What the spectator expects in the game of watching: Twitch.tv, materiality, and game consumption through and beyond spectatorship

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ABSTRACT

Understanding streaming platforms as capable of supporting and promoting new languages, trends, and online consumption practices, this article relates game media itself to cultural phenomena and social processes around play-watch activities in game streams on Twitch.tv. Analyzing the materiality (structure, affordances, socio-technical and economic aspects) of the leading platform in the live streaming market, we carry out a preliminary understanding of how these digital territories influence and harbor experiences of watching and playing games. Addressing the tools and uses of Twitch.tv, we present concepts that help us understand practices within the community that transcend watching and modify gaming – the sociability in participatory communities of play (Hamilton et al. 2014), the co-creation in multiplayer entertainment (Shear 2019), and the interactivity and agency in crossplay –, as well as the role of the industry and its neoliberal agenda on shaping game spectatorship and domesticating subversive conducts in the game of watching.

Keywords

Spectatorship; video games; live streaming; Twitch.tv; materialities

INTRODUCTION

"For me watching a gameplay is enough to say I played the game." Thus begins a Twitter thread posted in May 2021 by Brazilian user “EDENB0Y” (Fig. 1). EDENB0Y and other users present in their post, as well as thousands of consumers of platforms such as American Twitch.tv, a pioneer and leader in the live streaming market, are part of a community that is growing more and more: the audience of spectators and fans of gameplay[1] videos and broadcasts.

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Figure 1: Twitter thread from Brazilian user "EDENB0Y".

According to the "Newzoo Global Sports and Streaming Market Report" of 2021, an analysis produced annually by one of the largest sources of gaming and e-sports market research, in 2020, the audience of game streams reached 662.7 million users, and the forecast for 2021 anticipated growth of at least 10%, reaching 728.8 million. In this context, Brazil is among one of the three largest audiences for e-sports (Newzoo 2021), or electronic sports, the competitive genre in the video game universe that has become extremely popular in live streaming spaces. However, the popularity of game streams itself is not the only sign of how watching practices have been dominating the gaming universe. The survey conducted in 2017 by Google in partnership with Ipsos Connect also shows that 48% of gamers on YouTube revealed that they spend more time watching games than actually playing (Petrova and Gross 2017), a change that demonstrates the influence of such media arrangements (Pereira 2020)[2] in the experiences of playing and watching online.

Many game spectators in different contexts have been reproducing EDENB0Y's statements and the diversity of opinions that arise from their first tweet. As we analyze the speeches presented in the thread we can observe, for example, EDENB0Y as they thank Twitch's Brazilian game streamer "Alanzoka" (streamer being the one who produces, plays, and broadcasts their experience) for playing with them, in a clear allusion to watching as a collective experience that involves playing for both spectator and streamer. A second user responds to the post stating that, unlike the author, they do not think that just watching a game is enough to get a satisfactory experience. A third user believes that there are specific games that are more fun to watch, and a fourth says that they have no interest in playing, just in watching. These are perspectives that are useful as representatives of some of the practices and realities of spectatorship in games, tendencies that have been developing with the emergence and rise of media arrangements such as Twitch.tv, and other digital spaces for video game streaming.[3]

The activity of watching games in online spaces is no longer characterized as a dissident phenomenon, but it has remained relevant not only among consumers and producers in the field, but also among the media, the video game market, and, of course, among researchers in the area. The wide range of experiences of game consumption developed within such digital spaces is capable of instigating several complex academic debates, such as questions about the nature and the experience of playing, reflections on the limits of the play activity space – the magic circle (Huizinga 1980) –, and the spectator's capacity for enjoyment and participation within it, discussions about the role of this type of consumer in the gaming community itself, and other issues relevant to the universe of video games. However, once we assimilate the reality of spectatorship

practices, an issue arises: after all, what does the spectator expects in the game of watching?

This article seeks to understand and bring an introductory analysis of trends and modes of game consumption that are established through and beyond spectatorship on Twitch.tv, highlighting aspects of sociability, participation, co-creation, and the play-watch practices within the platform that reveal a more relevant role of the spectator in the game of watching. For that, we start the first topic by establishing prior studies on game spectatorship and developing the appeal of watching and coexperiencing a game within a live stream as a way to contextualize the social and interactive uses we approach in this article. Considering the materialities of Twitch.tv's media arrangement, the appropriations and subversive manipulations of its users, and the answers of the industry to those ways of watching and playing, more than understanding the type of content and consumption within the media, we also strive to explore the specificities and elements of the platform that support them, allow their existence, and influence their activities.

TO PLAY OR TO WATCH

Watching as entertainment, as a suspension from tension and daily life, as a form of learning, watching justified by financial, emotional, or cognitive obstacles that prevent playing, watching in connection to a vicarious enjoyment, as a social event, watching connected to the figure of the streamer, watching as an interactive activity... The types of game spectatorship on streaming platforms and their purposes are diverse, and many authors in game studies have been addressing them in a search to unravel why we watch others play games, what leads us, or what do we seek with these types of experiences.

Cheung and Huang (2011), for example, used the *StarCraft* series (Blizzard Entertainment 1998-2015) and its fandom to develop archetypes of spectators in the context of e-sports in physical and digital environments (in-game spectatorship). Sjöblom and Hamari (2016) apply the Use and Gratification Theory (UGT) to address the experience of the game spectator and the objectives and pleasures of watching games. And more recently, Orme (2021) performed a qualitative analysis of the motivations of "just watchers", addressing the constraints that make someone want to watch, but not play video games. Those and other researchers work through different methodologies and theoretical foundations to understand the types of watching in activities that can range from broadcasts of different categories of games (either fragments or full narratives), e-sports competitions, reaction videos, commentary, tutorials, speedruns, and others types of content. In doing so, they present the objectives and influences involved in the phenomenon of game spectatorship, revealing the various forms of consumption that have been established in environments such as Twitch.tv.

One of the first issues addressed by me in previous works (Coema 2020) when contextualizing game spectatorship compared to the classic notions about play and games are the concepts of interactivity and agency. Those are "basic fundamentals of video games and the play activity that could be left aside when watching" (7), according to a perspective based on pre-established sensitivities and notions of what it means to watch or play. Muriel and Crawford (2020) confirm this thought when they state that "the interactive nature of video gaming is one of the main arguments regularly used to differentiate video games from other cultural products or media" (138). A similar discussion is present in Ian Bogost's online article *Persuasive Games: Video Game Zen,* in which the author presents the concept of video games as lean forward mediums, a posture that clashes with the type of experience he approaches: zen games. As he states, "Video games, they say, are a 'lean forward' medium, while others are 'lean back' media. Leaning forward is associated with control, activity, and engagement.

Leaning forward requires continuous attention, thought, and movement, even if it's just the movement of fingers on analog sticks and digital buttons. It's one of the features that distinguish games from, say, television." (2007, para. 1)

In *Hamlet on the Holodeck,* Janet Murray knowingly addresses the characteristic notion of video games as a media permeated by aspects of interactivity and agency. The author is keen to point out the fact that "Because of the vague and pervasive use of the term interactivity, the pleasure of agency in electronic environments is often confused with the mere ability to move a joystick or click on a mouse." (1997, 128), which is not the case. Similar discussions about agency can be seen in Arsenault and Perron (2009), Falcão (2014), and even in the notion of "effectance" according to Klimmt (2003), who sees one of the main pleasure factors of games in the "immediate feedback to the player as a causal agent that influences the game world" (as cited in Lindley and Sennersten 2006, 9). In this way, it becomes clear that such forms of contact and user participation (interactivity) and the type of power of action/interference that offers relevant results in the narrative (agency) are some of the main characteristics pointed out when speaking of games, and this network of human and non-human actors that act on and influence the experiences of play. Therefore, choosing to watch a game instead of playing it could be seen as a choice of deprivation of such playful appeals intrinsic to the gaming experience.

Although the practices and experiences manifested in Twitch.tv do not always fit into classic notions of play, as they are initially based on spectatorship and are mediated differently, it does not mean that they do not invoke their forms of interactivity and agency, or create play opportunities and game consumption experiences. More than that, some of these experiences configure a parallel to the already established perspectives of play, even reproducing adapted characteristics of gaming as recognized in other spaces. The possibilities of fruition, interpretation, and apprehension in watching, the participation and co-creation through socialization, the interactivity in play-watch practices and in the crossplay[4] between spectator and streamer, or other types of experiences that produce pleasure, entertainment, and meaning for those who seek game broadcasts, reveal themselves in statements like the one at the beginning of this article.

Still, a user who feels that they have played a game to its fullest through watching, whether in a more passive way or one crossed by participatory instances, claims an experience that could be contested by individuals who prioritize a more direct type of interaction, pointing to a hegemonic sensibility (Cardoso Filho 2015) about gaming experiences. This hesitation directed at watching as a valid way to consume video games exists because when we play and act on video game narratives, different inputs, reflexes, and motor and cognitive skills are required. Those efforts, along with the types of stimuli felt during play, form an experience that for many cannot be achieved in the Twitch.tv environment. Participating in a game also requires the insertion of this actor/player in the magic circle, the space of activity of the game (Huizinga 1980; Salen and Zimmerman 2003). In this context, the participant must enter the limit of the play sphere being endowed with a lusory or playful attitude[5] (Ferreira 2020) and naturally in agreement and compliance with the mechanics, rules, interactions, and limits that characterize it, which is not always guaranteed in the case of users who watch.

Silent spectators who do not participate in the chat, communicate with the streamer, or interact with the platform and the game directly, can still engage with the game's narrative when they, for example, internally develop theories and methods to solve the challenges presented, or even note details ignored by the streamer. However, there is no way to reliably assume or attest to their entrance into the playing sphere or the existence of a playful attitude. In the case of *en passant* spectators, who move between

streaming channels as if they are “surfing” through television channels, we also do not find many expressions of interactivity, agency, and involvement with the game, similar to the practice of users who perform what is called “lurking”. Lurkers are spectators who watch but do not interact in the chat. This activity is mainly linked to users who seek to guarantee audience numbers for streamers without actually fully participating: watching multiple streams at the same time, keeping streams muted, or leaving background streams while performing other tasks, and therefore not enjoying the experience offered by the platform and the streamer in its full potential.

However, we can agree that in certain cases the processes of fruition and comprehension of a game by the spectator who consumes the live broadcast can be presented similarly to those experienced by the streamer-player. In this case, the experiences, although not analogous, start from a common root: the game, which can be played, shared, and coexperienced online. When watching, prior knowledge and experiences on game narratives and mechanics influence the way we perceive gameplays performed live. We can also add issues inherent to playing such as the perception of time and space, the cyclical stimuli and sensations of suspense and relief created by the narrative, processes of interpretation, learning, and decision, and factors such as memory, for example. Those can work in different ways for the player and the spectator, but despite the distinction caused by the mediations involved, they can still be perceived as relevant and present in both experiences.

These nuances of consumption, the attitudes towards the interactive narrative of the game, and play-watch practices that form around it lead us to seek a more in-depth analysis of the possible interactive experiences of users who consume games through streaming platforms. For that, we can start through the medium, in our case, Twitch.tv.

THE GAME OF WATCHING

To comprehend the forms of game consumption that develop through and beyond watching, we must recognize and take into account the importance of the materiality of the platform that supports the activity, and how it enables and modifies the experiences of its users. After all, as mentioned by Hernandez (2019), it was platforms like Youtube and Twitch that “changed the video game fandom”, and consequently how those who belong to this community consume games.

For that, we invoke an introductory material analysis to address the spectatorship of games on Twitch.tv, inspired by Van Ditmarsch (2013), who sheds light on the experience of watching both in game spaces in spectator mode, and on Twitch.tv, through material perspectives of both media. In doing so, we can discover how the platform shelters and promotes new languages and practices in video games and is capable, through its interface, affordances[8], and socioeconomic structure, to modulate, domesticate, promote and modify expectations, goals, pleasures, and forms of consumer interaction at different levels within the experiences of watching.

Born from Justin.tv, Twitch.tv emerged in 2011 from the recognition of its creators concerning the popularity of game-themed content on the internet. The platform, which can be accessed from a browser or through its official application, was launched with the slogan “Social Video for Gamers”, highlighting its focus on video games and the social interactions made possible by it, and later, in 2019, changed its brand to the motto “You're already one of us”, again an emphasis on the community aspect. Reaching an average of 2.76 million simultaneous viewers (TwitchTracker.com, accessed on April 4, 2022), over the years Twitch.tv has been developed and updated frequently, gaining new tools that, as stated by the company several times, aim to facilitate and encourage the production, consumption, and, especially, the involvement of its users in ways to play, watch and socialize.

If we look at how most game live streams on Twitch.tv are configured we will notice that these are essentially made up of audio and video content from the game itself, and a second audio and/or image transmission from the streamer. This secondary feed from the producer is the space in which they perform and react live to the gaming experience and the community that follows the stream. As a part of the experience, the image and audio from the streamer are vital for processes of vicarious fruition and interaction[6] (Kwastek 2013), and in social processes between streamer and audience, as it is through them that we will perceive the gaming performance and connect with the figure of the "primary player".

Added to this interface is an Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channel where viewers can communicate and interact with each other and the streamer. This can be a tool for sociability, participation, and co-creation, for the customization of the spectator experience, for the audience performance, and for the development of gaming spaces. Hamilton et al. (2014) list Twitch.tv's game spectatorship universe as part of their concept of participatory communities of play, environments characterized by their openness and the encouragement to participate in shared activities. In this context, it is possible to recognize an effort employed by the platform directed to the production of intimacy and the perception of co-presence, which here is related to the ever-present sensation of being and acting with others, in a space of connections and sharing of experiences. (Diwanji *et al.* 2019).

The much-discussed and relatively recent careers of professional streamers in the gaming world involve a series of attitudes that are led to meet and acquiesce to the material, social and economic scenario constructed by platforms like Twitch, including a space that facilitates and encourages communication. Their work is based on attention economy, self-branding tactics, viewer engagement, and the production of familiarity between the producer and the spectators creating an "illusion of friendship and proximity" in a performed intimacy (Marwick and Boyd 2011), which is reflected in the formation of parasocial relationships. [7] These relationships are further exacerbated when inserted into the co-experience universe enabled by Twitch's interface.

For example, from the basics of a live stream, a wide range of textual and visual overlays can be added to the broadcasting screen, and those logos and decorations for visual identity, information about the streamer (like technical setup and social networks), and community-driven add-ons can always be used as ways of engaging. Overlays can present goals of the channel (followers, subscribers, donations) that are updated live as the community participates, rankings (leaderboards) of fans set by different engagement factors, live feed from the chat, visual and audible notifications that pop up as actions are performed by viewers (new follower or subscriber, donations, personalized messages)… These audiovisual ingredients are visible to the whole audience present on a game broadcast, which means that those processes can function as a way of communication between the producer and its consumers, as opportunities for visibility and recognition of the spectator – who performs and participates in the social and interactive processes of the live stream –, and as means to ensure their loyalty, involvement, and permanence in a channel.

As in many audiovisual sharing platforms, below the main screen, we have several pieces of information about the live stream, like the title, the game being broadcasted, and tags that can help the process of searching for streams. Next, we have options to follow and activate notifications, to subscribe (which offers additional benefits to the viewer in exchange for a financial contribution), stream sharing options, and others. But on the Twitch platform, we have specific instruments that function along with the chat space and the stream that are constantly recognized for the ways they encourage and allow viewer participation and interaction in a true game of watching.

We can start by highlighting the tab for the *Bits* virtual currency, which can be used, among other purposes, to send a contribution in form of *Cheers* and paid messages to the streamers. According to Twitch, *Bits* are virtual goods with which viewers can "demonstrate support, celebrate moments and amplify their voice."[9]. In addition to being one of the ways to support a producer, they can also be used to ensure that viewers' messages are recognized by said streamers, to request certain actions from them, or even allow participation. For example, a streamer can request a number of Bits to allow specific types of influence, interaction, or entrance in a game, turning into a very common asset used to support careers inside Twitch, and by spectators who want to contribute and play along with the streamer.

Now *Channel Points*, Twitch's customizable benefits program, are referred to as a way for producers to reward and recognize their audience and their support to the community. These points can be accumulated through various interactions within channels, such as spending an amount of time watching a live stream, following, subscribing, contributing financially, etc., and can be used as socialization tools to influence and participate in the performances that develop on the platform, and for playful interaction.

Channel Points can be exchanged, for example, for personalized rewards (Figure 2) developed and made available by the streamer. In this way, a spectator can retrieve its points to highlight a message in the chat or ask the streamer to drink some water, stretch or change their way of speaking. A viewer could also use points to send different audios (initially set by the streamer) that at times interrupt, distract or surprise the streamer and the audience. Those same points can be used to participate and interfere in the game itself more directly. For example, a spectator can use points to ask the producer to open a public poll, ban an action in the game, choose the character or weapon used, or request entry in a game server, a very common practice, especially on smaller channels where the producer invites their audience to join an online match.

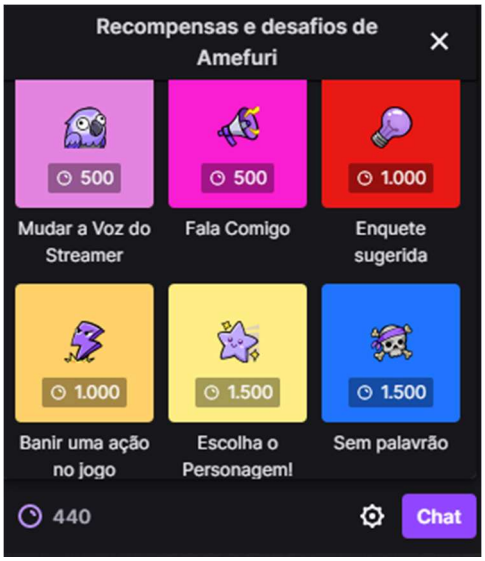
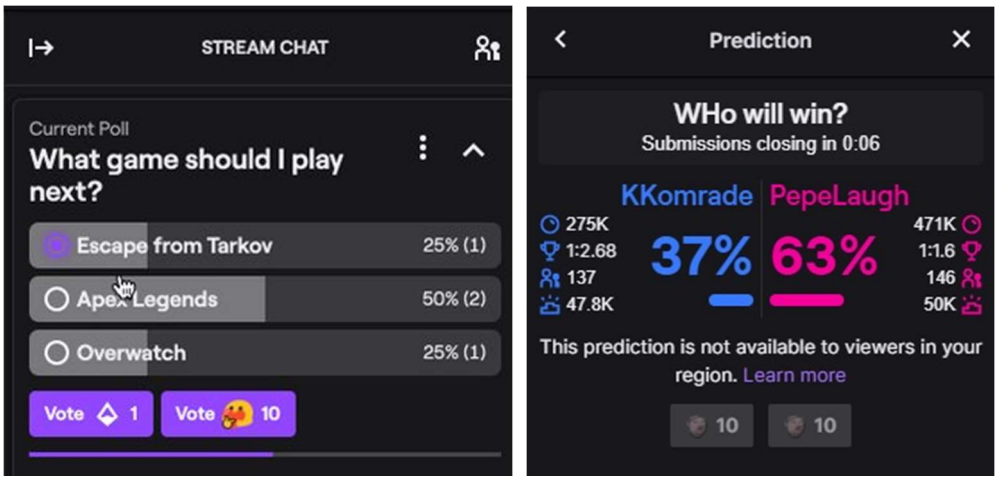


Figure 2: In order, Channel Points rewards from Brazilian streamer Amefuri's**:** change streamer voice; talk to me; suggest a poll; ban an in-game action; choose the character; no cursing.

The possibility to participate in Polls (Figure 3) and bets, or, as they're officially named, Twitch Predictions (Figure 4), is also an aspect of the highly interactive scenario set by Twitch's official tools. Polls offer a way to vote on game events and other issues external to play, and Predictions allow spectators to bet a number of Channel points on something like the result of a match and earn a part of the sum raised by the community bets. The tools appear as resources that are easy to be activated and fully integrated into the platform interface, although they can only be used by Twitch Partners and Affiliates, that is, those who have already achieved a certain degree of evidence and, therefore, could apply for the benefit/contract with the company. Among those streamers, Polls and Predictions appear as two of the most popular community engagement tools (Bulava 2021).



Figures 3 and 4: Examples of Polls and Predictions (bets) that can be found on Twitch.tv game streams that enable the spectator to socialize, interact, or influence the game, its players, and the community.

Those opportunities for participatory spectatorship, – especially through social processes (Hamilton *et al.* 2014) – play-watch and crossplay practices through interactions are famously recognized within the company by the concept of "Multiplayer Entertainment", a play o the well-known game term "multiplayer" that represents video game experiences that allow more than one participant. Emmet Shear, co-founder, and CEO of Twitch.tv uses this term in his 2019 TED Talk to refer to the remarkable ability of Twitch's game spectators to "influence what happened on the stream" and "co-create the experience" with the streamer and the community. As Shear states, "[…] going from watching a video alone to watching a live interactive stream is similar to the difference between going from playing a single-player game to playing a multiplayer game." (Shear 2019)

But, as we can observe, many of these tools – apart from offering interactive opportunities, stimulating practices around social and ludic activities, and changing how spectators interact and expect to engage with the game broadcasted and others that participate in the stream –, can create unequal spaces and instances of what has been called among game studies scholars as a "corruption of play". The possibility for users to get more votes by contributing with Bits (where 30% of the purchase amount goes to Twitch itself), using Channel Points, or having double votes when being paid

subscribers, for example, reflect the economic agenda of the platform. In a similar fashion, Predictions configure a secondary activity of play, permeated by the use of gambling mechanics as a form of engagement, a practice addressed in the discussion of the phenomenon of gamblification in games by authors like Zanescu *et al.* (2020).

In this way, microtransactions such as the purchase of Bits and subscriptions, and the accumulation of Channel Points through actions that guarantee permanence and interaction of users on the platform, are rewarded with the privilege of being able to participate in the crossplay experiences or have greater influence during a live stream.

The official resources, always celebrated by the company, many times turn out to be not as democratic as other options developed by the community, alternatives that have been setting the path for interactive and playful uses of game streams even before Twitch's initiatives. From the beginnings of Twitch, streamers have been exploring the possibility for their spectators to participate in the gameplay in a variety of ways. Ranging from simpler processes – such as the streamer including its audience in game decisions and asking them to respond or assist through chat –, to more complex and interfering ways, like using their own or third-party mods, bots, and tools like chat facilitators, bots that allow chat games, external donations, etc., users have been modifying and integrating different mechanics into the game and the Twitch interface. Through these practices, coexperiences that configure a collective play were developed in an autonomous and, in a way, subversive movement that appropriates and modifies the platform, taking their experiences beyond what is suggested or expected, and inspiring new developments within Twitch.

A case that has been extensively discussed among scholars in the area of game spectatorship is the phenomenon of Twitch Plays, which began in 2014 with the channel Twitch Plays Pokémon, created by an anonymous Australian programmer. The user developed a bot integrated with the Twitch.tv platform and the live-streamed game in a way that promoted remote gameplay allowing viewers to control the progress through commands inserted in the chat. This practice, which was soon adopted by more communities and made way for other forms of stream-adapted gameplay created by users and standalone programmers, influenced several initiatives of Twitch.tv itself.

For example, live streamings of the *Twitch Plays* category were made official by the platform in 2016. Also in 2016, the company started the Developer Success project, an "initiative dedicated to helping developers to use Twitch within and alongside their apps" (Gleason 2016, as cited in Coema 2021a, p. 3), and Stream First, "a technology that allows studios to incorporate Twitch into their games" (Plunkett 2016, as cited in Coema 2021a, p. 3), following the phenomenon of Audience Participatory Games (APG) (Seering *et al.* 2017).

Offering opportunities for interactivity and agency in experiences where the viewer can feel more engaged with the game, the narrative, the characters, and the choices made, users involved in experiences of Audience Participatory games can go beyond watching, becoming a participant inserted in the magic circle, a playfellow, and therefore, a part of the activity. Fanzo *et al.* (2017), for example, present their Twitch-based horror game *What Lurks in the Dark* as an experience that "explores themes such as viewer sympathy, the challenges of teamwork in online spaces, and the balance of power between streamer and audience" (621). In the game, the main character (controlled by the streamer) cannot see their supernatural enemies, and because of that, the omniscient audience, which has control over objects in the scenario, must guide them through an external interface, assisting or sabotaging their game partner.

Twitch's interest in integration tools and APG experiences was not by chance. A year later, in 2017, we see the emergence of Twitch Extensions, a feature launched by Twitch in order to expand play-watch practices. Officializing what was already happening, several extensions were made available in a more practical and accessible way, such as overlays added to the stream interface (rankings of donors, in-game stats, virtual pets, etc.), and gameplay and sociability features. Although based on previous movements, according to Ryan Lubinski, product manager for Twitch extensions, the feature would be "opening up a whole new world":

> Twitch is a platform where communities create, share, and interact with the content they love. With Twitch Extensions, we're taking interactivity to the next level by empowering our developer community to create customized interactive content, directly integrated with the Twitch platform, opening up a whole new world of creator-viewer interaction. (as cited in Moon 2017, para. 5)

While it would still be possible for a user to develop their own tools and make them available to others, with Twitch Extensions several resources from official partners, and Twitch itself, were added and highlighted by the company. The results of those actions can be observed in many instances, one being the fact that today various channels continue to stream Twitch Plays experiences like before, but now including the aforementioned Twitch tools of Channel Points and Polls.

This shows that while many of these game modes start when streamers and viewers appropriate available affordances to create new ways of playing and socializing, there is a movement from the industry that recognizes such practices, and uses them to generate and guarantee pleasures and demands expressed by its users, but who also expects and requires certain behaviors that follow the company's agenda and economic interests. This movement "hijacks" and shapes forms of interactive play-watching for the market, domesticating and exploring sociocultural potentials of play in a logic that meets the phenomenon of the "colonization of play by neoliberal capitalism" (see Contracampo v. 40 n. 2 (2021), which bears the same title). Partin (2020) refers to this as "platform capture", when already existing resources introduced by third parties are gradually appropriated and re-introduced (with a new official guise) by companies as a way of encouraging and even monopolizing user engagement.

According to Partin, the process of platform capture has three steps: first, users within a platform create new value for this ecosystem by developing innovative features such as bots, mods, and hacks that modify and enrich the activities practiced there; soon, recognizing such efforts, platform owners create their versions of these resources, directing the value to themselves; and finally, the third parties tools are then forced to compete with the company's offering in a "marketplace that is biased towards its owners" (1). The author states that, as happens in many platforms and industries, on Twitch the user's practices and strategies are not always in line with the company's objectives, and these misalignments often produce new (and official) technical features that aid the "gradual consolidation of Twitch's economic influence over its own ecosystem" (3).

As it is, a wide scope of practices around social and play-watch activities keep developing inside the platform, ways of play-watch and types of crossplay between the streamer, the community, and the medium, and manifestations of how Twitch.tv spectators can use and appropriate of what is offered, often taking their experiences beyond what is set by the platform. These uses soon inspire new developments within the streaming world that become staples in the transmission and sharing of experiences, the ways of sociability, participation, co-creation, and the forms of play that insert the

spectator in the game of watching. In a never-ending cycle, the actors involved in those innovative practices – the platform, Twitch.tv, the streamers and other types of producers, and the audience – exert their influence at different levels of power (but always in tangible and relevant means), shaping the way we watch and play video games.

CONCLUSION

Platforms, spectators, and producers have been playing with their possibilities in the game of watching, changing ways to consume games, and promoting collective ludic experiences. Considering our analysis, it becomes clear that the engagement options offered within Twitch.tv as a way to accompany and transcend watching games are carefully considered when developing the type of experience expected on the platform. The arrangement encourages, intends, and foresees, by offering such tools, that its spectators/players feel impelled to socialize, participate, interact, and contribute with their preferred creators and communities.

In this brief survey of Twitch's experience space, we were able to observe modes of consumption and spectator participation that lead us to understand the appeal of the spectatorship activities that take place in these gaming communities. Those appeals reveal themselves from different levels: the audiovisual dimension of the gameplay itself, in which the spectator who watches can be involved with the game's narrative and visuals; the aspect of the streamer and its performance (influenced by the platform, the game, and its audience), which viewers consume, assimilate, interpret and in a way reflect in the processes of vicarious fruition and interaction; and the social-participatory and playful-interactive spheres (Coema 2020), where collective activities and initiatives related to the play-sphere are developed between platform, streamer, spectator, and community.

Thus, the practices expressed in the media arrangement that configures Twitch.tv, its medium, and participating actors, are structured not only as an audiovisual entertainment platform, but as a social network, a space for fan communities, and an interactive media capable of changing conceptions of games and playing, harboring coexperiences that at times become more attractive than playing games in more classic perspectives.

Just as these materialities and affordances shape new sensibilities and ways of consuming games, those who produce and engage in playful and social experiences of play-watch also shape them. Platforms like Twitch.tv, its novelties, and initiatives, have the power to reach a bigger audience, setting the pattern for how the industry in general treats and promotes those “new” modes of consumption. However, as previously discussed, autonomous instances of appropriation and modification by users in the game community, the practices that for the most part popularized principles of participatory play on Twitch, are in many ways domesticated by the officialization of resources (once used in a smaller scale) and the big companies that monetize them. In this way, through social-emotional involvement and playful elements, now set officially by the platform, the experience lived in these spaces generate pleasures and demands that lead to the recognition of the brand's identity, one that preaches collectivity and interactivity.

It is essential to recognize that the aspects and tools provided by streaming platforms, and the social, cultural, and economic approaches generated there are not always

generally positive and open to everyone. In the same way as affordances can produce potencies, tools within the Twitch.tv environment can also reveal instances of control, social and monetary effect over the activities and uses present, as much as challenges and obstacles for certain users. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that the belief on the internet and its technologies as means that allow universal communication, visibility, appropriation, and production, underestimates the different levels of access in those spaces, which are granted, supervised, and managed by platforms and corporations who appropriate and domesticate potential and transformative uses of said tools according to their interests.

ENDNOTES

1 As seen in Aguiar and Battaiola (2016), the concept of gameplay refers to the "game's interaction, flow, and mechanics". Therefore, the live streaming of gameplay experiences from the player would be the sharing of tactics, plays, and narrative development of a game on a said occasion.

2 According to Pereira (2020), we must recognize a post-media contemporaneity where media arrangements mediate communicational relationships. Such arrangements configure themselves as devices originated from the coupling of "different components or elements in a media chain". In this context, these arrangements transcend and unfold traditional notions of communication mediums, in a reality in which "publics disperse their attention over a myriad of technological devices, supports and conversational, and communicational spaces".

3 Or even in the scenario of consumption of asynchronous Let's Play videos, game reviews, tutorials, etc., but this instance will not be covered in this article, as we seek to focus on live streaming only.

4 Crossplay or cross-platform play is the term used in the gaming universe to refer to online multiplayer games, or experiences that allow players on different platforms to have the possibility of playing together and simultaneously. Goffman (1961; 1981), who in structuring social interactions and social encounters recognizes playful environments and experiences of play, used the same term previously in a way that completes the meaning in which we use it. In his studies, the author classifies crossplay as the communication/interaction between formally recognized participants and individuals who observe the bystanders. Transporting this concept to the context of playing and watching games on live streaming platforms, we call crossplay the type of play interaction between the streamer (player one) and the spectator (player two). These actors, even in different spaces and consuming media through different interfaces and hardware, develop a collective play when the observer transcends the role of the spectator and chooses to participate in the game.

5 Based on authors such as Huizinga, Bernard Suits (also seen in Salen and Zimmerman's work), and Jacques Henriot, Ferreira further develops the behavior and conditions necessary for the player to enter the activity of playing. To adhere to this posture, referred to as *attitude ludique*, lusory attitude, or simply playful attitude (*atitude lúdica*, in Portuguese), means we must "assume a role of suspending the usual daily rules to engage in another scope of rules proper to such activity." (Ferreira 2020, 3)

6 In the process of addressing the consumption of "new media arts" and developing a theory of the aesthetics of interaction in art, Kwastek (2013) also recognizes the experience of the observer in interactive art spaces by analyzing the role of the artist, the system/art, and the recipient/interactor. The author uses the term vicarious interaction according to Golan Levin (2000) to bring out the position of the observer

who, despite limiting their participation when watching, develops a cognitive understanding and interpretation of their own, based on the interaction of others.

7 Relationships with media figures that develop during continuous consumption of said medias, and which are often perceived by users as something more intimate than they really are, as they are influenced by communication/interaction efforts by such idealized personas.

8 Within the concept of affordance in Shäfer (2011), submitted to the universe of watching games, technologies, in general, are presented as facilitating or repressing user participation. The material analysis of these technologies include their affordances, a concept that describes two of their characteristics: the material aspects of an object or technology, and the resources and qualities linked to the accessibility and uses, imposed on it by design (as cited in Van Distmarsch 2013).

9 Twitch.tv. Bits and Subscriptions. Accessed October 20, 2021. https://www.twitch.tv/creatorcamp/en/get-rewarded/bits-and-subscriptions/

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