and suggested social interactions, arcade rooms encourage the act of looking, spectating other players' activities. Arcade games, with their neon colors and elaborated cabinet decorations are more than playthings, they are spectacular devices.

The domestication of video games in the wake of the appearance of early game consoles such as the Magnavox Odyssey and the Atari 2600 seemed to put a halt to these communal play practices, making video game play a much more secluded affair. According to Mirjam Vosmeer, Gabriele Ferri, Ben Schouten, and Stefan Rank, "with consoles, however, videogame culture moved from arcades to attics and bedrooms, to re-appear later in the living room. For a long time, audiences remained fairly private."⁹ While the private nature of console gaming prevented the formation of "clusters of onlookers," it might be safe to say that the coupling of the console with the TV set, which by the late 1970s was a fairly common appliance in most living rooms in the West, helped frame video game play as a shared experience. As noted by Sheila Murphy, advertisements for these early systems often depicted entire families gathered around the TV set, either with children playing and parents spectating or vice versa.¹⁰ In this sense, early console gaming, by relying on earlier audiovisual technology, inherited television's familial, communal vocation. Even with the advent of PC gaming, a notably more intimate experience, as it "normally takes place close to the screen and in a private space, such as ones [sic] room (or office)," video games did not stop being spectacles.¹¹ During the early 1990s, following the release of *Doom* (id Software, 1993), a competitive scene grew around the first-person shooter genre. Players gathered at LAN parties, more or less formal gatherings where several PCs were connected via LAN cables in order to allow for multiplayer sessions and, most notably, social interaction, file sharing, and spectatorship.¹² Moreover, some PC games allowed players to export and share their games via BBSs and other methods. The possibility to distribute audiovisual content gave rise to new forms of remote spectatorship; players no longer needed to gather in one place to watch others compete, but could download relatively small files that could be reproduced via the game's engine.

At the same time, with the rise of eSports, in particular in South Korea, video games started being broadcast on more traditional platforms, such as dedicated TV networks and, more recently in the West, sports television channels. The diffusion and success of eSports amplified the aspirational



quality of video game spectatorship; that is, a vicarious enjoyment of a performance that could, in theory, be replicated by the viewer. With the success of video sharing platforms such as YouTube and streaming services such as Twitch, forms of remote spectatorship became prevalent, and the number and diversity of producers of video game-related content grew dramatically. It was no longer only the e-athletes that had some degree of visibility, thanks to their skills, but a plethora of other performers with different communicative styles, narrative techniques, and performing personas. Watching someone play a video game is, now more than ever, an accepted way of participating in game culture, an integral part of the experience of playing digital games, and a consistent revenue stream for a number of actors. The next sections will detail some of the types of audiovisual content that derive from video game play and their intended modes of viewing, while the last section of this chapter will propose a reading of video game spectatorship along three axes: aspiration, nostalgia, and meta-play.

Cinema through Video Games: The Machinima

After the success of *Doom*, id Software published *Quake* (1996), a largely similar game which requires players to navigate narrow corridors looking for enemies to annihilate. Despite the apparent similarities with its predecessor, *Quake* was provided with at least two profoundly innovative features: The first was the possibility for players to compete in local multiplayer games via LAN or through internet connection. The second, which will prove more relevant to this analysis, was a recording function (which was present in *Doom* in a rudimentary form), which allowed players to capture and store their best matches. This unique function would be pivotal for the birth and diffusion of a largely unique form of audiovisual production: the machinima. In an article on this particular media genre, Henry Lowood defines machinima as follows: "The word 'machinima' was derived from 'machine cinema.' A more apt derivation might be 'machine animation.' Whether we think of machinima as cinema or animation, it means making animated movies in real-time with the software that is used to develop and play computer games."¹³ Machinimas are usually short films rendered in a video game engine, realized by using non-conventional playing techniques with the intent of producing short narratives. *Quake*'s recording function allowed a part of its player community to create and distribute their own machinimas. In the year following the release of *Quake*, players produced a number of short features, now considered to be the foundational texts of this new hybrid media format.



Diary of a Camper (1996) is a short machinima in which a group of players is ambushed by a camper (the vernacular term used by players of first-person shooters to define someone who “camps” somewhere, waiting for other players to walk by), who, at the end of the short film, reveals himself as John Romero, one of *Quake*’s lead designers. This one-minute thirty-eight-second video was produced using the game’s graphics engine and derives from the players’ orchestrated performance, which was later edited with the intent of creating a narrative product. A few months after *Diary of a Camper*, another team produced *Quake Done Quick*, a freely distributed machinima detailing the extraordinarily “athletic” performance of a player. In this case, the creators’ intent was not narrative, but rather documentary, aiming at preserving a particularly remarkable speedrun (i.e., the completion of the game in the shortest time possible). Whereas *Diary of a Camper* uses editing to create a consistent narrative, the absence of editing in *Quake Done Quick* testifies to the authenticity of the performance.

These two ur-machinimas, tellingly produced in the span of less than a year, defined the medium in the following years. On the one hand, more or less complex narratives were produced using video games’ graphics engines, such as *Quad God* (2000), a forty-five-minute feature created using *Quake III Arena* (id Software, 1999). On the other hand, the documentary use certified a player’s technical prowess and skills. In the early twenty-first century, both practices would find different forms of stabilization and institutionalization. Video games such as *The Movies* (Lionhead Studios, 2005) crystallize the form of the narrative machinima, while festivals and events such as Games Done Quick gather communities of fans, turning the practice of speedrunning into a spectacle.

For film and game scholars and, more generally, for scholars of digital audiovisual media, machinimas constitute an interesting testing ground. On the one hand, they seem to pertain to the form of cultural production which Nicolas Bourriaud describes as “practices of postproduction”; that is, the tendency to create new content through the re-signification of existing objects.¹⁴ On the other hand, the characteristic convergence of audiovisual production and playing practices, with players being both the producers *and* the intended audience of these products, encourages a reflection on the communal forms of production within video game culture. Finally, and most evidently, machinima represents one of the most significant areas where video games and cinema intertwine, through a process in which the procedurality of digital play is led back to the linearity of cinema.

I would like to propose three different trajectories for the interpretation of these peculiar media objects. The first is political in nature. The “artistic” machinima—conceived as an art object, bound to spread beyond the gaming

community, and following the practices and habits of contemporary art—may be framed as a specific form of guerrilla-film which “enables individuals without the means to become purveyors of official histories/memories to be . . . storytellers who can challenge dominant myths.”¹⁵ Machinima thus becomes political, innately low-budget, and anti-hegemonic cinema. Nevertheless, as noted by Matteo Bittanti, artistic or political machinima constitute only a small fraction of a much larger phenomenon.¹⁶

The second perspective is sociological. Machinimas may be framed as catalysts of creative communities of producers, distributors, and critics of a series of shared texts. From this perspective, machinimas constitute a specific form of self-narrative in which players reflect critically on their practices, shared mythologies, and canonical texts. In this context, *Red vs. Blue* (2003–), a serial machinima created in the *Halo: Combat Evolved* (Bungie, 2001) engine which tells a story about the vicissitudes of two military factions bound to fight each other without any apparent reason, provides a relevant example. While *Red vs. Blue* uses a series of narrative and stylistic strategies derived from traditional TV sitcoms, this specific product is evidently targeted at an audience of players. Jokes and skits repeatedly self-referentially draw on gamer stereotypes, while the characters often question their own identities, ironically pointing at the possibility of being inside a video game.

Finally, machinimas raise an ontological question regarding their relation to film. Whereas this media form apparently reworks film stereotypes, forms, and styles, at the same time, it questions a number of possible definitions of cinema. Films produced through video games; set in virtual environments; shots of ludic performances, edited and turned into narratives via postproduction; documentaries of athletic endeavors in synthetic worlds—all of these aspects point at what Gianni Canova describes as the “identity trauma” (my translation) that cinema underwent when going digital.¹⁷ The analogue film image has been reconfigured, modified, and even falsified through digital technologies; indeed, arguably even rendered superfluous by the possibility of telling stories through video game engines. In this sense, instead of “playing at cinema,” the producers of machinima play with the notion of cinema itself.¹⁸

Let’s Plays, Longplays, and Playthroughs: Play as Document and Spectacle

Whereas the practice of machinima oscillates between artistic production and communal self-narrative, other forms of the linearization of the play experience satisfy documentary or even archival purposes. This diverse set of practices—

let's plays, playthroughs, and longplays—has its common denominator in the process of recording a play session, often with the player's voice-over commentary, and publishing it on platforms such as YouTube. These videos are usually devoid of significant postproduction (i.e., without editing or added effects), as they are presented as holding some form of documentary value. According to the Let's Play Archive,

LPs [let's plays] show a video game being played while the player talks about what they're doing in commentary with video, screenshots or both. Rarely some sections are done "off screen" or sped up, but in most cases the playthrough is a complete run of the game done in informative or humorous style so as to keep your attention.¹⁹

In most cases, the producers of this sort of media objects complete the games in several sessions and publish them on YouTube serially; in other cases, the whole of the game is presented through a single video lasting several hours. As in the case of machinima, these media products linearize the experience of play, as gameplay is presented to the spectators as a document or a hybrid between a document and spectacle. Indeed, the personality of the producers of these clips, who usually comment more or less ironically on their skills, is an integral part of the spectacular appeal of these texts. In other words, one watches the game *and* the player.

It might be useful to divide, albeit in an inevitably arbitrary fashion, these para-ludic products in two general categories. On the one hand, there are let's plays, whose characteristics are synchronicity and currentness. Let's play videos usually depict play sessions of recent video games and often include a critical commentary—a sort of ludic review—that may function as a buyer's guide or as a critical piece on the game. These audiovisual products entertain a symbiotic relationship with YouTube as a platform, and, as noted by Hector Postigo, are inscribed within "a complex set of social practices, some of which have little to do with the actual videos being shared."²⁰ In other words, these videos exist within a complex media ecology that includes YouTube's advertising, viewer's comments, YouTubers' monetization strategies, etc. Posting a let's play video of a popular game a few hours after its release implies leveraging YouTube's immediateness to attract a potentially vast audience seeking early information on the game. From this perspective, it is not surprising that let's play videos have started rivalling more established critical outlets, such as websites and magazines, due to their more immediate nature, and that those same outlets have responded by starting to produce video reviews.

The second category—that of longplays or playthroughs—is less concerned with currentness, but rather with thoroughness. These videos usually depict a

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complete playthrough of a video game, with the player analyzing its characteristics and/or unique traits. Moreover, these videos often contain tips or suggestions on how to overcome certain sections of the game, or, more generally, on how to achieve optimal play. In many cases, these videos are devoted to older games and respond to a need for preservation or even a nostalgic attachment to a specific game. Media historian James Newman claims that recording play sessions and preserving this linearized version of the play experience is the only tenable form of video game preservation.²¹ While this assumption is certainly not unchallenged, and several scholars have proposed different strategies for the preservation of otherwise obsolescent video games,²² YouTubers releasing longplays of rare or forgotten games help construct a vernacular and unruly archive of a medium that seems to be condemned to an eternal contemporaneity.

Videos chronologically detailing entire segments of video game production constitute a more institutionalized preservation practice. For example, Jeremy Parish's *Game Boy Works* (2014–) is a series of short videos that aims at covering the whole library of the Nintendo Game Boy in chronological order. Every video features footage of actual gameplay and, at times, other materials that help contextualize the respective game. Parish's commentary situates the games both within the history of video games and the author's own experience, thus bridging the gap between vernacular historiography and self-narrative. While less visible and successful on YouTube compared with other forms of production, historiographical projects such as *Game Boy Works* reinforce the idea that video game play footage can act as a historical document and a preservation tool for the larger video game community.

E-Athleticism and Spectacle: Live-Streaming

On February 21, 1983, the ABC television show *That's Incredible* broadcast the North American Video Game Challenge, a video game competition filmed at Twin Galaxies, Iowa. The broadcast was probably the first time competitive video game play was framed as spectator sport, worthy of being divulged beyond the four walls of an arcade room. While framing this event as the birth of eSports might be a bit of a stretch, it was the first time that an audience sitting in a remote location could witness a video game competition, in a fashion similar to a regular sports broadcast.

However, it took another two decades before eSports turned into a global phenomenon, starting with *Starcraft* (Blizzard, 1998) tournaments in South Korea in the early 2000s. The cultural practice later moved westward, with major competitions being broadcast by sports networks such as ESPN.²³

While the economic implications of the eSports scene are not the focus of this article, their relevance in spectatorial practices and the ways in which they assume and engender certain types of performances and spectatorship are worthy of some considerations.

In contrast to the practices discussed so far, eSports often relies on live-streaming. This seemingly minor difference implies a form of consumption fundamentally different from non-live media, as audience engagement depends on contingent, often unpredictable events and actions. In this sense, the practices of performance and spectatorship involving video game play live-streaming may be placed on a continuum connecting athleticism and spectacle. At the far end of this continuum, eSports represents the performance of athleticism within video game culture. The skills of players are gauged through highly digitized measures, such as APMs (actions per minute; the number of actions performed by a player in a given time frame), which contribute to building highly complex statistical evaluations of players and teams. This way of assessing players' and teams' performances engenders what Simon Ferrari has described as "the problem of legibility."²⁴ In other words, most eSports practices are rather inaccessible to non-expert viewers. For a casual spectator, oblivious to the complexities and implications of a game such as *DOTA 2* (Valve, 2013), watching a game played by highly trained e-athletes may be a bewildering experience. In this sense, athleticism in video games is linked with a degree of expected viewer competence, and the fact that matches are most often streamed live implies the spectators'—and often commentator's, as well—ability to correctly process the ramifications of very fast actions.

Especially within the context of dedicated events such as Games Done Quick, speedrunning is often performed live, as well, and streamed via platforms such as Twitch. In contrast to eSports, in which the context, the setup, and the general modes of signification and framing derive from traditional sports broadcasting, speedrunning conflates athleticism and spectacularization. On the one hand, speedrunners are dedicated players who obsessively perfect their skills in order to shave off precious seconds from their previous records; on the other hand, for the most part, these peculiar kinds of players do not subscribe to the rhetoric of professionalization implied by eSports. Rather, they seem to operate as a "technical community," a community organized around a common technical or technological interest.²⁵ In this sense, speedrunners are both athletes, in that they train in order to achieve a specific result, and performers of a specific spectacle, aimed at their technical community, as their performances are framed in a non-professional, often goofy or humorous way. Whereas eSports draws from the legacy of traditional sports broadcasting and spectatorship, live speedrunning implies a

different type of community, gathered around a common technical knowledge and a more informal atmosphere. A similar approach to competitive video game play occurs in the fighting game scene and relies on a lighter infrastructure than that of more popular eSports. To a degree, this community has managed to preserve some of the informal and vernacular qualities that preceded the professionalization of digital play.

Finally, a practice I would like to refer to as “spectacular streams” occupies the other end of this spectrum. These streams are play sessions in which the focus is both on the game being played and on the player playing it, whose commentary is often comedic or ironic, and whose interaction with the spectators aims at forming a strong sense of community. These streams represent a form of communal performance, in which the player/streamer elicits and responds to the comments and questions posed by her audience via a chat system integrated into platforms such as Twitch. This type of play implies an oscillation between two states for the player: she is both the player of a game and the performer performing for a community of spectators. Veli-Matti Karhulahti defines these two modes of interaction as “interview frames and play frames,” and claims that, in contrast to eSports and speedrun spectators, who are rather passive, the spectators of these spectacular streams “enjoy the possibility of affecting live-streams.

They want to feel that their actions have an effect, and they enjoy the feeling of their actions having an effect in front of an audience. In other words, spectators pursue the role of a vicarious performer themselves.”²⁶ Live interaction with a player thus frames this form of streaming as a co-created performance, in which the elitism of athleticism is superseded by the effort to build a community of spectators and players. It should be noted that live streams are commonly broken down into episodes and uploaded on YouTube for both archival and economic purposes. On the one hand, YouTube effectively functions as a repository for these otherwise ephemeral performances; on the other, segmenting a stream into episodes and uploading it for on-demand consumption allows the streamer to re-monetize her content.

Play Spectatorship: Three Theses

Since the 1978 Brighton Conference, film studies has rekindled its interest in spectatorship, with the textual approach of the previous decades being replaced by an analysis of film viewing as a complex experience involving several actors, among which the spectator plays a key role. Seminal works such as Miriam Hansen’s *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (1991) and Francesco Casetti’s *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and its*

Spectator (1998), along with more recent contributions, such as Janet Staiger's *Media Reception Studies* (2005), call into question the spectator's gaze as one of the forces involved in the production of meaning within the medium of cinema.²⁷ While often relying on adapted versions of theories developed in the context of film studies, game studies has rarely attempted to develop an organic theory of video game spectatorship.²⁸ This final section of my chapter will propose three theses for understanding digital play spectatorship. While these three theses do not (yet) constitute a theory, they may hopefully serve as a starting point for scholarship in the years to come.

The first thesis is based on the *aspirational* quality of video game spectatorship. According to Theodor Adorno, "mass culture is not interested in turning its consumer into sportsmen as such but only into howling devotees of the stadium."²⁹ As Miriam Hansen has pointed out, Adorno frames play within mass culture as completely subsumed by professional sports, and thus describes the spectator of play as a fan rather than as an aspiring athlete.³⁰ While Adorno's theory of play is debatable in its entirety, video games retain an aspirational aspect in terms of spectatorship (despite being a flagship product of "mass culture"). Whereas "analog" sports tend to require a degree of physical prowess and exercise usually inaccessible to the spectator, when it comes to video games, all potential players use a specific interface (joypad, keyboard, mouse, etc.), which somewhat lowers the barrier of access to the practice. Indeed, video games arguably have to have an aspirational quality in order to be appreciated by spectators. Since the translation of inputs into screen events often remains rather obscure (e.g. it is hard to infer how to perform a bicycle kick in *FIFA 2017* (Electronic Arts, 2016) by only seeing it on screen), spectators must have, or aspire to have, a degree of experience with the game in order to enjoy the spectacle. For example, in the case of eSports spectatorship, Emma Witkowski has argued that a player learns to appreciate the work of more skilled players through first-hand experience: "If you want to convince someone that the sport in eSports is not a faux pas, your best bet is to get them to play the game and internalize the sensations for themselves—the sport of eSports is a lived experience calling on bodily engagement from the player."³¹ Watching video games thus becomes an aspirational activity, as spectators watch in order to gain a better insight into their own play, devise or acquire new techniques, and marvel at the spectacle of a well-played game they know how to play.

The second thesis frames video game spectatorship as part of the wealth of nostalgic practices ubiquitous in contemporary media cultures. The prevalence of *nostalgia* as a mode of engagement with video games is a well-documented phenomenon and operates in different ways and contexts.³² From remakes and de-makes of older games to collecting, and from nostalgia-focused game

criticism to practices of nostalgic game design, video games have a complex relation with their past, and players often use video games as proxies for a more general nostalgia for their own youth or adolescence.³³ If recording play sessions of older games can act as a form of vernacular preservation, in some cases, these videos are also activators of nostalgia.

YouTube channels such as Classic Game Room often produce content that actively evokes the viewer's nostalgia for a certain time in game culture. On the other hand, online shows such as *The Game Chasers* (2011–), very much in the vein of other fetishist shows such as *Storage Wars* (A&E Network, 2010–), depict the practice of “chasing down” old games as part of a nostalgic attitude towards the medium and, tellingly, interpolate footage of the “chase” with gameplay clips. Accordingly, if we look at preservation and archival practices performed through play recording from the side of the viewer, video game spectatorship converges with other nostalgic practices common across game cultures. Re-watching thus acts as a vicarious form of re-playing.

Finally, video game spectatorship is part of a *co-constructed performance*, which involves the player/streamer and the audience. While this is true in a literal sense in those rare games designed for streaming and incorporating interaction with the audience as a mechanic (e.g. *Choice Chamber* (Studio Bean, 2014)), spectating a live stream on Twitch generally implies some form of interaction with the streamer, the game, and the other viewers. As William A. Hamilton, Oliver Garretson, and Andruid Kerne have argued, live streaming implies the formation of a “community of play,” in which the performer/player's effort is aided and even augmented by the multifarious performances of the performer/viewer, who interacts via chat, allowing “informal communities [to] emerge, socialize, and participate.”³⁴ In this context, Clara Fernández-Vara's theory of play as performance suggests that certain forms of play spectatorship (especially of live gameplay) constitute performances of *meta-play* in themselves, thus making the spectator a player of a larger meta-game. In this sense, while the practices discussed thus far linearize gameplay, at least mechanically, by removing its immediate ergodic functioning, they also produce a set of rules and habits that, in turn, inform the fuzzier meta-game of watching someone else play.

Conclusion

Ben Egliston has claimed that “[t]he growing pervasiveness of spectator platforms and observatory practice across the contemporary gaming landscape has been impactful in forcing a reformulation of what games as a medium fundamentally involve and demand.”³⁵ While observatory practices

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and forms of spectatorships have historically been present as less-visible companions of video game play, Egliston certainly has a point. This chapter has offered a historical overview of such phenomena, a snapshot of their current configurations, and a speculation on what watching someone (else or oneself) playing a video game may imply. More generally, this chapter has aimed at encouraging video game scholars to take spectatorship into consideration as an essential part of a great number of play practices, which often happen inside the screen and, as importantly, all around it, in the eyes, minds, and hands of onlookers, passers-by, spectators, and fans.

Notes

- 1 Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 1.
- 2 Espen Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).
- 3 Clara Fernández-Vara, "Play's the Thing: a Framework to Study Videogames as Performance," in *Proceedings of DiGRA 2009: Breaking New Ground—Innovation in Games, Play, Practice and Theory*.
- 4 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1980), 74.
- 5 Erkki Huhtamo, "Slots of Fun, Slots of Trouble: An Archaeology of Arcade Gaming," in *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*, eds. Joost Raessens and Jeffrey H. Goldstein (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).
- 6 I deliberately use the male pronoun, as the player depicted in these photos is almost always a boy.
- 7 Most notably Lin Holin and Sun Chuen-Tsai, "The Role of Onlookers in Arcade Gaming: Frame Analysis of Public Behaviours," *Convergence* 17, no. 2 (2011).
- 8 Carly Kocurek, *Coin-Operated Americans: Rebooting Boyhood at the Video Game Arcade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 6–8.
- 9 Mirjam Vosmer et al., "Changing Roles in Gaming: Twitch and New Gaming Audiences," in *Proceedings of 1st International Joint Conference of DiGRA and FDG* (2016), 1.
- 10 Sheila C. Murphy, "'This is Intelligent Television': Early Video Games and Television in the Emergence of the Personal Computer," in *The Video Game Theory Reader 2*, eds. Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (New York: Routledge, 2009).
- 11 Lisbeth Klastrup, "'You Can't Help Shouting and Yelling': Fun and Social Interaction in *Super Monkey Ball*," in *Proceedings of Level Up: Digital Games Research Conference* (2003), 382.
- 12 Marc Fetscherin, Charis Kaskiris, and Fredrik Wallenberg, "Gaming or Sharing at LAN-Parties: What Is Going On?" in *Proceedings of the First International*

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- 13 Henry Lowood, "High-Performance Play: The Making of Machinima," *Journal of Media Practice* 7 (2006): 26.
- 14 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002), 24.
- 15 William Brown and Matthew Holtmeier, "Machinima: Cinema in a Minor or Multitudinous Key?" in *Understanding Machinima: Essays of Filmmaking in Virtual Worlds*, ed. Jenna Ng (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 3.
- 16 Matteo Bittanti, "Don't Mess with the Warriors: The Politics of Machinima," in *The Machinima Reader*, eds. Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 315.
- 17 Gianni Canova, "Sguardi ibridi e immagini meticce: un'occhiata alla galassia del cybermovie," *La carne e il metallo: Visioni, storie e pensiero del cybermondo*, ed. Enrico Livraghi (Milano: Il castor, 1999), 20.
- 18 Guglielmo Pescatore and Valerio Sillari, "Machinima: giocare a fare cinema," *Bianco e nero* 564 (2009): 51; my translation.
- 19 "FAQ," *Let's Play Archive*, <https://lparchive.org/faq>.
- 20 Hector Postigo, "The Socio-Technical Architecture of Digital Labor: Converting Play into YouTube Money," *New Media & Society* 18, no. 2 (2016): 336.
- 21 James Newman, *Best Before: Videogames, Supersession and Obsolescence* (London: Routledge, 2012).
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