

Competitive Online Games
Subject, Power and Resistance

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Abstract

This dissertation draws upon the concepts of subject, power and resistance analysed by Michel Foucault in order to propose an understanding of the way in which power relations operate within competitive online games. It is suggested that the aforementioned relations produce a new kind of subjectivity through various techniques of power. Based on an analysis of the Foucauldian concept of resistance, I suggest that competitive online games constitute virtual heterotopias that are inherently resistant to subjectification emanating from relations with ‘the outside’; but where a new kind of subjectivity emerges.

INTRODUCTION

“Nature determined that men be distributed across the world in distinct regions and that within each of these regions they have privileged relationships with each other that they do not have with the inhabitants of other regions, and men have taken up this precept in legal terms by forming separate states which maintain certain legal relationships between them.”

Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2004, 57-8)

The advent of the digital era has led to the development of virtual spaces where individuals can interact. Today, the natural distribution of men and women around the world is not sufficient to account for the forming of privileged relationships between people. These new virtual spaces can bring people from different regions together, in real time, for a shared purpose. Drawing upon Foucault’s quote coming from the *Birth of Biopolitics*, it is clear that the formation of states is in part a result of the natural distribution of men and women across the world. It is this natural distribution that is the *prima condition* to the formation of states, through the necessity of maintaining legal relationships between individuals forming a community. In modern political philosophy, Hobbes and Locke use the terms “community” and “society” as synonyms. In the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot makes a distinction between the two. He associates the term “society” with the moral and political aspect of human cohabitation whereas “community” refers to its juridical aspect. He states: “as a political body, [community] is the assembly of several people united in one body, formed by the permission of the powers that have the right to authorise or prevent its establishment (Diderot, 1753, 716 in Raynaud & Rials, 2015, 117). Drawing upon this definition, it is possible to point out the appearance of communities within Massively Multiplayer Online Games. Unlike traditional ones, these communities are not formed based on the natural distribution of people across the world, in geographical terms. Instead, it is the purpose of these new spaces that brings people together. According to Michel Foucault, “power relations are rooted deep into the social nexus” (Foucault, 1982, 791). Drawing upon his work, power can be described as not being an institution nor a structure. It is rather a complex strategic situation within a society (Olivier, 1988, 88). The spaces produced by MMOGs can be analysed as spaces where power operates. That is to say, as spaces where strategic networks of power form, transform and move (Olivier, 1988, 91). Competitive MMOGs gather millions of individuals every day from around the world. They differ from other kinds of MMOGs through their competitive nature that can be expected to play a crucial

role in the way power relations operate. Thus, the attempt of this dissertation is to investigate how power relations operate within such competitive MMOGs. Drawing upon the work of Michel Foucault, the aim is to understand what techniques of power manifest themselves and what are the results of their operation. All in all, we will try to make sense of governance in competitive MMOGs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To begin with, clarification is required regarding the definition of the term ‘esport’. Indeed, this one is the subject of many debates within the literature. It has in turn been defined as competitive gaming, as computer mediated sport or interactive spectatorship (Reitman, Anderson-Coto et al., 2019, 9). More broadly, esport is often defined as games, as a sport or as mass entertainment (Reitman, Anderson-Coto et al., 2019, 10). In this dissertation I will use the terms ‘competitive gaming’ instead of esport to avoid any confusion. The term ‘competitive’ does not ensue here from the existence of competitions organised around the world. Instead, I decide to classify games as ‘competitive’ insofar as they include competition in the form of a player ranking system at the very heart of their design.

In a first part, this literature review will attempt to provide an account of Foucault’s work on power relations. We will focus on the way power relations operate according to the author. For that, I am going to introduce the concept of the self, show how this one is constructed and explain the relevance of this concept for our study. Additionally, I will emphasise on the concept of resistance. I will present this concept and introduce its particularities, show how it relates to power relations and in turn, present Foucault’s concept of heterotopia as a ‘place of resistance’. In a second part, I will draw an overview of the relevant literature that relates to power relations within virtual spaces and more particularly, within virtual videogames.

The notions of Subject and Power are related throughout Foucault’s work. His work can be mistakenly understood as investigating primarily the notion of power. As he puts it himself in his article *The Subject and Power*, the goal of his work was not to “analyse the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis. [His] objective, instead, has been to create of history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects” (Foucault, 1982, 777). Thus, in order to understand how power relations operate, it is important to first understand what is ‘the Subject’, how this one is constructed and why the

concept is relevant for a clear understanding of power relations. The expression “to be made subject” can prove difficult to understand. In other words, it corresponds to the way “humans develop knowledge about themselves” (Foucault, 1988, 2). Foucault exposed three modes of objectivation which transform human beings into subjects. The first mode corresponds to “the modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of science” (Foucault, 1982, 777). The second mode of objectivation operates through “dividing practices” where the subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others. The author takes the examples of the mad versus the sane, the sick versus the healthy, the criminals versus the ‘good boys’ (Foucault, 1982, 778). The third mode of objectivation corresponds to the way human beings turn themselves into a subject.

In order to analyse the relations between ‘the self’ and power, Rose (1996) proposes to investigate “the ways in which subjectivity has become an essential object, target, and resource for certain strategies, tactics, and procedures of regulation” (Rose, 1996, 152). The notion of ‘strategy’ was defined by Foucault as “the choice of winning solutions” (Foucault, 1982, 793). More precisely, it is employed by the author in three ways. First, it corresponds to the means employed to a certain end. Second, a way in which one seeks to have the advantage over others, based on what he “thinks should be the action of the others and what he considers the others think to be his own” (Foucault, 1982, 793). The third way corresponds to the “procedures used in a situation of confrontation to deprive the opponent of his means of combat and to reduce him to giving up the struggle” (Foucault, 1982, 793). All in all, strategies are mechanisms brought into play in power relations. Thus, drawing upon Rose’s suggestion and Foucault’s definition of strategies, we understand that the subject plays an important role in the mechanism of power relations insofar as it constitutes its object, target and resource.

It is important to point out that ‘the self’ studied by Foucault is produced. Rose proposes an enlightening description of the self. He states:

“‘The Self’ does not pre-exist the forms of its social recognition; it is a heterogenous and shifting resultant from the social expectations targeted upon it, the social duties accorded it, the norms according to which it is judged, the pleasures and pains that entice and coerce it, the forms of self-inspection inculcated in it, the languages according to which it is spoken about and about which it learns to account for itself in thought and speech” (Rose, 1996, 222).

He adds:

“Thus ‘belief systems’ concerning the self should not be construed as inhabiting a diffuse field of ‘culture’, but as embodied in institutional and technical practices [...] through which forms of individuality are specified and governed.” (Rose, 1996, 222).

Therefore, the self must be understood as resulting from a set of practices through which power operates.

Before expounding on the question of power, it is important to emphasise that the exercise of power has a condition. This condition is the freedom of the individual (Foucault, 1982, 790). ‘Freedom’ is understood here as the ability to choose from various options, various ways of behaving. According to this statement, a relationship of coercion cannot be understood as a relationship of power. Additionally, power relations only take place in a society. That is to say, where there is interaction between individuals. To begin with, let us underline that Foucault affirmed multiple times that “power does not exist” (Olivier, 1988, 88). Indeed, it is not a thing in itself or something that one can possess. Instead, it is “the name we give to a complex strategic situation in a society” (Olivier, 1988, 88). In other words, “power” corresponds to relationships between actors (individual or collective). It is a way in which certain actions modify others (Foucault, 1982, 788). As Foucault famously stated, “it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; [...] it is always a way of acting upon an acting subject” (Foucault, 1982, 789). Pickett confirms Rose’s (1996) affirmation regarding the relation between ‘the self’ and power. Indeed, he states that power “creates gestures, impulses, and even individuals” (Pickett, 1996, 458). Thus, power can be said to be productive and the object of its production can be understood as being a manifestation of this very power. As Pickett rightly noted, “if we are the products of modern power, then all of our behaviours, gestures and thoughts including our normative intuitions are expressive of that power” (Pickett, 1996, 465).

Power needs to be understood in the form of a relationship. Nevertheless, Foucault distinguishes three forms of relationships that should not be confused. These types of relationship always overlap one another, support one another and use each other as means to an end. Those are relationships of communication, power relations and objective capacities.

Together, they can constitute a regulated and concerted system which Foucault calls a “block” of capacity-communication-power, or “disciplines” (Foucault, 1982, 787-788). In order to analyse power relations, Foucault advocates focusing on institutions which bring into play explicit or implicit regulations together with an apparatus. This analysis shall be undertaken through the establishment of five particular points. First, the system of differentiation that enables one to act upon the actions of others. This is the system that separates teachers from their students, inmates with guards etc. Second, the type of objectives pursued by those who act upon the actions of others. Third, the means of bringing power relations into being that can be more or less complex. They can be means of control or surveillance, archives, norms and rules, among others. Fourth, the forms of institutionalization which can notably take the shape of one or multiple apparatuses. And finally, the degrees of rationalization (Foucault, 1982, 792).

Lilja and Vinthagen (2014) propose an outline of Foucault’s ‘triangle’ of power relations corresponding to three ‘forms of power’ that emerged at different historical phases of modernity, though without replacing each other. That is, sovereign power, disciplinary power and biopower. The aim of their study is to discuss the relationship between power and resistance through associating each form of power with its corresponding form of resistance. In this part, we are going to explain how power is exercised or, to put it differently, we are going to present the techniques of power.

For Foucault, knowledge and power are linked inasmuch as power assumes the authority of the ‘truth’ and because it has the power to make itself true (Foucault, 1994). Thus, the establishment of what he calls a ‘discursive norm’ is key. In other words, disciplines carry a particular discourse that itself establishes multiple tacit rules that Foucault calls ‘norms’. In a nutshell, disciplines define a code of normalization (Foucault, 1994, 44). Thus, all individuals are referred to this code that ultimately becomes an “optimum towards which she or he strives” (Foucault, 1986, 241, Lilja, 2008).

Disciplinary power shapes subjects through normalization leading them to ultimately “become, speak, think, and act in similar manners” (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014, 109), transforming individuals into a tool to serve certain interests. Conforming behaviour is rewarded, and deviance is punished. One feature of disciplinary power is what Foucault calls ‘architecture’ namely, the organisation of individuals and space based on their rank and function. In this way,

enclosure and hierarchy are central to the exercise of disciplinary power. In fact, individuals are both the object and the instrument of this technique of power. It also seeks an increase in 'productivity' through 'activity-control', time-space organising and an optimum correlation between the body and its gestures (Foucault, 1991, 151). Discipline is also closely linked to time insofar as it extracts from it evermore available moments in order to render individuals always more productive towards its end. The second essential feature of disciplinary power is 'training' insofar as its success depends on hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and examination of individuals' behaviour (Foucault, 1991, 170). It is also important to point out that power is inherently productive. It makes 'things happen', it builds notions of pleasure and pain and achieves certain outcomes. People are expected to make improvements and to self-control in order to conform to the norm.

Biopower (or governmentality) constitutes another form or technique of power in Foucault's analysis. Biopower 'takes charge of life' (Foucault, 1978, 143) and applies itself to everyday life. It constitutes the subject through the three modes of objectivation listed above.

Sovereign power is the power of explicit rules. As Dean affirms, it primarily makes use of the law and law-like regulations (Dean, 1999, 105-106) to prohibit and censor.

In *The Subject and Power*, Foucault suggests to take the "forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point" in order to bring to light power relations. "Rather than analysing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analysing power relations through the antagonism of strategies" (Foucault, 1982, 780). According to the author, all 'struggles' have six common features. First, they are 'transversal' in the sense that they are not confined to a particular political or economic form of government. Second, these struggles are always against power effects as such. Third, they are 'immediate' in the sense that they are formulated against immediate instances of power instead of targeting a "chief enemy". Also, they do expect to find a solution at a future date. For these two reasons, Foucault designates them as 'anarchistic struggles'. Fourth, they question the status of the individual or, in other words, are struggles against the "government of individualization". Fifth, they are an opposition to the effects of power which are linked with knowledge, competence and qualification. In other words, they are struggles against privileges of knowledge. And sixth, struggles revolve around the question "who are we?". They are a refusal of all kind of abstractions that ignore who we are individually. All in all, struggles are against a technique (or

form) of power (Foucault, 1982, 780-781). It is important to point out that, according to the author, “every power relationship implies, at least in potential, a strategy of struggle.” (Foucault, 1982, 793).

Foucault lists three types of struggles. Against forms of domination, against forms of exploitation, and against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way or, in other words, against subjectification. The latter is said to be particularly prevailing in modern society as a result of the rise of a new political form of power that is both totalizing and individualizing: the state. However, it can be mistakenly assumed that struggles (or ‘resistance’) aim to destroy or undo power relations. In fact, resistance must be understood as resistance against the limits set by power relations. Resistance is what eludes power, what threatens it, and power targets resistance as its adversary (Pickett, 1996, 458).

However, Pickett also points out that power can produce what comes to resist it. Indeed, “power is only accepted to the extent that it is hidden” (Pickett, 1996, 459) and is never safe from being made aware of. There is therefore a clear opposition between power relations and resistance, and power always seeks to minimize resistance. For that, Pickett notes, it “must seek to individualize and divide the forces of the institutions it creates” (Pickett, 1996, 459). It is also worth emphasising that resistance is not only a negation of power relations. Indeed, it can be also productive and affirmative, using the techniques of power. As Foucault stated, “every strategy of confrontation dreams of becoming a relationship of power” (Foucault, 1982, 794). Additionally, Foucault emphasises that resistance can lead to new forms of subjectivity (Pickett, 1996, 464).

Lilja and Vinthagen (2014) associate each form (or technique) of power namely sovereign power, disciplinary power and biopower to corresponding forms of resistance. They suggest that resisting practices to sovereign power are concerned with doing what is illegal or doing things for deviant purposes, ultimately leading to circumvent and/or undermine sovereignty (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014, 113). Resistance to disciplinary power manifests itself in the refusal to “participate in the construction of new subjectivity/capacities/skills/organisations” (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014, 114). Disciplinary power is also said to be challenged by the destabilization of the institutional control of behaviour. In this way, behaviours such as escape, passivity, disloyalty, avoidance, slander or misunderstanding are

considered as resisting to this form of power. Resistance to biopower engages with the same techniques of this very power. That is to say, “the managing of large populations, of life and society, and the managing of huge information databases, surveillance techniques and statistical management” (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014, 119).

Heterotopia

In 1967, Michel Foucault presented his concept of ‘Heterotopia’ for the third time, during a conference in Paris. He expressed his interest for particular kinds of sites which “have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect” (Foucault, 1986, 4). These spaces are linked with all the others but, at the same time, contradict all the other sites. They are of two kinds: utopias and heterotopias. Utopias have the specificity to not be real unlike heterotopias that are effectively enacted. These places are ‘outside of all places’ but can be localised in reality. Examples of sites such as cemeteries, libraries or even gardens can be considered as heterotopias. According to Foucault, it is possible to determine such sites according to six principles.

The first element to consider is that every culture constitutes heterotopias, even though the form they take is not universal. He distinguishes two forms that they can take. On one hand, what he calls crisis heterotopias that are spaces reserved for individuals in a state of ‘crisis’ in relation to society. They are sacred, privileged or forbidden places where people such as menstruating or pregnant women, adolescents or the elderly are put. For him, crisis heterotopias have been disappearing, handing over to another form called heterotopias of deviation. These sites are reserved for people whose behaviour is categorized as deviant from society’s rules and norms such as psychiatric hospitals, rest homes or prisons. According to the second principle, the same heterotopia can function differently depending on the culture it finds itself in, which is itself subjected to change through time. The third principle states that heterotopias are a juxtaposition of multiple incompatible sites in one real space. In this way, the cinema juxtaposes the room of the audience with a number of other sites shown on the screen. The fourth principle of description of heterotopias corresponds to the notion of heterochrony. They are linked to ‘slices in time’ inasmuch as they create an absolute break with people’s traditional time. This is the

case for libraries or museums, where different periods of time coexist in the same place. Heterotopias of accumulation are places of “all times that are themselves outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages” (Foucault, 1986, 7). Foucault opposes these heterotopias that accumulate time to others that are, in the contrary, absolutely temporal. Those are linked to time “in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect, in the mode of the festival” (Foucault, 1986, 7). For instance, this is the case for holiday villages which come alive only during seasons. The fifth principle describes a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and make them penetrable. They are not accessible unless one is constrained or is obliged to perform certain rites. The author points out that some heterotopias might give the illusion to be open at first sight but are actually totally marginalizing. The very act of entering the site leads to one’s exclusion (Foucault, 1986, 8). Finally, the sixth principle emphasises that every heterotopia has a function: either of illusion or of compensation. The role of the first is to create an illusory space that exposes all non-heterotopic spaces as still more illusory. On the other hand, the role of the latter is to create a space that is “as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” (Foucault, 1986, 8). The author takes the example of Jesuit colonies in Paraguay where:

“daily life was regulated, not by the whistle, but by the bell. Everyone was awakened at the same time, everyone began work at the same time; meals were at noon and five o’clock, then came bedtime, and at midnight came what was called the marital wake-up, that is, at the chime of the churchbell, each person carried out her/his duty” (Foucault, 1986, 8-9).

Heterotopia & virtual spaces

The concept of heterotopia developed by Foucault has been associated to a place of resistance to the dominant culture by multiple commentators (Johnson, 2006, 81; Topinka, 2010; Wearing et. al, 2015). Shields claims that such sites can become ‘an open field of social innovation’, where rituals of resistance take place and where subjects can become ‘liberated’ from disciplinary ‘micro-powers’. Additionally, he recognizes that such displays are “compromised or tempered through various political and socio-economic controls” (Shields, 1991, 94-96; in Johnson, 2006, 82). This contradiction sheds light on the unconventional nature

of such places that can be caught in a vice between forms of power and forms of resistance. Those are said to “provide an escape route from power” (Johnson, 2006, 86). They provide an opportunity to think differently about power relations and uncouple their grip in order to “overcome the dilemma of every form of resistance becoming entangled with or sustaining power” (Johnson, 2006, 86). According to Johnson, the spatial field and the set of relations that heterotopias give birth to are not separate from dominant structures and ideology. Nevertheless, they “go against the grain and offer lines of flight” to individuals (Johnson, 2006, 87). Here, we can suggest a comparison with the second example of the fifth principle developed by Foucault, where the author sheds light on the existence of heterotopias that seem open but are in reality merely a passage which is an enclosure (Foucault, 1986, 7-8).

Heterotopias can therefore be considered as sites of resistance as they tend to challenge power relations insofar as they create ruptures in individuals’ ordinary life and disrupt the customary notions of ourselves. However, as Johnson argues against Shields, they hold no promise or space of liberation.

Cybulski (2014) emphasises the inherently surveillant nature of videogames and particularly of its most modern form. For him, video games’ code and culture facilitate data collection making them inherently surveillant insofar as they are designed to “monitor, measure and mine play for data from users” (Cybulski, 2014, 427). He points out the opaque and asymmetrical characteristic of modern video games whose programming design is compared to “enclosures” of information (Bogard, 1996, 5). He identified significant components of video game programs as being oriented toward surveillance, to the benefit of the game’s developer. The author also acknowledges the surveillant nature of videogames resulting from the display of players’ score inside games’ program in arcades (i.e. gaming sites that were particularly famous during the 1970s and 1980s). The ranking of scores was visible to all players of the same gaming site, leading to influencing the behaviour of gamers. The author suggests the increase in volume of this notion of visibility following the development of the internet and online video games. However, he does not offer a meaningful analysis of the recent form this one takes as well as the consequences it entails regarding surveillance and disciplinary power as a whole.

Exodus

In the previous part, we focused on the concept of heterotopia and pointed out the nature of its relationship with practices of resistance. Humphreys and Zwart (2012) expounded on the heterotopic nature of gamespaces. In their view, this perspective enables to understand games as not being totally separate from the ‘outside world’. Instead, they are not only subject to the rules of the game, but also to multiple cultural and legal rules emanating from the ‘other spaces’.

They argue against the dominant ‘top-down’ conception regarding power relations within games. Indeed, they draw upon the example of the MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game) *World of Warcraft* to emphasise that players’ interactivity within the virtual space has a crucial role in defining the rules and norms of the game. This assessment leads them to advocate for a ‘bottom-up’ conception of legality within those games, that is in part influenced by rules coming from outside the game.

Rose claims that the primary image offered to the modern citizen is the one of the ‘consumer’ (1996, 103). Individuals are urged to shape their lives through the practice of consumption. Wearing et. al notice that this ‘consumer culture’ has manufactured ‘worlds of escape’ notably for adolescent boys (2015, 219) that take the form of online virtual games. He categorizes these virtual spaces as heterotopias, namely, as “a personal space for resistance to domination, a space where there is room for choice (other than consumer choice) and for self-identity to expand beyond what it should be by authority figures” (Wearing et. al, 2015, 230). The authors based their research on the case study of an adolescent playing *League of Legends*, a competitive Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) game. This reminds us of the notion of ‘crisis heterotopia’. That is, places reserved for individuals in a period of crisis with society. Here, the authors provide a good illustration of the phenomenon introduced above where power produces what comes to resist it. In this case, the ‘consumer society’ opens the door to virtual spaces of resistance through the creation of video games where self-identities can develop out of the grasp of the consumer subjectivity.

Thus, we can witness a shift occurring from gamers who constantly move from the ‘outside world’ to virtual spaces and vice versa. Based on what has been developed above we can clearly underline a border between those two kinds of spaces inasmuch as, it appears, the

subjectification emanating from ‘external’ power relations within the former do not seem to manifest itself in the latter. It is important to remember that those two spaces are not totally separated and that some norms and rules within the game might come from the ‘outside world’ (Humphreys & Zwart, 2012). Some have designated this shifting behaviour from gamers as a practice of ‘escape’ that can itself be considered as a primary form of resistance, as Hardt and Negri suggest (2004).

Raphael Koster (2013) conducted qualitative research that demonstrates gamers’ desire for ‘evasion’. He even comes to define the video game industry as an ‘industry of evasion’ (Koster, 2013, 138; Vonach, 2001, 119-128). He argues that the practice of videogames constitutes a search in oneself of a sense of adherence to new modes of regulation. The author also acknowledges that the player finds himself in between two worlds with distinct modes of social regulation. The ‘outside world’ on one hand, that is made of instituted rules considered as constraining and on the other, the gamespace constituted of rules that are chosen and desired. Koster explains this ‘evasion’ behaviour as resulting from a fear to feel excluded from a society that make it necessary for individuals to find in themselves a meaning to their activities and to their interests. Therefore, Koster explains this shift as being a result to an already existing sense of non-conformity to society’s norms. The author also acknowledges that esports players tend to display individualistic values of self-discipline and of competition, as well as to seek social recognition through their practice.

Seo and Jung (2014) essentially focused their study on the practice of esports. According to them and to Wagner (2007), esports players do not seek temporary escapism. Instead, players seek to improve within a competitive environment (Seo & Jung, 2014, 643). The practice of esports has been compared to playing sport (Wagner, 2007). Also, it often comes with adhering to a subculture (Taylor, 2012) and can even become a profession (Adamus, 2012). Chee (2006) even claims that online games constitute a way of life for many Koreans, in a country where its practice is particularly significant. The authors also emphasise on the productive aspect of esports practice, which comes in contradiction with Caillois’ (2001) idea according to which “play creates neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind” (Caillois, 2001, 9). Seo and Jung disagree and point out that esports practice can produce financial gain in the form of prize money resulting from tournaments and even social status (Seo & Jung, 2014, 644).

Seo and Jung have also pointed out the emerging institutionalization of competitive gaming. They suggest that esports has developed and professionalised through interrelated nexuses of consumption practices namely, watching, playing and governing. They note that individuals often adopt multiple roles within these practices and share common understandings, tools, skills and competences that prove necessary to take part into the ‘assemblage’ of esports practices cited above. However, it seems that the competitive aspect of esports comes from the organisation of ‘in real life’ (IRL) tournaments in the view of the authors. In their study, the watching of esports limits itself to the watching of or attendance to IRL gatherings and therefore excludes other forms which appear to be much more significant today.

METHODOLOGY

This research can be designated as theoretical. That is, its aim is to test, generate and/or enhance thinking within the discipline it belongs to (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, 24). I used a qualitative method to collect data. According to Bryman, qualitative research enables to study the way people understand and interpret their social reality (1988, 8). Thus, this interpretative approach seemed appropriate to study how power operates within competitive online games. Indeed, it enabled me to grasp the meanings that respondents attach to phenomena (actions, decisions, beliefs, values...) (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, 3). The objective was to study the ‘product of power’ (i.e. the subject) through individuals’ behaviour, thoughts, normative intuitions and even gestures, since those are expected to be expressive of that power (Pickett, 1996, 465).

Qualitative research methods can be divided into two groups. There are those which focus on naturally occurring data, and those which focus on generated data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, 34-37). The former can be defined as “enactments of social behaviour in its social setting”. According to Ritchie and Lewis, this type of data is particularly enlightening to study a particular culture or community as well as the explicit and implicit rules that govern it (2003, 34). I chose to use the observation approach within this group of qualitative methods in order to analyse behaviours as they occur. Thus, I have been watching and analysing a great number of online contents in the form of video on demand (VOD) and video streaming through major

online platforms (YouTube, Twitch.com). Additionally, I have had the opportunity to play multiplayer and competitive online games for years. Therefore, my observations also draw upon this experience. Streaming content is a live and unedited type of content. I was therefore able to witness authentic behaviour from streaming players (or *streamers*). On the other hand, VOD is not live and enables the content creator to edit videos. However, the editing remains generally quite minor. This work of observation has been undertaken in the long run. In fact, the very idea of conducting a research on this particular topic first emerged while consuming such content around a year ago. I have been taking notes regarding relevant occurrences since. The main benefit of the observation method is that I have had the opportunity to analyse genuine behaviour, gestures and discourses for a significant period of time. Its principal limit is that it can be considered as time consuming. This did not particularly affect me since this activity has been intertwined with personal leisure. Also, observation can be criticised of lacking objectivity.

Generated methods involve ‘reconstruction’ (Bryman, 2001) from the interviewee. In other words, they require re-processing and re-telling of particular events, thoughts, behaviours, values etc. Generated data enable to understand respondents’ own perspective and interpretation on particular phenomena, as well as the meaning they attach to them (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, 36). Within this second group of qualitative methods, I chose to use semi-structured individual interviews for my research. This type of interview has a predetermined organisation but remains flexible. Indeed, questions are expected to lead to discussions in order to let respondents share their view on particular topics. These interviews were tailored according to the interviewee and contained ‘broad’ questions to allow respondents to answer based on their own knowledge of the topic discussed. Unlike ‘yes/no’ questions that call for affirmation and risk to influence and/or misinterpret the interviewee’s true thought (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, 153-154). Also, semi-structured interviews have the advantage of enabling the clarification of questions if necessary and potentially to re-direct the discussion towards certain topics. On the other hand, the lack of complete structure may lead to the omission of certain elements during the discussion. It also necessary includes researcher’s bias and preconceptions.

I conducted two interviews with two individuals belonging to the esports culture. One is an intensive amateur esports gamer who has been playing for a long period of time. For anonymity purpose, I will call him/her Stanley. The other is an intensive gamer as well but also

a famous *streamer* who counts a community of around 130 000 followers on a major streaming platform and 60 000 on a leading VOD online platform. This person will be called Kubrick. He has made of esports his profession and thus, has a singular perspective on the topic under study. Indeed, his position grants him of a significant influence within the esports scene.

Due to the exceptional circumstances ensuing from the current sanitary crisis, the interviews were conducted and recorded through video call. I contacted both respondents via email to ask for their participation. Both interviews lasted for approximately thirty minutes each and were conducted in French to avoid potential hesitations, imprecisions and time waste from respondents whose native language is not English. Due to the fact that one respondent is a public figure with professional and personal interests to safeguard, ethical considerations include the necessary anonymisation of the collected data.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

“If we are the products of modern power, then all of our behaviours, gestures and thoughts including our normative intuitions are expressive of that power” (Pickett, 1996, 465).

This part will focus on the presentation of my findings based on the interviews I conducted as well as my observations. Simultaneously, I am going to analysis these findings in light of the theories aforementioned in order to answer the questions: How do power relations operate within multiplayer and competitive online games? How is constituted the ‘gaming subject’? And what role do resistance practices play in the operation of power in esport? This part is organised in themes as follows.

First, I am going to show how my findings enable to better understand the way competitive gamers develop knowledge about themselves. Or in other words, how they are made subject. Drawing from the theoretical assumption that subjects are the manifestation of the power relations that produce them, I will expound on the various techniques of power that operate in the production of those subjects. I am going to develop on the functioning of such techniques in practice within multiplayer and competitive online games. In this part, I will first analyse power relations by putting forward the conditions of their operation. Then, I will go into more depth by analysing how disciplinary power, sovereign power and biopower operate in the case of such online platforms. Since every power relationship implies, at least in potential, a strategy of struggle (Foucault, 1982, 793), I will focus in a second part on resistance and ask the question: to what extent can we consider the practice of esport to be a practice of resistance? We will also attempt to determine the target of such practices of resistance.

In the literature review we understood that Foucault’s theory suggests that the the ‘self’ is produced by power, enabling the governance of individuals. The freedom of people as well as their cohabitation to form what we call a ‘society’ or a ‘community’ (cf. Diderot’s distinction in the introduction as the ‘moral’ and ‘political’ aspect of human cohabitation for the former and the ‘juridical’ aspect of the latter) are necessary for power relations to exist. Multiplayer

and competitive online games (MCOG) do gather individuals in the same place and at the same time.

The formation of a community is actually a crucial element within such games. Stanley “essentially plays with friends” to competitive games. He finds it “more interesting” to do so because it enables him to “develop a game style” with them and “implement gaming strategies”. In fact, he pointed out that the same practice with and without friends is “not the same thing at all”. This social aspect certainly constitutes a main difference between ‘competitive’ and ‘contemplative’ games. Although it is not exclusive to competitive games, it is a clear distinctive feature between the two game types. Stanley created a vocal and textual server on a distinct platform where he meets his co-gamers daily. He perceives people from this small community as his friends. He has never seen the majority of them ‘in real-life’ but for him, playing videogames online with them is similar to “drink a beer with someone ‘in real-life’”. He added: “it is a social interaction like any other. I make no distinction on the basis that it happens online”. Judging by Stanley’s statement, virtual games seem to be places where genuine social interactions can form and evolve. It can even be understood as a crucial feature of competitive gaming.

As a famous and influent streamer, Kubrick has a privileged relationship with Riot Games (i.e. *League of Legends*’ developers). In his view, the ideal *LoL* player is somebody “who is going to create a community through making friends online”. He explained that this is the reason why the company developed a system of ‘guilds’ (i.e. in-game online communities). For him, Riot expects “players to create groups of people” for promotion purposes as well as to make it alive. The contributions of both respondents highlight the fact that the competitive online game *League of Legends* leads to the creation of communities and even incentivizes it.

As Humphreys and Zwart (2012) already suggested, virtual games can be considered as heterotopias, or sites that are ‘outside of all places’ though that can be located in reality. Additionally, players are free insofar as they can choose to enter or not the virtual gamespace and to submit themselves to its design and rules. In-game behaviour is also free. Players can mutually interact through the chat and play the way they desire to, though within the extent of the game’s programming and affordances. So, how is the conduct of gamers itself conducted? How do the techniques of power operate within the game? In a nutshell, what are the “impulses, gestures and individuals” that power creates? (Pickett, 1996, 458).

Power relations

The technique of disciplinary power bases itself on the establishment of a ‘discursive norm’, or a ‘code of normalization’ (Foucault, 1994, 44). It sets a number of norms that constitute the optimum towards which one strives. It leads people to seek to achieve the same objectives, to speak the same language, to think and act in a similar manner.

One main objective that seems to be common to all competitive gamers appears very clearly. It is to improve and become better at playing the game. Stanley, the intensive amateur player, expressed his desire to “improve” several times. He made a clear difference between ‘contemplative’ games and ‘competitive’ games and associated the latter with the notion of ‘tryhard’. In his view, competitive games even *are* ‘tryhard’ games. He also stated that he is “expecting results” from playing those games, which is not the case with ‘contemplative’ ones. He sees playing esport as an “investment” of himself. Nevertheless, he made a clear distinction between playing the same game in ‘normal’ mode and in ‘ranked’ mode. In ranked mode, the result of each match (i.e. winning or losing) has an impact on the rank of the player. He stated: “If you lose in ‘normal’ mode, it’s not a big deal”. This difference of perception between those two game modes leads us to believe that it is the ranking system that is the base on which the ‘code of normalization’ stands. Or to be more cautious, we can say that it is an essential feature of this one. He added:

“Within competitive games, people will rather seek to surpass themselves by becoming better at it, and consequently, one inevitably needs to play, play and play, until a point where you can master every single of your actions in game. Because you want to reduce the number of mistakes you make you know...”.

Thus, improvement appears to be the major aim of competitive games. Kubrick, the famous competitive gaming streamer, pointed out his skills and his high rank in the game as the major reason that explains his activity of streamer. It even constitutes the reason why he started his streaming activity that is, “to share [his] rise in the ladder with the community” (*ladder* stands for the ranking system). He even designates his game level to be “fundamental base” of his

activity and the principal reason why people consume his content. According to him, people watch him play for entertainment but also and mostly “to see what they can do to improve”. For him, while playing competitive games it is necessary to “challenge oneself” in order to be “better than the others” and this can lead, in his view, to “happiness”. Therefore, this continuous strive for performance within the game and the “happiness” resulting from it resonates with the creation of “notions of pleasure and pain” by power, like Foucault emphasised.

The ‘architecture’ of the game is also a crucial element of its disciplinary power. The ranking system holds an important role. The game is composed of servers that each corresponds to a region of the globe. Players are associated to a particular server based on their geographic location. It is important to note that the coverage of each server does not limit itself to countries’ borders. In this way, the West European server ranks every single player who has played at least one game in ‘ranked mode’ from *Iron IV* to *Challenger*. Years are called ‘seasons’ and each player can follow its progression from season to season. Additionally, players have access to the ranking of every single player within the server. The rank of one player is displayed together with his virtual name tag and number of games played. There is therefore a visibility of all and from all (cf. appendix n°1). The ‘matchmaking’ system makes players of roughly the same level to compete against each other. It is also worth pointing out that the in-game chat constitutes a medium of interaction between players during a match. People are incentivized to communicate for strategic purposes and cooperation. There is a precise vocabulary that each player has to learn in order to be able to communicate accurately. The chat can also be used to reprimand other players’ behaviour or to congratulate certain actions. *League of Legends* is a game that requires a lot of cooperation. “Team management” was highlighted by Kubrick to be a crucial component of the game. Other people’s mistakes can have a huge impact on the result of the game and ultimately on the rank of each player. This can lead to “frustration” and “irritation” as both respondents claimed and as a consequence, to judge other players’ actions more frequently.

Victories bring back points which enable players to increase in rank whereas defeats lead to a loss of points. There is therefore an inherent system of reward and punishment built in the game’s design. Stanley highlighted this element by stating that “losing in ‘normal’ mode is not a big deal. You know that there is nothing to lose. But in ranked mode you have much more to lose if you lose the game”. Stanley also expressed his satisfaction to have reached *Platinum* recently. He qualified his accomplishment as “gratifying” especially because he only started to

play this game around a month ago: “it is satisfying to see that all this progression happened”. For him, reaching *Platinum* proves to his peers that he is not a “chimpanzee”. However, he remained modest by acknowledging that “there is still a huge margin of progression”. In Stanley’s view, players’ rank is closely related to the time spent playing the game. He believes that some players’ level does not match their rank. He suggests that this is due to the time invested in game as well as their ‘mindset’. With the ‘right’ mindset of improvement, “they could even reach higher”.

Kubrick acknowledges the level difference that separates him from his viewers: “to be totally frank, I am better than them for the most part”. For him, this is his main source of attraction or, to put it differently, the element without which he could not perform his activity. It is possible to argue that this ranking differentiation grants authority to higher ranked people. In the case of Kubrick, it constitutes a key reason for his influence within the esports community. In fact, players from different ranks will almost never play against each other. The relation between them is coordinated through external media such as VOD content or streaming. In this way, virtual video platforms are both crucial for players to be able to improve by watching better ranked players perform, and for the disciplinary apparatus to convey its code of normalization.

Kubrick, together with other streamers around the world, gained a significant influence towards millions of players. First, because their high level in the game grants them with a certain authority towards lower ranked players. They are what one could call the “bearers of truth”. Kubrick recognizes that a relationship of trust and cooperation developed between himself and his ‘chat’ on a famous streaming platform. The ‘chat’ is a crucial canal of communication between the streamer and his community. He noticed that the fact of considering the chat’s recommendations while playing led to the development of this beneficial relationship. Also, “as a result, [his] choices have become less and less contested”.

The second major component of disciplinary power is teaching according to Foucault. The responses of both participants show that teaching of the way to play was central to the practice of competitive gaming. Indeed, Stanley claimed that some people in his group of gaming friends with whom he forms a small community “want to learn”. Their relationship is based in part on the sharing of skills and knowledge. This relationship is also very clear for Kubrick who sees his activity primarily as a way to teach his community how to improve. He has a “pedagogue aspect in [his] streams”. While playing, he shows the right behaviour to adopt and the right

decisions to take. In fact, the structure of the game implies the existence of ‘one best way’ to play. Players might display a certain gaming style but there is always *one best* decision to take or *one right* move to do. There is therefore a system of differentiation in place which separates the ones who possess the knowledge (i.e. high ranked players) and those who do not (i.e. low ranked players).

In order to improve players are expected to self-control. The best players are also those who adopt the right behaviour, both physically and mentally. The right physical posture first, as Stanley emphasised:

“When you play [competitive games] and you ‘tryhard’, you need to adopt the posture that comes with it, whereas a contemplative game allows you to relax. There are games that you can play in bed or on a couch... slumped you know... and there are games where if you do that, you won’t get results. It would be better to be well seated on your chair, as straight as possible...”

This point underlines the control of the body operated by the disciplinary power under study. Players are incentivized to coordinate their body and gestures in an optimal way in order to improve and be rewarded. The technology required to play is rather limited and accessible. Gamers only need a table and chair, a computer and a mouse, electricity and an internet connection to be able to play. The majority of their movements are limited to mouse clicking and pressing a keyboard. Nevertheless, competitive games succeed to control the physical posture of millions of individuals simultaneously across the globe.

Self-control also operates mentally. For Stanley, “one needs to be totally composed. One also needs to be able to self-criticize”. The objective is to “find its own mistakes”. Stanley “tries to work on it. [...] [He] recently came back to this goal of staying calm”. On the other hand, Kubrick grants a lot of importance in adopting a “respectful” and “authentic” behaviour during his streams. This is due, he claims, to the fact that he is also like this in “real-life”. His values outside the virtual world remain the same while playing and streaming. He believes to be a person with whom his viewers can identify. He pays attention to “not say too much insults and to respect the people who watch him” because this is what he expects other streamers to do as well when he watches streams himself.

In a nutshell, we can say that competitive games incentivize a behaviour of physical and mental self-control in order to conform to the norm and strive for improvement.

The notion of time is also crucial to point out. Indeed, every sequence of the game is carefully timed. When a player clicks on 'play', he is automatically redirected to a virtual waiting room where he has to patiently wait for a match proposition that comes with a recognizable sound. Once every players of the match have accepted the proposition, they are redirected again inside a virtual 'airlock' where each of them selects a character to play. Then, a common loading screen is displayed on everyone's screen before the match finally starts. The game itself is timed and particular events happen at regular time intervals, accompanied with recognizable sounds. Each in-game character has its own voice and identity and each in-game action is coupled with singular sounds and visual effects. Thus, a series of automatic reflexes take place. In this way, players' behaviour tends to go like clockwork. This element reminds us of the example underlined by Foucault to describe heterotopias of compensation. Indeed, the perfect organisation of time, space and behaviours in the Jesuit colonies in Paraguay resonates with the equivalent in competitive virtual spaces.

This point illustrates perfectly how the game organises time for ideal efficiency. Disciplinary power produces the subjects who play the game through a number of technologies. Among them, we can count a system of reward and punishment, a pyramidal hierarchy, a system of enclosure and of surveillance.

League of Legends imposes a number of rules to players that are enforced through a system of 'reporting'. Each player has the possibility to praise one teammate at the end of every game for his or her exemplary behaviour. Receiving multiple praises leads to in-game rewards in the form of virtual goods. On the other hand, players can also 'report' the behaviour of teammates. There are seven reporting categories (cf. appendix n°2) and this practice is used frequently. Kubrick expresses his total approval for this system. According to him, "the reason for reporting is not very important". What matters most is to 'flag' troublemakers. When players are significantly more 'flagged' than the average, "it necessarily means that he causes problems". The range of punishments goes from a chat restriction to permanent ban of the account. Kubrick also made reference to a reporting system in place within another competitive game called CS:GO, where individuals can connect on a separated platform where they are asked to judge the behaviour of others. If their assumptions turn out to be true, they get rewarded in the form

of virtual goods. He added: “For me, the [reporting system] is the best system to implement”. Stanley on the other hand is more sceptical about the punishment system. For him, “[Riot Games] is not punitive enough. Either sanctions are not adapted, or there are not enough of them”. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that “if everyone was banned for the merest deviation there would be no players anymore”. The main reasons that lead him to report others are because of cheating practices or ‘toxic’ behaviour. He added that this happens “often”. Even though he considers that his reports have few chances to result in a real punishment, he still “hopes that the system will punish them”. In the end, he recognizes that the act of reporting is “mainly for yourself. Reporting someone can take a weight off”.

In 2019, the American developer *Blizzard* suspended pro-player Ng Wai Chung for six months after he expressed his support for the protest movement “Free Hong Kong” (Alexander, 2019). *League of Legends*’ publisher Riot Games also censored the phrase “Hong Kong” on stream during 2019 World Championship (Endres, 2019) (cf. appendix n°3). Therefore, virtual games’ sovereign power proved to align with other states’ regulations, in this particular case, China. Though, these prohibitions apply to all players from all countries and a new kind of interventionism can be witnessed. This point resonates with Humphreys and Zwart’s (2012) claim according to which heterotopias are never totally separate from ‘other places’ or, in other words, from the ‘outside world’. This example shows that virtual gamespaces are not totally enclosed but can be influenced by external power.

Thus, regulation within the game appear to be set mostly by the game’s developer, but not only. Also, they are enforced by players themselves. Developers have the responsibility to issue sanctions. Yet, gamers themselves play a crucial role in the system. There is a horizontal control and surveillance taking place where each one is both watching and watched, monitoring and monitored. Drawing upon both respondents’ contributions, we can realise that the rules defined the sovereign power are mostly accepted and integrated by players. Also, their behaviour seems to be particularly suitable for disciplinary power to function insofar as they appear to be committed to follow the norm. Thus, sovereign power and disciplinary power can be said to work hand in hand, resulting in the production of the competitive gaming subject.

Biopower is different from the two other forms of power insofar as this technique ‘takes charge of life’ itself (Foucault, 1978, 143). Biopower focuses on the totality of bodies within a group

of people instead of taking them individually. Foucault emphasises the interest for biopower in the ‘effectiveness’ of the population. This form of power is about regulating and managing social life as a whole. It also acts upon people’s lifestyle through control and operates hand in hand with the other forms of power (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014, 110-118-119). Stanley is 24 years old and studies architecture. He started playing videogames around the age of 5 and has started playing competitive games at the end of high school. He depicted a typical day of his current life:

“I wake up around 10 am and I have lunch around 1 pm so... I wake up, then I laze around for an hour or so on Netflix for example. Then I generally play Apex with my mate ‘Zrapi’ ... Then I eat, then I get back on video games until 8 pm approximately, for dinner. Then I continue for around two hours and I finally go to sleep.”

This particular lifestyle needs to be put into perspective since it happens during a time of national lockdown due to a sanitary crisis. Nevertheless, it can be pointed out that Stanley’s main activity is to play online, and he mostly makes breaks to satiate primary needs. For him, it is almost impossible for him to reach a higher rank because his “everyday life does not enable it”. He added: “it is impossible because we also have other activities. There are studies... and sleep as well”. In fact, the activity of gaming makes do with very little. It requires little investment and effort from the subject. In fact, what separates the individual with the activity is very minor if we compare it to other activities such as work that requires a series of steps before actually performing the activity (e.g. physical movement, intermediary costs etc.). It makes it appealing to the individual who appears to get satisfaction from very little physical effort. Stanley’s lifestyle is directly influenced by gaming. When asked about how he conciliates studies with gaming, he explains that “when he has work, he just works are that’s it. Then I go play games once I am done with my work”. He claimed that “there is not one activity that outshines the other”. However, he added that he already had a background in the field of his studies and that this “lets him be in peace”. This very point can lead us to suggest that he sees the work related to his studies as a necessary burden that needs to be dealt with in order to dedicate himself to what he truly desires at the moment.

Competitive games’ companies influence the lives of millions of players every day. *League of Legends* alone reached a peak of 100 million monthly users in 2016 (Heimer, 2019). The significant community that online competitive games’ developers have control over crosses all

borders and all cultures. I argue that this is a major aspect which differentiates esports with regular sports. This point has not been highlighted in previous studies. Indeed, such games are strictly organised, centralised, systematized and standardized; operating a precise control over its participants. The term ‘consumer’ does not fit to designate the gaming subject in my view. Indeed, these games have the particularity to be free-to-play and the consumption of virtual goods is both optional and marginal (Ho and Wu, 2012). As a matter of fact, one of the most famous *League of Legends* pro-gamer Lee Sang-hyeok also known as ‘Faker’ is known for never having bought a ‘skin’ (i.e. a new appearance for a character). Therefore, I suggest using the term ‘gamer’ instead in order to focus on the main activity that is non-commercial.

This part shows how the three forms of power relations emphasised by Lilja and Vinthagen (2014) operate within competitive online games. We have seen that they work together to produce the gaming subject as well as to control it in order to serve its own interest.

In this second part, I am going to focus on the concept of resistance as it was developed by Michel Foucault. More precisely, I will attempt to answer the question: to what extent can we consider the practice of esports to be a practice of resistance? In order to do so, I am going to emphasise the target of such supposed resistance. It is worth recalling that “every power relationship implies, at least in potential, a strategy of struggle” (Foucault, 1982, 793). In a first subpart, we will investigate the potential resistance practices directed towards power relations emanating from the ‘off-line world’. In a second subpart, we will focus on the resistance practices within the game itself.

Resistance practices correspond to struggles against power effects as such (Foucault, 1982). In other words, they are targeted against forms (or technique) of power. In the previous part and in the literature review, we outlined the various technologies of power and we showed how individuals are “made subject”. For Foucault, modern resistance is principally targeted against “that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way” (Foucault, 1982). That is, that which makes subject. As Pickett underlines, power can produce what comes to resist it, because it organizes multiplicities.

Stanley associated the activity of gaming with a “means to escape while staying comfortably at home”. This comment resonates with the debate I underlined in the literature review. His contribution seems to join Seo and Jung’s (2014) claim according to which esports players do not seek temporary escapism. For Stanley, ‘escapism’ is most likely to be reached through playing contemplative games. Additionally, he highlighted the fact that he rarely consumes goods and services outside the game, other than for primary needs and a few social gatherings. On the other hand, he recognized buying virtual goods on a regular basis.

This behaviour can be interpreted as a form of resistance against a market-based self-identity. In this way, Stanley’s case joins the observation made by Wearing et. al (2015, 229-230). Thus, Stanley seems to go against the primary image offered to the modern citizen namely, that of the consumer (Rose, 1999, 103). His lifestyle described above does not conform to the norm of the ‘outside world’. Indeed, his main activity can be referred to as leisure. More, a free leisure that does not (or very little) include commercial trade and therefore, that is not ‘useful’ to society.

As we mentioned above, a gamer necessitates only few resources to commit to his activity. ‘Hardcore’ gamers can be supposed to engage in commercial trade only for primary needs, ultimately decreasing the need for finding a job. Kubrick emphasised that many people who are not familiar with the gaming environment tend to also have bad preconceptions about his profession.

In a nutshell, there seems to be a clash between the ‘online’ and the ‘offline’ world regarding the type of individuality that results from both of them. Additionally, online games bring together players from different countries with different cultures. A singular language has emerged that only gamers can understand. For Stanley, “there is a whole new language, a whole new way of thinking, a whole new sense of humour” that comes out of these virtual places: “it is clearly a particular culture”. As Pickett (1996, 457) wrote, “the very identity of a culture is to be part of the struggle”.

It could be argued that the influence of those new spaces on people from all around the world competes with that of states to a certain extent, insofar as they constitute a new subjectivity that does not satisfies the interests of the ‘offline world’. In other words, it can be referred to as a ‘counter-conduct’ which are “conducts done differently, by other leaders, with other objectives, or procedure/methods” (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014, 119; Foucault, 2009, 194-195).

Thus, this resistance is operated at the scale of the games' communities and can be said to target states' biopower. Stanley's case is not enough to suppose that competitive games' construction of subjectivity constitutes a resistance to 'offline' disciplinary power. It would be necessary to investigate the extent to which gamers challenge the stability of the institutional control of behaviour. That being said, Stanley's case can be understood as constituting a refusal to participate in the construction of the subjectivity, capacities, skills and organisations that are promoted outside of the gamespace. It is important to point out that one individual can be influenced by multiple power relations, sometimes contradictory. The engagement in competitive gaming activities could therefore itself be understood as a practice of resistance towards subjectification.

My research aims to demonstrate the nature of power relations operating within competitive gamespaces. In the previous part, we expounded on the way they operate. Thus, since every form of power necessarily implies, at least in potentia, resistance practices; we are then led to suppose that resistance practices might take place inside the gamespace too.

Stanley has never been banned from a competitive online game. However, he recognized having already 'flamed' his fellow gamers: "because they proved to be mean towards other players". However, he assured respecting certain limits that some players do not. He stated: "some people can get extremely aggressive and insulting. They take things way to seriously". Kubrick also highlighted the fact that he mostly pays attention to respecting others, would it be while playing or streaming. Lilja and Vinthagen (2014) claim that resistance to sovereign power manifests itself through illegal activities or by doing things for deviant purposes. Insulting others and cheating can therefore be considered as illegal practices. The history of *League of Legends* counts a number of ban cases. Notably of famous streamers who got temporarily or permanently banned from the game itself or from streaming platforms because of breaking explicit rules. 'Flaming' can be said to be an inherent component of such games which tend to kindle all sorts of passions.

Both respondents' compliance with the code of normalization outlined in the previous part does not enable to put forward any kind of resistance practices against the game's disciplinary power. Indeed, they do not seem to perform any kind of activity that would go against the game's

control of behaviour. The only noticeable behaviour would be escapism from the online platforms. However, both respondents appear to demonstrate a clear attachment to those and to video games more generally.

CONCLUSION

This research has shed light on the functioning of power relations within competitive and massively multiplayer online games. Based on Foucault's theory on the subject and power, it has shown the extent to which the "conduct of conduct" of gamers operates. It also has attempted to provide leads to better understand how humans develop knowledge about themselves in the online gaming culture. We based our investigation on Lilja and Vinthagen's (2014) taxonomy of forms (or techniques) of power namely, sovereign power, disciplinary power and biopower as well as the corresponding practices of resistance to these forms.

This dissertation has attempted to point out the nature of the competitive online game apparatus to show how the competitive gaming subject is produced. This subject is produced as a result of multiple practices that are shared by several video games developed by various companies. Though, these practices remain relatively similar throughout the array of competitive online games on multiple platforms. Therefore, the production of the gaming subject is not the result of a centralised organisation only, but of an interrelation of similar practices.

In addition, I have underlined the inherent resistant nature of video game virtual spaces that can also be defined as heterotopias. I hope to have offered new leads regarding virtual spaces' capacity to produce a new kind of subject that is suggested to challenge the interests of other governments.

As a conclusion, I claim that competitive online games manifest a resistance against other forms of subjectification, for the pursuit of its own economic interest. In other words, power has created what comes to resist it in the form of competitive online games. However, we emphasised that this space of resistance also led to a new form of subjectivity that we called the 'gaming subject' and in turn, to potential resistance practices against the power relations operating within those spaces.

This study shows how the development of new technologies of information and communication led to the creation of new spaces where communities can form, and where power relations operate for new purposes. This topic raises a significant number of questions that encompass various academic fields. Further research could focus on investigating the role of other platforms that also influence the gaming subject such as streaming platforms and social media.

Investigating the gaming culture in more depth would also prove enlightening to enrich the study of the topic. Finally, I believe it would be interesting to compare the attachment of gaming individuals for traditional political structures such as states with that of virtual political structures, such as virtual worlds.

This work comes within the broader scope of showing how new technologies can reshape the way humans cohabit, leading to new problematics that require significant investment from researchers in order to understand the associated stakes and foresee consequences for the good life of modern individuals.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

Engaging with the immense work of Michel Foucault proved demanding. Although, this work has fulfilled my desire for intellectual challenge. I created the opportunity to improve my knowledge of his concepts. Yet, I recognize that it remains imperfect and still requires additional personal investment in order to comprehend its full extent. All in all, this work has enabled me to better understand how power relations operate among actors in modern society. I believe that the methodology used to conduct this research could be improved. Even though both respondents provided insightful knowledge to respond adequately to the research questions, I suppose that it would have been beneficial to better precise the questions asked. It proved challenging to design these questions accurately enough to reach sufficient depth on the topics covered. If I had the opportunity to start this work again, I would most likely interview more people and design my questions better. In particular, the first interview I conducted was with the streamer Kubrick. Besides constituting my first interview ever, the fact that this person is a 'public figure' to a certain extent certainly had an impact on the result. I found it difficult to focus on the content of the interview and as a result my questions became even more imprecise than expected. Additionally, I suppose that the method used has not enabled a precise analysis of resistance practices associated to the activity of gaming. I believe that the sample of data is too small to propose a comprehensive description of how they actually manifest. This research only makes suppositions based on small sample volume. However, I suppose that this work can be said to provide an introductory understanding regarding how competitive online games produce a new kind of subjectivity.

Appendix n°1

SOLO/DUO 


2020 SEASON

BRONZE IV III II I

#	UP FOR PROMOTION		WINS	
1	1 	damostrinity	27	×   × 
2	6 	Xoài Non	23	 × ×  
3	8 	AryaOnFrenzy	7	 ×   
4	1 	Joshua Mac	285	    
5	4 	OTP Main Pidgeot	16	    
6	6 	Sephiroth Arcane	30	×    
7	3 	shuai318	5	    

#	SUMMONERS		WINS	POINTS
8	3 	quimi	4	99
9	3 	ZhuaWoYiCiSiGeMa	14	98

Appendix n°2



REPORT A PLAYER

As accurately as you can, please tell us what happened with this player. Choose up to three reporting categories if you need to.

- NEGATIVE ATTITUDE**
Griefing, Giving Up
- VERBAL ABUSE**
Harassment, Offensive Language
- LEAVING THE GAME / AFK**
- INTENTIONAL FEEDING**
Feeding is griefing, not just having a bad game
- HATE SPEECH**
Racism, sexism, homophobia, etc.
- CHEATING**
Unapproved Third Party Programs
- OFFENSIVE OR INAPPROPRIATE NAME**

Give any additional context on what happened

REPORT

Appendix n°3

<https://clips.twitch.tv/AltruisticReliableClipsmomMVGame>

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