Watching the Watchers:

New Perspectives on Spectatorship, Gaming and Online Media

Keywords

Digital games; e-sports; spectatorship; competitive gaming; case studies

Panel Outline

Electronic sports (e-sports) represents the configuration of competitive videogaming as spectatorial, professionalized sport, problematizing conventional distinctions between work and leisure, 'geek' and 'jock' cultures, and crucially, between playing games and watching others play.

Much of the scholarship on e-sports has focused primarily on players and player communities involved in the 'professionalization' of digital gaming, examining players' game-based skillsets (Rambusch, Jakobsson & Pargman, 2007), the ways they negotiate the rules, expectations and challenges that come with professional play (Witkowski, 2012), and the formation of gendered subjectivities afforded (and constrained) by the confluence of gaming and sport (Taylor, 2010). Recent work by TL Taylor (2012) and Todd Harper (2010) have begun to extend the study of competitive play beyond players, examining the fundamental role of spectatorship in the social, technological and economic development of e-sports.

As TL Taylor points out in *Raising the* Stakes, the connections between spectatorship and play run deep. While *The Wizard,* Twin Galaxies, and Starcade may have presented spectatorial gaming as an entertaining, if quirky sideshow, watching others play - whether attending tournaments, bars or arcades in person, or simply watching others in between turns at the controls - has arguably always been an integral, albeit understudied, part of gaming culture (Alloway & Gilbert, 1998; Lin & Sun, 2011; Taylor, 2012). Over the last 15 years, however, the loosely affiliated and often volatile assortment of clans, tournaments and leagues collectively representing the e-sports industry has sought to cultivate a mass online audience for competitive, elite gaming.

Recent developments have demonstrated that there is indeed a global audience for e-sports, made possible both by the surging popularity of specific games as well as by the emergence of high definition, live streaming webcasts, and the various viewer practices and business models these make possible. Major League Gaming (MLG), the self-proclaimed "world's largest e-sports organization", recently reported 11.7 million "live online viewers" for online, streaming webcasts of MLG's Pro Circuit tournament play in 2012 (MLG, 2012). The last day of competition of the 2012 Spring Championship, held June 8-10 in Anaheim, CA, which featured the *League of Legends* and *Starcraft 2* finals, drew 2.2 million viewers to MLG's webcast – more than their total number of unique viewers for all 2010. Over roughly the same period of time, Twitch (http://www.twitch.tv/) has emerged as a highly popular venue to watch live-streaming videogame play, including e-sports. Boasting over 23 million subscribers a month, the platform has not only offered a means for e-sports organizations, teams and individual players to reach potentially massive audiences, but it has served to further enact and legitimate the notion of gaming as something we *watch* as well as something we *do*.

The recent success of MLG and Twitch, as well as the (related) surging popularity of *Starcraft* 2 and *League of Legends,* have seemed to establish e-sports as a legitimate and viable entertainment media industry (Tassi, 2013). At the same time, the short history of professional gaming is marked as much by sudden declines as by sudden success; claims that 'e-sports has finally arrived' were heard shortly before the collapse of the longstanding Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL) and the much-touted Championship Gaming Series (CGS) in 2008-2009, for instance (Kane, 2010). Outside of South Korea, where e-sports has had a solid foothold for some time (Jin, 2010), competitive gaming

organizations struggle to attract and maintain sponsorship for what is still largely seen, by potential sponsors, as a marketing experiment (Taylor, 2012, p. 146). Adding to this the high "churn" rate of players, games, and tournaments (p. 153); the brevity of players' careers and the relatively short shelf life of games and gaming platforms means that the constellation of pro-gaming 'stars' shifts rapidly. For these reasons, competitive gaming is very much a moving target for researchers: often, by the time a particular community, tournament, or organization is reported on in academic publications, it no longer exists in the same form, if at all.

Given this dynamic and unpredictable terrain, one of the central challenges for e-sports researchers is to link accounts of competitive gaming to larger transformations in digital games, social media, and emerging forms of both leisure and labor. Each of the papers on this panel undertakes this project, whether through linking e-sports spectatorship in China to issues of censorship, nationality, and broadcasting, analyzing the fundamental role of spectators in enacting and shaping the psychological and social experiences of play, or exploring changes in the ways spectators have been incorporated into the 'assemblage' of North American e-sports broadcasting over the past five years. Collectively, this panel represents an attempt to more productively understand the crucial role that audiences carry out in the ongoing socio-technical transformation of digital play as spectatorial activity.

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One shining (virtual) moment: The social facilitation hypothesis extended to video game performance

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Abstract

From the first public arcade machines to the massive online worlds and professional gaming contests of today, a central part of the history of video games has been that of performance: a demonstration – often public – of mastery over a digital challenge. When we consider the notion of public performance, something often overlooked in video game research, we might also suggest the audience to play an important part of the gaming experience. Just as athletes might shine or choke when playing in front of a crowd, e-sports feature gamers succeeding or failing in front of gathered crowds. Emerging research suggests the drive theory of social facilitation to provide a robust explanation of how the mere presence of an audience an affect one's performance at a video game, and the following paper suggests how this research can be extended to better understand the interaction between gamer and audience in the e-sports arena.

Keywords

e-sports; social facilitation theory; performance; drive; competition

Introduction

A cursory review of research on the psychology of video games reveals an interesting methodological artifact: studies often conducted with gamers in relative isolation, playing video games in front of a monitor under laboratory supervision. Such approaches are insightful in understanding the individual experience of gaming, but they by proxy adopt a Putnam-esque (1995) approach to the medium as an isolated and socially-withdrawn one. This limits how we can understand video games as a social phenomenon - being played with and for audiences as a matter of performance. Indeed, a core component of e-sports is the notion of a central performance qua video gamer performing for a gathered audience, and we can turn to psychology to understand how audiences might impact that performance.

Drive theory of social facilitation

The drive theory of social facilitation (Zajonc, 1965) provides a psychology-based explanation for understanding human behavior in front of audiences. In its simplest form, the theory explains that the presence of social others is an indiscriminate multiplier of habitual response, which results in increased effort on behalf of the performer. A behaviorist approach (cf. Hull, 1943), it argues that the presence of social others is a physiologically-arousing experience that energizes our actions. To understand the influence of this process on performance, (Zajonc, 1980) studied the influence of audience presence on male billiards players, and discovered that professional players had a significantly better shot accuracy when playing in front of a crowd, while novice players often performed far worse. He concluded that audience-induced drive was causing both sets of players to respond more intensely with their habitual response to the event: for the skilled player, this habitual response was a skillful and accurate shot while for the unskilled player it was a clumsy and inaccurate one. A similar analogy might be drawn from understanding one's reaction to a pitched baseball: a skilled person has the innate hand-eye coordination to swing his/her bat at an even and powerful level while the unskilled person usually lacks these skills. In front of a crowd, we often see the skilled player perform far better while the unskilled player tends to perform far worse. Thus, we see the social facilitation process: audience presence induces drive, which influences performance.

The social dimension of video gaming

To study video games and social facilitation, it is first important for us to recognize the social dimensions of video games. Video games as a sociocultural phenomenon are steeped in public performance. Borrowing from the operating model of pinball and other parlor games, the first video game systems were installed in public spaces such as taverns and gaming arcades. As a matter of implicit (or perhaps even explicit) public performance, skilled gamers would often attract crowds in a similar style of athletes playing in sports arenas - early video games adopting "hi score" boards so that top players could earn their regard. As technologies allowed for video game consoles to be manufactured smaller and cheaper, a home market for video games opened up. Yet, even this home market was designed nearly from the start to be a social experience. For example, the 1977 release of the Atari VCS featured a pair of controller ports to facilitate the co-located game play of PONG and since then, one is hard-pressed to find a home console that has not included at least two game controller parts and games supporting multiplayer gaming (cf. Bowman, Weber, Tamborini & Sherry, 2013). Furthermore, studies player experiences continually implicate the social dimension of gaming as important to the medium's attraction: Colwell and Kato (2005) talk about the companionship expressed by gamers with each other, Wan and Chiou (2006) report on the friendships formed between gamers and Sherry, Lucas, Greenberg and Lachlan (2006) suggest that challenge and competition as well as social and relational aspects of the experience all serve as related-yet-discrete dimensions of the experience.

Video games and social facilitation effects

Arguing that social dimensions are a salient aspect of video gaming allows us to more closely examine it. To this end, Bowman et al (2013) examined the potential influence of audience presence on performance at a video game. Using an arena-style first-person shooter (*Quake 3*), their research assessed the cognitive abilities of a randomly-selected group of individuals - notably, their hand-eye coordination and their ability to mentally rotate two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects (skills positively associated with performance at first-person shooter games) - before having them play either in front of a co-located audience or in isolation. In line with the drive theory of social facilitation, the presence of an audience significantly and substantially increased the performance of high skill players, although the performance of low skill gamers was not significantly decreased. Notably, 'high skill' in this application is indicative of a player whose cognitive skills were most conducive to game performance, not necessarily a player who was experienced with the game itself. Moreover, manipulating the challenge of the game itself was also found to moderate the social facilitation effect - audiences were more influential on performance at low-challenge versions of the video game than at high-challenge versions. Indeed, the differential capacity of an audience's ability to influence game performance as a function of game challenge is explained by Worchel et al. (1997), who found that the difficulty of a given challenge can also increase drive. Bowman et al. (2013) explained that gamers in the high-challenge condition were already exerting a maximal level of drive independent of audience presence.

Implications for e-sports

Returning to the core concept of e-sports - the public performance of video game play akin to a professional sporting event - the connections between the psychology of audience-influenced performance and video game play become apparent. Studies (Kimble & Rezabek, 1992; Bowman et al., 2013) have demonstrated audience presence to influence video game performance analogous to audience effects long-established in sport psychology by which athletes 'shine' or 'choke' in the heat of competition (cf. Schwartz & Barsky, 1977). Emergence evidence suggests that the basic tenets of drive theory should operate for competitive gamers, yet such research has not been replicated or extended. Why might this matter for the understanding of e-sports or competitive gamers? First, it suggests the audience has a great deal of agency over the event itself. Part of what legitimizes e-sports is their ability to draw large and interested crowds. Yet as the crowds grow, competitive gamers will

need to become accustomed to handling the increased drive that comes from playing in front of, for example, 5000 spectators in a public arena rather than a few friends in one's living room or a gaming center. Moreover, many e-sports are broadcast - through traditional and Internet channels - and scant evidence exists that compares the relative influence of a virtual (non-co-located) or actual (co-located) audience on game performance; particularly relevant to online-based video games.

Conclusion

As e-sports evolve into public performances, we can borrow from psychological theories of audience and performance to better understand the experience of the competitive gamers themselves. Evidence suggests that there is an implicit interaction between audience and athlete, and the massive crowds gathering around e-sports can be a boon not only for the competitions themselves, but for performance of the gamers themselves.

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Creating a Spectacle: Live e-Sports Events and China's Digital Games Market

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Abstract

Based upon ethnographic research conducted in China, this paper examines two e-sports tournaments, the e-sports Champion League tournament (ECL), a domestically produced and government sponsored Warcraft III tournament held in Beijing in May 2010, and the World Cyber Games (WCG) Festival, an international, multi-game tournament held in Kunshan in November 2012. By comparing these two events and placing e-sports in the context of literature on sports spectacle and Chinese national sports culture, this paper argues that live e-sports events in China are less about fan spectatorship than they are about creating a spectacle fueled by politics, nationalism and capitalist consumer culture.

Keywords

e-sports; China; spectatorship; ethnography

Introduction and Methodology

As e-sports develop on the international scene, there are many questions about the future of this industry and its sustainability. One interesting issue has to do with the development of 'live' spectatorship for a form of competition that is, by nature, already mediated. Indeed, many might argue that it is easier to follow an e-sports match through live streaming or replays than it is to watch the 'live' event in a noisy arena with a distant screen, an argument supported by the ethnographic findings of this author. If this is the case, what is the true purpose of the "live" e-sports event?

Based upon ethnographic research conducted in China, this paper examines two e-sports tournaments, the e-sports Champion League tournament (ECL), a domestically produced and government sponsored Warcraft III tournament held in Beijing in May 2010, and the World Cyber Games (WCG) Festival, an international, multi-game tournament held in Kunshan in November 2012. By comparing these two events and offering analysis of Chinese e-sports policy and media coverage, it is possible to see that live e-sports events in China are less about spectatorship than they are about creating a spectacle fueled by politics, nationalism and capitalist consumer culture.

Theoretical Framework

Spectacle is a term that has been variously theorized by both sports sociologists (e.g. MacAloon, 1984; Manzenreiter, 2006; Tomlinson & Young, 2005) and Marxist critical theorists (Debord, 1994; Kellner, 2003). This paper will consider these theories of spectacle while also engaging with literature on the connection between Chinese Olympic aims and politics. Importantly, scholars who have studied sport in China note that sports play a mediating role between nationalism and internationalism (Brownell, 1995; Xu, 2008). Says Xu (2008), China defines sports "almost completely in terms of nationalism and politics" (p. 60).

Discussion

China is a country familiar with the power of spectacle. Over the course of the past few years, they have hosted an array of domestic and international events with a clear eye trained on the image they would present to a global audience. Notable events include the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the 2009 National Holiday celebration for the 60th Anniversary of the founding of the CCP, and the 2010

Shanghai World Expo. Such events make use of the size of China's population to impress upon the global audience the sheer power in numbers of the Chinese state. China's hosting of the World Cyber Games is a continuation of this concerted effort to demonstrate China's power, but of a different sort. Rather than physical prowess, military might or urban planning, the World Cyber Games served as a venue for demonstrating China's ascendency in the realm of digital gaming and techno-culture.

E-sports, while an extension of China's nationalistic sports culture, is also implicated in powerful processes of capitalist consumer culture. The Chinese government's desire to create an image as a leader in digital gaming is linked to the notion that China has long been seen as lagging behind its East Asian neighbors in the realm of pop cultural commodities (Chua, 2004). For example, Hjorth and Chan (2009) noted that South Korea and Japan are considered to be the leaders in the East Asian games market. This imbalance is one that China is actively seeking to rectify, and the promotion of international e-sports events is one of the ways in which China is creating a new image for itself.

From the "Olympics of e-sports" to an Empty Stadium

The World Cyber Games is the perfect venue for China to promote itself in this regard as the WCG fashions itself as the Olympics of e-sports (Hutchins, 2008; Lowood, *nd*; Taylor, N., 2009; Taylor, T., 2012). The Chinese producers clearly sought to reinforce this Olympic metaphor, housing professional gamers in a designated "player's village" and featuring an impressive opening ceremony with the requisite carrying of the country flags. The presence of a large contingent of young volunteers wearing official attire harkened back to the volunteers that were present at both the Olympics and the Shanghai Expo. Finally, the emphasis on good sportsmanship and diplomatic behavior aligns well with China's promotion of "harmonious" Internet culture.

China's 2012 WCG was particularly notable for the large number of spectators that turned out for the event. According to the official press release, the event attracted over 110,000 spectators over the course of four days and a reported 85 million online views. WCG CEO Brad Lee commented on size of China's e-sports and digital gaming audience, even going so far as to state that China was one of the largest markets for e-sports and that it was quickly catching up with South Korea.

But behind the shiny façade created by spectacles such as the World Cyber Games, China's contradictory policies about digital games reveal that games still remain a marginalized and contested part of Chinese culture. In comparison to WCG, the ECL championship in Beijing revealed a very different image of e-sports. Aside from a seemingly staged crowd that appeared for the opening ceremony of the competition, there was virtually no audience, and the event was poorly promoted. Furthermore, e-sports, while being publicly sold as China's "99th professional sport" is actually banned from being broadcast on TV by the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT). Such policies are largely the result of negative public opinion and fears about Internet addiction (Golub and Lingley, 2008; Szablewicz, 2010). Indeed, a government official presiding over the opening of WCG even noted that her spouse would not allow their teenage son to attend the competition for fear that e-sports would negatively impact his studies.

The Problem of Live Spectatorship

Finally, from the audience perspective, live spectatorship at WCG was less about watching the match than it was about the atmosphere (*qifen*). To begin, the arena in which the matches were held was not always conducive to close watching. The sheer number of people in the audience often meant that it was hard to see the front of the stage. Announcers, while present, were set to the side or back of the audience, and while their voices were sent over loudspeakers, they often had to compete with loud music or other announcements being pumped out of surrounding booths. One of the young men I work with posted mainly pictures of the professional players and the "booth babes" he posed with at the event. Many had never before attended a live e-sports event, but chose to go with friends to reminisce about the games or players they had followed as teenagers.

Conclusion

Elsewhere (Szablewicz, 2012) e-sports in China have been framed as a form of "patriotic leisure" that, extending from Lisa Hoffman's (2011) notion of the "patriotic professional," fuses a neoliberal ethos of the skill-building, self-enterprising individual with a commitment to acting in the best interests of the socialist state. But aside from the fact that e-sports is promoted as a "healthy" form of digital gaming and contrast to other, unhealthy and purportedly addictive games such as *World of Warcraft*, it is clear that in hosting international e-sports competitions such as the WCG, China also aims to produce a media spectacle that demonstrates for a global audience their growing strength in the digital games market.

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Belly Up to the Barcraft: E-Sports Spectatorship in Informal Spaces

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Abstract

In this paper, I examine the phenomenon of "barcrafts:" informal gatherings at bars, pubs, and other similar public spaces for the viewing of e-sports content. These settings have long been used as gathering places for the viewing of traditional sports media, and thus have a particular status in sports culture, as well as in cultures orthogonal to sports culture (such as the public performance of masculinity). This research uses ethnographic observation to identify the characteristics of the barcraft. Does it match up with our concept of pub-based sports spectatorship, or does its engagement with e-sports and digital gaming culture infuse it with a different quality?

Keywords

e-sports; spectatorship; sports culture

Introduction

Consider the following image: a group of people (mostly men) sit at a long bar, each one nursing a drink of some kind; various types of beer are favorite. Their eyes are glued to a flatscreen HDTV hanging overhead, behind the bartender, but chatter about what's going on still flows back and forth… until a big play is made. Then everything changes. People's hands go into the air; cheers (or maybe even boos) drive the volume level up a few decibels. Eyes turn away from the TV as these spectators turn to each other and start discussing what just happened with animated excitement. If this image seems familiar, that's no surprise; this vision of the consumption of sports media is well-known in the public imaginary.

However, take a step back and look at that TV. What these individuals were watching was not football, basketball, hockey, or soccer. Instead, it was a championship round of Riot Games' incredibly popular online battle arena (MOBA) game, *League of Legends*.

This was the scene at a 2012 "barcraft" held in the Boston area. All the markers of the previous stereotypical image were there: the crowded bar, with viewers typically clustered in small groups of acquaintance. The term "barcraft" is a portmanteau, combining "bar" (as in a pub or tavern) with "*Starcraft*," the title of one of the largest and most popular e-sports. However, barcrafts are not limited to viewing *Starcraft* matches, as this example shows. In fact, the concept of the barcraft meeting extends to MOBAs such as *League of Legends* (*LoL*), and even the competitive fighting game culture.

In this paper, I examine the phenomenon of the barcraft in the context of sports spectatorship, specifically the practice of public viewing of sport in bars. Through ethnographic observation of these events, I seek to better understand how barcrafts navigate various aspects of sport culture, as well as the distinct qualities that their intersection with e-sports and digital sports culture may produce.

Sports, Pubs, and Public Spectatorship

The pub as a place to publically consume sports media is a phenomenon that exists across the globe. Although here in the US we might associate it with a wide variety of spectator sports, in other parts of the world the pub has a strong tie to soccer culture. In a New Zealand study on the influence of a particular brand of beer's advertising and cultural production on NZ culture, Gee and Jackson (2010) refer to the confluence of beer, sport spectatorship, and masculinity as a "holy trinity" of sorts. The link between these three confluent forces these researchers describe is very powerful. They note that it isn't simply the consumption of beer at sporting events, or the consumption of sport in pubs, that

builds this link, but also the sponsorship of sport by breweries that binds these acts together in the public imagination.

The pub as spectator space is also an archetypal example of Oldenburg's (1999) concept of a "third space:" a neutral space away from work or home with familiar faces where people can go to socialize, often in the context of a shared interest or event. Thus there may be reasons beyond spectatorship that would drive participants to meet at these events; repeat attendees may come to rely on them as a "home away from home" where they can relax in the company of other fans.

In considering why spectators might gravitate to pubs and off-site spectatorship of sporting events, Mike Weed (2007; 2008) notes a few factors that influenced the viewing of soccer at pubs in the UK: increasing accessibility of high-quality display technology in bars (such as HDTVs), better access to a wider variety of games on satellite networks such as BSkyB, and what he calls the "sanitization" (2008, p. 190) of public stadium viewing. However, this movement of spectatorship to pubs, for Weed, calls for us to re-examine certain motivations for, and qualities of, off-venue spectatorship in pubs. In his eyes, pub viewership is less about being "the leisure of being there" (Baines, 1996) or a need for proximity to the event. Instead, "[i]t would appear that 'spontaneous group association' is a key part of the sport spectating experience… rather than being about seeing the game, it is centered on sharing the experience" (2008, p. 195).

These conclusions echo earlier findings by Eastman and Land (1997), who examined pub-based spectatorship in the US, in particular looking at how sports fans contextualized the public viewing experience in comparison to home viewing. They observed that, among other things, public viewing was related to feelings of community and group membership; being among other fans and participating in specialized discourse about the activity turned a group of strangers into a unified body, circling the axis of their shared interest.

These findings resonate with existing literature on public video game play and competition, particularly in the form of analysis of e-sports competitions and competitive gaming. The qualities that the above scholars observed in public consumption of sports media in pubs – the idea of co-creation of a space around shared interest, in using ritual and specialized discourse to establish community, and the influence of masculinity and consumption on public discourse – are also found in game studies literature. These behaviors emerge at LAN events (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010) and e-sports/competitive gaming events (Taylor, 2009; Harper, 2010; Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2012) in particular.

Methodology

This study will employ ethnographic observations of local barcrafts, and similar events, to examine the ways in which they are both resonant with and different from the depiction of pub-based sports media consumption identified in the above research. Analysis of field observations and interactions with barcraft attendees will provide a more complete picture of these informal events.

The selection of sites will be focused primarily on informal events – those organized by fans or venues, rather than official bodies such as Major League Gaming or game developers – in order to focus on the difference of these spaces to more "sanctioned" events.

Conclusions

While there is no complete data yet to draw definitive conclusions, current research into digital games as described above presents a number of important areas for consideration. For example, do barcrafts present a space like the online forums mentioned in Harper's (2010) analysis of fighting game culture, where new entrants are expected to already have specialized knowledge to participate, or can they also be gateways for those new to the scene? Do the various manifestations of sporting masculinity that Witkowski describes in her work appear in this space, and if so, how? Finally, how does the nature of

e-sports media come into play? Since many e-sports media are livestreamed, the question of "being there" is considerably more thorny than with physical sports.

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Staging the Crowd: The Changing Work of e-sports Spectatorship

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Abstract

The emergence of high-definition, accessible live-streaming services has led to a surge in online spectatorship for competitive gaming matches and tournaments. Major League Gaming (MLG), long regarded as a console-driven e-sports organization, now boasts a 'mass', globalized audience for its live-streaming broadcasts of competitive play in *Starcraft 2* and *League of Legends*. This paper reports on a qualitative case study, comparing two MLG tournaments - the 2008 Toronto Open and the 2012 Raleigh Summer Championship – from the perspective of spectators and the kinds of activities they undertook at these events. The differences in the kinds of 'audience labor' at these events point to transformations in MLG, and (to some extent) in e-sports more generally, towards a re-entrenchment of conventional divisions between mass media producers and consumers. These transformations run contrary to the trend towards more 'participatory' forms of socio-technical practice made possible by online media.

Keywords

e-sports; spectatorship; live-streaming; ethnography

Introduction

Major League Gaming (or MLG), which proclaims itself "the world's largest e-sports organization", has seen audiences for live streaming of its competitive gaming tournaments grow propitiously in the last two years. Regarded for much of its history as a league for console-based games (particularly *Halo*), MLG's recent surge is partly due to its adoption of *League of Legends* and *Starcraft 2*; but it is also fueled by the increasing use of the Internet as a platform to view content typically delivered by television or film (Fox, Senior & Thomas, 2010).

The emergence of a large, globalized online audience for MLG's events challenges the often-repeated assertion that online media undermine many conventional distinctions upon which the study of "mass" communication rests (Cover, 2006; Livingstone, 2003). Rather, MLG's recent success is based on the re-enactment, via new media platforms, of traditional distinctions between media producers (the organization and its cadre of sponsored 'pro' gamers) and consumers (the online audience). This short paper examines the effects of this transformation on the 'work' of attendees at two e-sports events, representing two very different periods in the development of Major League Gaming (2008 and 2012). In doing so, it situates these events within broader socio-technical transformations in the e-sports industry and digital media more generally.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs the political economic concept of "audience work", as developed by Smythe (1977), adapted by Jally and Livant (1986), and revised, for the study of 'Web 2.0' and social media platforms, by Andrejevic (2002), Cover (2006), and Napoli (2010). In Smythe's formulation, television producers vie for audience attention which is then sold to advertisers; the audience simultaneously acts as commodity and as unpaid workforce, carrying out the labor of watching advertisements. While this theory has undergone substantial revision, the core concept – that media audiences conduct significant forms of unpaid labor on behalf of producers – remains the same. This framework, developed for analyses of mass media, has a renewed significance for e-sports. Not only does it provide a critical perspective on the crucial role spectators play in competitive gaming, but it highlights the ways that some organizations such as MLG are purposely enacting the conventional

'one-to-many' media producer/consumer relationship that the theory was initially developed to accommodate.

Methodology

This qualitative case study incorporates field notes, photographs, and interactions with participants from two MLG events, separated by four years: the 2008 Summer Open (Toronto), and the 2012 Summer Championship (Raleigh). Proceeding from ethnographic observations, this paper explores the ways crowds were hooked in to two very different spectatorial assemblages of competitive gaming.

Sites

MLG held the 2008 Toronto Open between August 22 and 24, as part of its "Pro Circuit", a series of tournaments held across North America, primarily for team-based *Halo* play. Located on the ground floor of the Metro Convention Center in downtown Toronto, the tournament ran in conjunction with FanExpo, an annual convention for sci-fi and fantasy enthusiasts. Set at the far end of the floor, between a concession stand and a card-gaming tournament, MLG was positioned as a sideshow for FanExpo attendees. The majority of MLG's crowd consisted of the approximately 500 MLG players and their family, friends and partners.

In contrast, the 2012 Summer Championship, held on the bottom floor of the Raleigh Convention Center between August 24 and 26, attracted approximately 2500 attendees. Whereas the 2008 event featured a central stage capable of accommodating about 300 spectators for its marquee matchups, this event had four separate stages, each capable of accommodating around 500.

Discussion

Examining the activities of spectators at these two events illustrates the very different versions of e-sports spectatorship instantiated by MLG between 2008 and 2012. While a full account of the different kinds of labor undertaken by crowds at these events is beyond the scope of this paper, two observations highlight these differences.

Kickoff

The 2008 Toronto Open began late Friday (August 22), with tournament emcees addressing a (at the time) small crowd attendees directly, welcoming them and reviewing tournament rules and schedule. They then invited those assembled to raise their Xbox 360 controllers in the air and shout "lock it down!" in unison. This ritualistic spectacle indicated the extent to which the lines between players and spectators were blurred.

Kickoff for the 2012 Summer Championship was configured quite differently. Integrating MLG's promotional video with live shots of cheering spectators as tournament emcees addressed the 'folks watching at home', the kickoff delivered the crowd to a digitally-mediated audience. Here, the role of the crowd was more aligned with that undertaken by live audiences at televised sporting events than the kind of participatory ritual signaling the start of the 2008 event.

Spectating

With most matches taking place on the event floor among rows of Xboxes and monitors, often with up to 16 matches occurring at once, spectating at the 2008 Toronto event was a frenzied and highly selective activity. Players spent time in between matches studying other teams; if a match they wanted to watch took place during their own matches, friends or partners were tasked with watching and taking notes on other teams' strategies, strengths and weaknesses. This spectatorial 'work' primarily served players, in their efforts to get a competitive edge.

The majority of attendees at the 2012 Raleigh event were spectators, who either bought single-day or full weekend passes. In contrast to the activities of players-spectators in Toronto four years earlier, spectators spent their time circulating between seating areas for various games, promotional booths, concession stands, and autograph tables, where they could line up to meet celebrity shoutcasters and players. They could also line up for a blank banner on which they could write messages "to their favorite MLG pros" to hold up during matches. During breaks in play, cameras swooped over the crowd, zooming in on particularly colorful or catchy banners.

These activities are far more in keeping with the 'work' expected of spectators at conventional sporting events than with the practices undertaken at typical LAN events or at the 2008 Toronto Open. The differences drive home the extent to which MLG has, in the intervening years, enacted a relationship towards its audience (both present and online) that is, in some key respects, more aligned with conventional mass media than with the "participatory" affordances of online media (Jenkins, 2006).

Conclusion

e-sports has its roots in LANs (Taylor, 2012), and grassroots events (such as the "Barcrafts" discussed elsewhere in this panel) continue to be the primary means for aspiring competitive gamers to meet and gain tournament experience. While such events are not particularly inclusionary (Taylor, 2009), they are nevertheless participatory (Taylor and Witkowski, 2009). The increasing prevalence of online livecasting does not necessarily signal a lessening of opportunities to participate in e-sports; indeed, services such as Twitch.tv make it possible for gamers to be both consumers and content creators. At the same time, MLG's recent success in creating large, globalized online audiences for its events signals one particular configuration of competitive gaming based on clear distinctions between spectators and athletes, and between content producers and audiences. As with mainstream professional sports, these divisions are engineered by and entirely conducive to the capitalist interests of the organization.

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