

# Chapter 6

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

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### ABSTRACT

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

### INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

## **GAME DEFINITION**

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

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