

*"Agon, Alea, Ilinx, Mimicry. Describe and analyse how one game (or series) uses a mix of at least two of Caillois' four categories in its design, and how this offers for the player a distinct experience."*

Electronic Arts' (EA) hugely successful franchise 'FIFA' cleverly blends Caillois' forms of play in its design to offer a truly distinct experience for its players. After building upon the theories of Johan Huizinga<sup>(1)</sup>, French sociologist Roger Caillois infers many social structures as elaborate forms of games with his own four distinct categories 'Agon, Alea, Mimicry, and Ilinx'. He also scales these categories between Paidia (improvisation) and Ludus (rule-based)<sup>(2)</sup>. These categories may combine to create a more diverse experience and enhance the player's interaction with games. With this in mind, FIFA ingeniously mixes Agon, Alea, and Mimicry to shape its distinct football experience, one that remains strong for more than twenty years<sup>(3)</sup>. In this analysis, each of the discussed categories will be addressed on their fundamentals, with the emphasis of FIFA, on how they unite together to provide EA's distinct football game.

Let's start with Agon. To put it simply, Agon is any form of competition, a direct contestation between two or more entities. Agon will put the players' skills to the test, with the winner being the one who proves their mastery of said skills. Caillois (1961) believes that Agon is culturally shown through traditional sport<sup>(4)</sup>; with that in mind, it only makes sense that Agon is embedded within FIFA's core gameplay. FIFA tests its players both physically and mentally, just like a real football match. The player's knowledge of how-to-play football, their speed, reflexes, patience, and inner strength are all tested by the game, among many other skills. EA's implementation of Agon drives the player to improve their abilities and aim to dominate against other players. As a result, Agon provides a sense of accomplishment from defeating opponents, both real and artificial, something that many sports games dream of accomplishing.

Another thing to consider with FIFA's implementation of Agon is that the difficulty needs to be fair for all players, as an unfair difficulty spike would ruin the overall experience. EA's creative response to this problem is its innovative 'adaptive difficulty' algorithm, which figures out the best-fitting difficulty for each player, depending on how well they played against AI opponents. Consequently, EA's use of Agon, with its competitive nature, along with its creative application of difficulty provides a football experience like no other, as the drive to become better and thrive against others is an experience that players will never forget.

Next up is Mimicry, the concept of acting or role-playing, where "one escapes the real world and creates another. [Where] [o]ne can also escape himself and become another"<sup>(5)</sup> (Caillois, 1961). Mimicry provides a way for imagination and creativity to flow, whether it be through storytelling or fantasy. Mimicry will only work however if the player is willing to get rid of their disbelief, and accept that they are a world-class player, a professional coach, or a rising star. Looking back at FIFA, players can choose from thousands of football players, whether it be a legend like Cristiano Ronaldo or a local favourite like Tim Cahill. The use of the football jerseys (which socially represents Mimicry through uniforms), helps to embrace the idea that the player is becoming a football athlete when playing.

EA strengthens its use of Mimicry by ensuring that many of the greatest football leagues are exclusive to FIFA only, including England's 'Premier League' and Spain's 'LaLiga Santander'.<sup>(6)</sup> By having exclusivity to the world's greatest football leagues, and even the world cup, players will gain a distinct experience, unlike those of competitors like Konami's 'Pro Evolution Soccer'. People can play as their childhood heroes, allowing them to believe that they are said player, as they can control their every move and embrace that player's persona as their own. In this sense, FIFA skilfully embraces Mimicry to

offer its unparalleled experience by allowing players to self-insert themselves into the game and identify with the players on the football pitch.

Last but not least is Alea, the concept of luck. With Alea, the player has no control over the result, and "winning is the result of fate rather than triumphing over an adversary"<sup>(7)</sup> (Caillois 1961). While FIFA's core game mode doesn't implement Alea directly, its Ultimate Team mode<sup>(8)</sup> does, where players can use virtual trading 'card packs' to build up a team of their own. Players can gain 'card packs' by completing tough, gruelling challenges; however, a much easier method is to purchase 'card packs' with real-world money. Players will always take risks when playing with money; they could get the best card possible, or the worst one and have wasted their hard-earned cash, either way, it is all based on pure luck. Caillois (1961) emphasizes this point by stating that '[t]he role of money is generally more impressive than the role of chance, and therefore is the recourse of the weaker player'<sup>(9)</sup>. EA's application of Alea is much like its cultural form of lotteries or casinos, where it appears easy to win big, where in reality, it's near impossible. Despite how rare it would be to win a powerful 'player-card' such as Leoni Messi (who has the best statistics in FUT 20)<sup>(10)</sup>, players will still buy card packs to try and build a more powerful team than other players. FIFA is the only sports game of its kind to offer a mode like 'Ultimate Team', which differs it from all other football games, making it truly distinct in the video game medium. As a result, FIFA's use of Alea through its sole reliance on luck in its exclusive game mode provides a truly unique way to play for its players.

In conclusion, FIFA's original blend of Agon's competitive nature and fair adjustment to difficulty, Alea's emphasis of luck and Mimicry's application of embracing another's personality and self-image allows EA to provide a truly distinctive experience. While there are other football games available in the video-game market, such as 'Pro Evolution Soccer', EA's award-winning<sup>(11)(12)</sup> formula, combined with its use of Caillois' forms of play, has allowed the company to provide the best football experience of the video game medium.

## References

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