Save Points: Video Games and the Preservation of Play

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This response boils down to two aspects of the preservation of play that will probably be discussed as they continue to evolve: statistics and the use of event spaces.

Although research has sought how to best preserve video games, much has already been lost. Quantifying loss is typically a thorny subject because of difficulties in identifying lost information, such as computer games, which are viewed as transient objects. As stated in the FLOW roundtable discussion description, as an interactive medium, video game preservation is incomplete without play, and the preservation of play must be delimited to involve broader conceptions of video gameplay. Games are a dynamic experience; shaped by the interaction of player, software, hardware, game design, and often wider culture such as film, historical events, and fashion. As the scope of the study of video games continues to broaden, what we consider video game preservation must also be broadened as well. My experience in NCAA Division I sports information departments has given me perspective in the potential challenges the industry may face in one of the fast-growing areas of video game studies: eSports. Just as athletic departments keep statistics from the basic to obscure, the popularity of eSports tournaments should be subject to similar scrutiny. While entities such as the Overwatch League publish statistics on its website, the disparity between those and the ones used by its production team on Twitch broadcasts is vast but not readily available to the public.

In addition, the sheer amount of eSports events taking place has exploded in the past decade, attracting players who perform in array of locales, from sellout crowds at major arenas to small gatherings at local hobby stores. The burgeoning culture of eSports competitions is quickly becoming a central facet of modern video game culture and losing these experiences of play will deprive future generations of an understanding of what makes them unique to this culture. Twitch and YouTube have each been championed as options for the preservation of eSports competitions online, but the debate surrounding preference between public and private archival sources poses potential problems of historical interest, care and preservation of certain records.

Recently, the city of Arlington, Texas, announced plans for a 100,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art eSports stadium that is scheduled to open this Fall. The project is a collaboration between the city, architecture firm Populous, Infinite Esports, and NGAGE Esports. Instead of building a new facility, the city plans to gut the Arlington Convention Center to accommodate eSports events, as well as "other convention activities." The space will be the largest of its kind in the United States. The potential for physical spaces to preserve gameplay, physical video game records, and other artifacts related to eSports competition has outstanding potential.

As more and more physical spaces dedicated to video game and eSport competitions are constructed, focus on the integration of the industry's history and preservation of games, statistics, and dynamic experiences surrounding the sphere of gameplay needs to be prioritized. Whereas these stadia may prioritize transitory events like tournaments, the induction of museums concentrating on digital preservation could attract both fans and scholars on more of a regular basis. In addition to more sophisticated methods of tracking and keeping statistics, classic video game systems running original software in exhibitions and museums could be integrated into the Arlington space. What these methods have in common is capturing both the look and feel of video game history as it continues to evolve.

There is a lot to unpack in this increasingly broadening topic, and it's a pleasure to be speaking here today. I look forward to hearing what my fellow panelists think about the preservation of play.