Submission from Jad Saad to *Technology: The Evolution of Play*

Concept of “play” and its evolution accompanied by technology.

The idea of “play” is viewed as a concept that has been present before the rise of civilizations. It is also not something purely reserved for human beings, but it can be observed as part of animal behavior. To define play, we cannot confine ourselves to a single field of study such as Psychology or Biology, and this is highlighted by Huizinga in his study (*HOMO LUDENS: A Study of The Play-Element in Culture*, 1949) by saying that “the very fact that play has a meaning implies a non-materialistic quality in the nature of the thing itself”. This notion of “play” is facilitated by the spread of the Internet around the world, the multitude of gaming consoles and stations available (PlayStation, Xbox, PC, Nintendo, Browser games), in addition to the popularity that the gaming scene is gaining with millions and millions of people migrating towards the online gaming world.

Firstly, social interactions withing gaming has largely shifted over the past few decades. People used to meet at Internet Cafes to socialize and play games with one another on different computers in the same physical environment via LAN (Local Area Network). It evolved to what is now known as online gaming, whereas people are able to play games together whilst staying at home through the Internet. One of Huizinga’s notion, the formation of social groupings promoted by “play”, is highly applicable nowadays due to technologies implemented in online gaming, such as the voice chat, a telecommunication technology that enables players/friends, to play together while talking to each other similar to a phone call. In addition, Huizinga gave a new understanding of play in which we, with our own volition, step away from real life and indulge ourselves into an alternate world with its own boundaries of space and time, but also its own rules; he called it “The magic circle”. With the help of technology, people are able to enter this newly established world as characters and avatars, away from their real life, and enjoy their time with similar people.

Secondly, the advancement in technology brought forth to esports (electronic sports: competitive play of a game that can be compared to any other sport like football, soccer, or basketball) where more and more people pursue careers as “professional gamers”. Streaming platforms like YouTube and Twitch allows people from around the world to watch the professional gamers compete in real time, and cheer for their favorite layers and teams in the multitude of games that have established their professional scenes. This aspect of esports relates back to the Agon category of play defined by Caillois whereas competition and having a very high skill ceiling in order to compete with the best in the world forms an infrastructure for this category of “play”. In a sense, the unproductive notion that Caillois and Huizinga agreed upon when defining “play” has become outdated, but it lines up pretty well with Caillois’ explanation of the notion of “[Ludus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludus_latrunculorum)” which is a requirement for these professional esports players that need to have patience, skill and ingenuity, while following certain rules that define the competitive aspect of the game that they are taking part in.

Another category of “play defined by Caillois is “Mimicry” or mimesis, or role playing and defines it as "When the individual plays to believe, to make himself or others believe that he is different from himself”. A new field in gaming that appeared with the introduction of Virtual Reality, is VR Gaming which is a new type of games using VR technology that enhances the immersion of a player’s experience using a first-person perspective. These players role-play as the character of the game and influence the game’s environment through the multitude of virtual reality accessories and devices, such as VR headsets, sensor-equipped gloves, controllers with camera’s catching the player’s movement. This environment created using these new technologies, that are in constant evolution and under development, have broadened Caillois’ concept with new horizons. Games like VRChat have seen massive influx of new players due to the feasibility of VR consoles like the Oculus being an easy and reasonably priced way to access the virtual world.

Additionally, the evolution of technology opened up a new field in gaming, which is mobile gaming. This emergent field is becoming one of the most profitable and easily accessible type of gaming. Its market grew the most during the last two decades and influenced the entire structure of major gaming corporates and companies that are forced to publishing their games, developed for different consoles, on the mobile platform as well. This new façade has facilitated gaming for a vast majority of people, from different age categories, that are able to play at the comfort of their own homes or anywhere they travel to, while providing them with sufficient entertainment. The freedom given by this new technology to be able to play at any time and in any place, relates back to the concept of “play” by both Caillois and Huizinga being a “free activity”.

To sum it all up, Caillois and Huizinga set the stage by defining “play” back in their days. Their concepts are the infrastructure to today’s inclusion of new technologies in gaming, and the evolution of gaming as a whole. Playing a game has never been easier while also being a source of entertainment, available for everyone. With the advancement in technology and the implementation of new mechanics such as new game engines, consoles and graphics improvement, the future of video games is certainly bright with today’s market shifting more and more towards this field.

Bibliography

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