Players, Cabinets, and the Space In-between:
Case Studies of Non-ludic Negotiation of Video Game Cabinet Spaces in Japanese Game Centers

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Abstract：

This article examines the phenomenon of the non-ludic use of arcade video game cabinets in Japanese game centers. It focuses on the analysis of concrete examples of non-ludic behaviors and activities conducted by venue goers in the game center Tsujishōten located in Kyoto. After a thorough study of its spatial structure and cabinet arrangement. I discuss specific cases of hanging behavior and alternative uses of cabinets in regard to the type of structures that facilitate them. Non-ludic behavior and activities are then analyzed as processes of territorialization of game center that make visible the creation of private spaces of rejuvenation within a public venue in which one negotiates its personal space in the context of constant exposure to others.

1 Introduction – Arcades Beyond Video Games

The question that is most often asked in discussions of game centers in the Western world is why arcades still exist in Japan. While the North American arcade scene almost completely disappeared in the brutal recession of the game industry in the mid-1980s and is no longer a driving force in Western video game culture, the Japanese arcade industry not only survived, but has retained an important cultural presence in the country. According to the National Police Agency, in 2017, 4,381 operating game centers were registered in Japan ("Heisei 29-nen ni okeru"). This is far less than the 44,386 venues identified thirty years ago in 1987 ("Kyōkai ni tsuite"), but the network of existing venues still constitutes an important actor within the entertainment business industry of contemporary urban Japan. However, in a world in which video games are just one finger swipe away on one's smartphone, it is understandable to call the relevance of game centers into question.

Over the course of the four decades since video games integrated mainstream culture, game centers alarmed many social critics and media personalities in Japan just as well as it had in the West. In a 2001 article, child psychologist Aihara Hiroyuki questions the purpose of young players gathering in game centers. Discussing the phenomenon, Aihara adopts an open mindset to examine these spaces that, until that time, had often been denounced as nothing more than hotbeds of criminality in similar publications (100). He states that video game arcades constitute socialization spaces located outside of the common surveillance grid of the dominant disciplinary regimes to which Japanese children are subjected: the family and the school. This space and its collection of players and observers, which themselves form a microcosm of society, also becomes a place in which youth can develop self-confidence and

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a freer sense of self-expression in an alternative regime of value, based on gaming prowess rather than on social status, interpersonal relationships or academic success.

As Aihabara suggests, an important factor that explains why game centers are still frequented today might be that youths are finding genuine and unsupervised social connections therein, or even because these urban spaces facilitate moments of reconnection to oneself in the context of relative anonymity. Thus, to explain the appeal and the potential social function of game centers, it is essential to empirically investigate what is concretely happening in game centers between users, machines, and the space. How are cabinets mapped within game center spaces, and how does this mapping influence the activity occurring within? How does space affect machine design, and, subsequently, the behavior of players? These questions lead us to consider that what attracts people in these spaces might not be related to the very act of playing games for their intended purposes. What if, in game centers, playing video games was just one activity amongst many others?

Samuel Tobin calls "ludic essentialism" the overemphasis of the ludic aspect at the expense of all others in critical readings of video games (Tobin "Cocktail Cabinets"). As Tobin explains in the case of arcade games, cabinets can be used for many more purposes than simply machines that provides ludic experiences. Each type of arcade machine provides material conditions that come to define their use, such as socializing, gambling, or even simply holding players' coats. From this perspective, an arcade video game, contextualized within the space of the game center, is much more than a simple combination of software and the procedural text it makes playable. The material conditions of the device itself and its connections to the surrounding agents of its environment also matter. While arcade game cabinets are primarily used as video game platforms, they are also a device around which people can socialize while sipping a drink, doing homework, reading or even gamble, and these often constitute the majority of the activity that they enable during over the course of their

social lives. In the field of game studies, and specifically in a discussion of the afterlife of discarded arcade games, Rayford Guins speaks of the need to stop exclusively looking *at* games and start looking *around* them as well in order to expand our understanding (Guins 7). These ideas all point at the importance of looking at arcade games contextually and not uniquely as machines with a clear, preestablished, and limited purpose.

2   Research Purpose and Methodology

The objective of this article is to examine concrete examples of non-ludic behaviors and activities that take place in the game center called Tsujishōten located in Kyoto. Between February 19 and March 2, 2016, I conducted a field study in Tsujishōten in order to shed light on its gaming practices, and to evaluate the interinfluences of spatial and machine design into the play experience. My observations of this game center spanned over the course of two weeks, during which I visited the venues over long stretches of time, and at different periods to examine and take notes on a variety of customers and behavior. While many types of interaction between players, and many forms of interaction with technology were witnessed, this article focuses on the non-ludic forms of use of game cabinet observed during this period.

The primary data-collecting method for this field study was the observation of people visiting the venue, which lent itself well to the context of game centers. I immersed myself in the culture of the venue and observed the general behavior of gamers engaged with game machines, both in groups and on an individual basis. I did not make contact with participants nor conduct interviews, but took notes after witnessing specific behaviors or noticing relevant phenomena. I recorded the type of public, whether if users were male or female, in groups or by themselves, and, on certain days, the number of people entering the premises. The advantages of this methodology are numerous: in addition to permitting a greater focus on recording non-verbal behavior, it also ensures that my presence as a researcher was not noticed and that the participants'

behavior was not influenced. My methodological choice of restricting any contact with patrons had certain disadvantages, such as the lack of capacity to connect gaming behavior with the personal situations that characterize the participants' life beyond the arcade through follow-discussion; even so, it is well suited to capture player behavior at a micro- and macro-level and remain unbiased by the incentive of subsequent rationalizations of actions by the players themselves. A sociological methodology could well be applied to this type of research, but would have led to enquiries of different nature, and thus would have taken this research in directions beyond the scope of the objectives of this project.

The objective behind the use of this method was to capture empirical examples of player interaction with specific game machines in real-life conditions. This study is partly inspired by Tom Apperley's 2010 study of gaming rhythms, but differs because of its related focus on the formation of gaming cultures at a micro-level, which is informed directly by the social affordances of the material conditions of specific games.

This project also adopts the stance developed by Doreen Massey that space is a fundamentally multilayered entity whose individual layers, in their plurality, add different dimensions to a place, that itself, is the result of the different interactions occurring between these layers. Scratching the ludo-centric surface of Tsujishōten, the venue is also examined in terms of its internal architecture, circulation pathways, and cabinet placement patterns relative to the structure of the space. The negotiation between the structure and how users negotiate it will be informed by Michel de Certeau's dual concept of strategies, the grid set up on the urban architecture's visible plane and which imposes certain lines of movements, and tactics, city walkers' response to these structures as they use their wits and creativity to negotiate them and create new ways to navigate the city (xviii). In addition, examples of the appropriation of spaces by users in Tsujishōten will be discussed in terms of the dynamics of territorialization and deterritorialization as formulated by Gilles Deuleuze and Félix Guatari (436-437; 450).

In this study, the spaces of game centers are not interpreted as necessarily measured and quantified in a fixed capacity, but as spaces that always fluctuate and subjected to transformations by users as they negotiate them according to their shifting desires.

The observations conducted as part of this close reading process are contextualized in the physical space of the venues. The way machines are installed, isolated or exposed, influence their function, and thus the way in which players interact with them. This attention also applies to amenities often present in game centers as well as the corridors of circulation structuring access to different cabinets and installations. After identifying some of the observed non-ludic use of the machines and the space of the venue, as well as comparing them with other non-ludic behavior in other types of game centers, I engage in a theoretical reflection on the implications of these practices in regard to the social functions of game centers in Japan in the light of their potential repurposing by the neoliberal economic system.

3.1 Tsujishōten: Between the Past and the Present

The golden years of the Japanese arcade in the late 1970s were characterized by the emergence of thousands of small venues operated on a very small, human scale. Most of these shops, which occupied very small commercial spaces located in small to medium-rise residential areas and, perhaps more importantly, around train stations that acted as public transportation hubs, were operated directly by their owners, who could earn a living from the income that their operation provided. These convenient neighborhood business operations located on people's daily routes could attract children on their way home from school or salarymen on their lunch breaks. For the most part, these were familiar safe spaces, the dedicated operating staff who owned the space rarely changed, and the players were familiar faces from the neighborhood. Unlike bigger establishments that provide a space structured around the economic roles of games and general profitability, these types of game centers allow users to territorialize

the space in a more intimate and personal manner. Fictional works that take place in game centers, such as the TV Tokyo-produced series *No Con Kiddo* (No Continue Kid) and Gichi Otsuka's novel *The End of Arcadia*, all released in the second decade of the 2000s, are fueled by the idealization of these spaces. *Ekimae* game centers, meaning game centers facing train stations, as they are often called, embody Japan's nostalgia for arcade gaming and the retro games often associated with the experience. Tsujishōten is one such game center. Located on Higashi Street in Kyoto, the venue has been part of the neighborhood since its opening in 1978.

3.2   Structure and Spatial Design

Tsujishōten is located in the ground floor section of a two-story building on Higashi Street, just south of the modern JR Kyoto train station, the main transportation hub of the city. *Tsujishōten*, which literally means "crossroad shop," is a relatively common name for stores. As its name indicates, it is located close to an intersection next to other businesses, including a small Panasonic radio shop, a barber shop and a small udon noodle restaurant. A sign above the main door that is lit up at night, which reads "Video Game K.T.T.", perhaps the former name of the store, are the only signs indicating the presence of a game center. The other windows are shut by safety fences from inside the building, preventing bystanders from peeking inside and any sort of light from entering the venue.

Between February and March 2016, the period within which I observed the game center, one would directly enter the venue through its rhythm game section before accessing a tight corridor leading to the back end of the venue. Its small size prevents any sort of two-way circulation for players. The primary hub of rhythm game machines, which features a large range of some of the newest network-enabled cabinets, is relatively spacious. Located at the left-hand side of the venue, the machines are laid out in a square-like space that space feels separated from the venue and features only two pathways. A few stools in the center of the

square allow players to sit and wait their turn, or, more commonly, waiting for a friend to finish their play session. A rack with two plastic baskets also allows users to store their valuables or clothing items while they play. The bright purple colors of the *Mai Mai* (SEGA 2012) and *Jubeat* (Konami 2008) machines illuminate the space and dominate the color scheme of this section.

Facing the rhythm game section, the manager of the game center usually sits in a small office to watch television and security cameras during the center's hours of operation. A freezer, a fridge and a collection of various brands of instant noodle packages are organized around the office. Players can buy cold drinks, frozen treats or snacks directly from the manager; if they purchase instant ramen, the manager tells them to wait at a cabinet where he will deliver it directly to the player after preparing it.
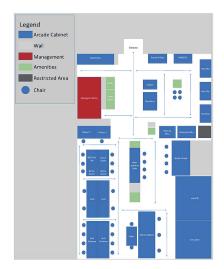

Fig. 1: Tsujishōten's floor map

The south side of the game center, which constitutes most of the floor space of the venue, is structured by an assortment of modern and retro game machines tightly organized so as to maximize the number of machines in the space while still allowing players to walk through the venue relatively easily. The majority of the games in this section of the venue are SEGA-branded products and network-connected; games such as *Wonderland Wars* (2015), *Border Break* (2009) and *Code of Joker* (2013) are the most contemporary machines. The *NesicaXLive* and *Tekken 7*

(Bandai Namco 2015) machines, both offering discounted play sessions compared to other venues at 150 yen for two *NesicaXLive* credits and two *Tekken 7* credits for 100 yen, provide more conventional game genres such as fighting games and shoot'em ups; they occupy a less central place, located in the eastern back end in which pathways and aisles are narrow. A mahjong game is relegated to the isolated far back end of the venue, and at the left-hand side of the back end is a collection of sit-down machines playing two variations of the team-based robot-fighting game *Gundam VS.* (Branpresto and Bandai Namco 2008-)*,* based on the anime series of the same name. In total, twelve machines are dedicated to this game series, which indicates the focus of this game center in terms of games and public. Tsujishōten also uses a different pricing strategy based on hourly rates to draw customers in to play these games. Indeed, for the price of 2,000 yen,[2] a group of four players can rent unrestricted access to four of the six *Extreme Vs.* machines and play as much as desired for an hour at a time.

The eastern side of the venue's back end is characterized by the presence of isolated sets of machines of various genres. A few cabinets of *SEGA Network Taisen Mahjoong 5 Evolution* (2013) are at the far back of the venue, just opposite two *Code of Joker* collectable virtual card game machines, while an imposing row of *Initial D* (SEGA 2002-) and *Cyber Trooper Virtual-On* (SEGA 1995) cabinets, respectively a driving and robot fighting game, occupies the far east corner. These machines are rarely used but are similarly located in a corner of the arcade that is difficult to observe from afar due to the arrangement of the machines on the floor. One must walk close to the machines to verify whether a player is already using it or not. In order to cut the power expenses of the arcade, and potentially the amount of noise within, the *Cyber Trooper Virtual-On* cabinets are not powered on during hours of operation and were never on during the

observation period. A piece of paper taped to one of the cabinets indicates that players need to directly ask the venue operator should anyone desire to pay the game in order to have the power turned on and the game activated.

Fig. 2: the *Cyber Trooper Virtual-On* section

These elements indicate that Tsujishōten is a meeting place for youth, a familiar spot to socialize through video games, and an urban landmark in front of which people wait for friends to arrive. However, behind its visible structure and spatial organization is the intention of providing a comfortable and familiar space for regular commuters in order to tempt them into spending a hundred yen on a video game experience on their way home. Game centers, at this specific moment of time usually situated between 4:00 and 7:00 PM, also provide a space for unwinding from busy work or school days before fulfilling domestic responsibilities at home. This side of the space is expressed in the different types of amenities available for players: washrooms, baskets to store clothing items including gloves for those who use them to play rhythm games, ashtrays, change dispensing machines and hand towel distributors used to wash one's hands after playing. Other elements and practices that characterize Tsujishōten transcend the norms of the industry and create a sense of place that feels comfortable, homelike and informal.

One of the fundamental parts of this space is the wardrobe-like metallic structure located in the middle of the venue, on which a few plastic hangers are left to encourage patrons to leave their coats on the structure and their bags on one of the two shelves located at the waist and knee levels. The limited space of the venue,

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2) The hourly rate seems to vary depending on the season and the release of game updates, reaching up to 2,500 yen.

which also limits the number of players present in the arcade at any given time, makes the presence of a coat hanger viable to maximize floor space and increase the comfort of their play session, and perhaps encourage them to extend their stay. Most importantly, however, the space is designed to allow the existence of multiple micro locations where players wouldn't be seen by other players in the venue or the managing staff.

Fig. 3: Clothing rack in Tsujishōten

3.3   Rhythm and Fluctuations: The Game Center as an Extension of Home

My observation of the space was conducted during different times of the week and various hours of the day. Data collected on the number of players in the venue and their various levels of interaction demonstrate that the game center operates on a shifting daily rhythm; not only does the flow of customers coming to Tsujishōten fluctuate greatly during the day, but the interpersonal interactions displayed between players also change. While some customers come in groups to make full use of the space's function as a social gathering place, others approach the cabinet-laden space as an extension of home where one is free to relax in a familiar setting. In it in these cases that machines are sometimes used for purposes other than ludic ones, where the primary appeal of game centers do not concern the games, but is instead located around

them.

From 10:00 AM to the end of the afternoon around 4:30 PM, the number of players present in Tsujishōten is very low, and the users present tend to engage with the machines on an individual level or in pairs. On March 2, 2016, the player count at 2:00 PM was four players, of whom two were engaged with the *Initial D* driving game machines with their coats hanging off the driver's seat, while two others played *Tekken 7* side-by-side, complementing their play session with snacks, drinks, and cigarettes. Later that afternoon, at around 3:30, the situation remained comparable, but a small group formed around the *Tekken 7* machines, watching the same players taking on one another through the game. At the same moment, other players started to occupy different parts of the space; one player enjoyed the rhythm game space, while another played against online opponents at a *Code of Joker* cabinet. An hour later, a second customer entered the rhythm game space segregated from the rest of the venue, and both players began a long multiplayer session on the rhythm game *Mai Mai*, which features a two-player mode allowing two cabinets to simultaneously play over the same song and compare their scores. The two high-school-aged boys then proceeded to enjoy the rest of the evening. The two occupied the whole rhythm game subspace and appropriated it as a sort of personal space for their exclusive use. They made a lot of noise during and after gameplay, particularly vocal expressions of satisfaction and defeat, and also physically interacted with the space at large in typically non-conventional ways such as performing very exuberantly before suddenly lying on the floor with both arms extended to rest, a type of behavior that would conventionally be difficult to perform in a normal setting.

Every day from 4:30 onward, as the school and work day comes to an end, more customers walk into the venue, and one can witness the formation of small groups of players around cabinet sets. On March 2, for example, from that time onward, all game activities occurring in the venue involved groups of two players or more that were either observing *Tekken 7* matches, playing *Mai Mai* together, or enjoying a few races of *Initial D* in networked mode. This was observed to be

the busiest time for Tsujishōten during the week. Despite the very tight space to which they are confined, the racing game cabinets often attract groups of players observing the action from very close, sometimes sitting on seats and cabinets directly beside them. The layout of this section of the center prevents casual observation of other players' play sessions from a safe interpersonal distance; performers and observers must be at very close to one another to allow observation and, given the social codes of game centers based on limited social interactions between strangers, this spatial arrangement tends to be tailored for groups of people with previously existing social bonds. Surrounded by familiar faces, their bags scattered around the machines and casually eating bowls of instant ramen noodles, players tend to feel empowered and comfortable enough to be more vocal and physically demonstrative in their play style, accentuating their movements. One of the players observed on February 25 even felt comfortable enough to play the game without shoes on.

3.4   Non-ludic Uses of Cabinets: Space Appropriation and Hangers

In most instances, the cabinets in the venue are not used to their maximum capacity; plenty of empty space, buffer space and unoccupied cabinets make up the usual spatial structure of the space and any game sessions. In addition, instead of actively engaging with the machines, many venue goers use them for other, non-ludic purposes. Many customers use the cabinets to kill time on smartphones and other handheld devices, to sit at in order to observe the play session of a neighboring friend, or, as I observed on Friday, February 19, at 8:30, even use them as a makeshift bed for a quick nap during a late evening. These types of non-ludic behaviors are more commonly found in the south-east corner of the venue, and generally involve the racing game and the *Cyber Trooper Virtual-On* cabinets; the design of these machines, which feature elaborate and comfortable plastic seats that provide an additional layer of isolation due to their large edges, as well as their location in the most isolated corner of the venue, can be understood as incentives to use the

cabinet in this particular way. These types of "players" are not economically active assets per se for the operators since they do not spend money in any of the machines of the game center or become involved in its broader ludic activity by taking the part of the active user or the observer. Even so, these "hangers," as Samuel Tobin refers to them, are nevertheless fully constitutive elements of the social fabric of the arcade.

Hangers, arcade patrons who are not playing video games, have been part of the arcade scene in the United States since the arrival of coin-operated video games in the 1970s. They have been defined mostly by the disciplinary regime of arcade owners and operators through various policing and crackdown methods that primarily sought to limit the presence of people who did not bring in financial benefits to their operation (Tobin "Hanging in the Video Arcade"). As Samuel Tobin points out, despite their importance in shaping the situated nature of arcade gaming, hangers have often been evicted from histories of arcade culture that prefers tales of performance and active engagement. This is further emphasized by the instability of hanging behavior itself, which is constantly adapting itself to the rules and affordances in specific venues, and whose negative behaviors are identified by owners and operators, never by themselves. The history of hangers in the United States illustrates not only the nature of arcades as a contested place, but also the importance of tolerating certain types of hanging behavior in order to create a sociocultural space free from exclusively economic incentives. Hangers tend to cruise from machine to machine, filling the gaps between active players, inhabiting the space's empty spots, and tactically using the space creatively for alternative purposes as they escape surveillance (Tobin "Hanging in the Video Arcade"). The overwhelmingly dominant responses of arcade operators to such customer practices include crackdowns, articles published in operator magazines warning of hanging behavior, and the establishment of surveillance regimes, but as the example of Tsujishōten demonstrates, taming this disciplinary regime by restraining player agency might have helped to create a more sustainable arcade game parlor environment with different sociocultural

functions.

3.5 Hanger Behavior in Game Centers: Daily Tactics and their Neoliberal Capture

Sociological studies of game centers have examined cases of tension between operators and users linked to the game center's ambiguous status as a privately-owned commercial space and embedded with the social functions often associated with the notion of public space. Perhaps the most significant example is Katō Hiroyasu's discussion of the process of consensus building between different types of game center users. (182-220). However, physical hanging behavior in contemporary game centers does not seem to be frowned upon in Japan. On the contrary, some venues seem to actively encourage customers to occupy their spaces for purposes other than strict game consumption that brings tangible financial benefits.

Most large-scale game centers in Japanese urban settings provide customers with spaces and facilities that facilitate forms of engagement that differ from strict and economically-viable video game playing. Isolated tables and stands on which communication notebooks, picture notebooks and strategy guides are placed direct gamers prone to hanging behavior to specific locations by providing the possibility of actively engaging the space of the arcade regardless of their ability to spend money for game sessions. In these contexts, however, the resulting type of engagement remains within the realm of activities from which the venue might be able to reap long-term benefits by harnessing a type of labor from these patrons. The case of SEGA's game center established in the district of Akihabara illustrates the neoliberal capture of non-ludic activities within Japanese arcades. In 2013, the multi-floor game center complex turned one of its floor sections into an entire room filled with derivative representations of the vocaloid and rhythm game character Hatsune Miku shown wearing a variety of clothing styles called modules. The center invited customers to sit down at one of the many desks and provide their own illustrations of the popular character in illustration sketchbooks. Writing in communication

notebooks or drawing in sketchbooks provided by the venue, to some extent, demonstrates tolerance of hanging behavior in these spaces. However, this example also shows the double-sided reasons behind welcoming non-paying customers; such installations indeed capture the creative labor of arcade goers to feed a game franchise with content and game center chains beyond the games themselves, as well as developing an emotional proximity towards specific game-related characters.[3] As part of the process, customers could vote for which modules should be included in the then-upcoming version of the portable game *Hatsune Miku Project Diva F* (SEGA 2013), thus further engaging players to engage with the space in a fashion that is not strictly economic.

3.6 Hanging Behavior in Tsujishōten: Cabinets as Territories

Game cabinets in Tsujishōten serve purposes other than ludic experiences, such as gathering places, eating surfaces, studying desks, or makeshift beds, more often than those in most other game centers. Such repurposing of the machines originates from their intrinsic affordances that, despite being present in other venues, are perceived differently in Tsujishōten, partly influenced by the environment in which they are located and its characteristics. The appropriation of machines to fulfill the needs of users also reveals that the navigation of game center spaces cannot be read in a deterministic fashion because the users make their own use of navigation tactics in a space that has been strategically structured to favor certain types of interactions. As the structure of the game center's space

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3) Character images, or *kyarakutā* in Japanese, often shortened to *kyara*, are ubiquitous visual elements in contemporary Japanese popular culture meant to bestow a sense of affect to an object by giving it a cute drawn form. According to Itō Gō, *kyara* are mobile in that they are not tied to any particular medium due to their two-dimensional nature, and they are communicative with regard to their ability to enable communication between different media (Steinberg Coda: The Character-Media Synergy).

invites a familiar approach to the machines and close-knit interaction between customers, the fashion in which the affordances (Gibson; Norman) of the machines are perceived and acted upon need to be examined on an individual level. Users who choose and use a cabinet at which to spend time appropriate it in a much more creative and holistic fashion than those in other venues, and, to some extent, this process is like that of a complete, but temporary, colonization of a micro-public space in which users appropriate the machines for their own use by redefining its purpose.

Beyond their function as ludic objects, game cabinets in Tsujishōten can also be understood as territories within the arcade that can be and are occupied by different players or groups of players. Game cabinets, as micro spaces that present themselves as territorialized and compartmented, are more subject to deterritorialization by users without reforming their initial structure; Tsujishōten's customer base turns them into intimate places within a public setting, an extension of home. The customers' use of the machines demonstrates contradictory processes of reterritorialization as they choose a cabinet and make it their own. Cabinets are often used as eating surfaces on which plastic ramen bowls, drinks and other types of food are consumed, and the remains can often be witnessed by subsequent occupants, as trash is rarely thrown in the provided trash cans and, unlike in more orderly spaces such as restaurants and cafés, no waiting staff come to maintain the machines.

3.7　Hanging Behavior and Cellphones: The *Private-in-the-Public*

The space of arcade cabinets is settled by users in a variety of other ways, all linked by the common notion of homeliness and the desire for an intimate and separate space within the public space. Though these appropriations of arcade cabinets are totalizing, they remain temporary, and as soon as customers leave, they usually leave little trace of these specific types of previous occupation. Yet, the use of game cabinets as places at which one sits to use his/her smartphone stands out as the most fully realized embodiment of this

phenomenon.

The arrival and settling of smartphones and other personal devices in the very fabric of the public setting has been associated with the privatization of public space and even criticized as capitulation to the demands of neoliberal capitalism and the individualization of society. However, de Silva and Frith have instead argued that the use of these types of new technology constitutes "a physical instantiation of the constantly negotiated understanding of how public and private are related" as they make "their socially negotiated nature" (52) visible. For their part, Sheller and Urry debunk the common notion of the purity of public spaces and the idea that the privatization of the public sphere equates to a loss of democratic control and the erosion of social life (109). Instead, they emphasize that the private and the public are not consensually differentiated concepts within the academic literature and that, fundamentally, the two concepts are blurred, fluid, mobile and hybrid rather than static and zoned. Similar places fulfill a mixture of purposes and host a variety of activities, what they call the private-in-public life (110). The automobile, for example, comes to represent the mobility of these spheres and their interpenetration as one drives on a public road to a place akin to a dwelling.

Through the repurposing of cabinet space, gamers and users of Tsujishōten make visible the fluid and hybrid nature of game centers as spaces that can be read through Sheller and Urry's concept of the public-in-private. Their use of space also debunks the apparent contradiction between the existence of intimate homely play space within a public venue open to interventions by other people, a fundamental part of the act of playing in public. Game cabinets are complementary devices of daily life that, like the automobile, provide ways to experience the public within a personal subspace; they are fluid spaces whose vocation is always in the process of transformation and hybridization due to their existence as public devices to be used as a temporary personal territory.

As mentioned above, the use of mobile screens within arcades and at game machines adds another layer of individual isolation within a public setting. The

use of portable screens and devices as complementary to the arcade game's own screen is not benign in our reading of arcade space; while gaming might function as escapism by immersion into a ludic activity, the public setting of arcade games always involves performance and the tacit agreement to being observed by the other users of the space. Using cellphones as a communication device and also, most interestingly, as a ludic device in this space can be seen as a way to reconnect with an entirely private space. The micro space of the smartphone does not exclusively belong to the realm of the private space; overlooking a neighbor's smartphone screen is frowned upon despite the heavy use of smartphones in public settings such as on commuter trains, where people are usually standing very close to one another.[4] The use of smartphones in this context, far from constituting a paradox or a form of invasion by the private and individual sphere within the arcades, makes the perpetual negotiation between the private and the public visible, and also illuminates the intimacy and performance that surround the act of playing on an arcade cabinet. It also demonstrates the multiple layers and functions of arcade cabinets within a single space as time passes. Cabinets constantly switch from being settled to supporting an intimate play space through the colonization of its surface by some players' personal objects such as drinks, food, cellphones, or bags, to being used more openly for public observation or for gregarious play forms by groups of people. The use of cellphones during downtime, in between play sessions, or as brief private moments of escapism that allow moments of rejuvenation before re-engaging the public reflects this phenomenon, and the hanging behavior that it generates is as much a staple of game center life as game playing itself.

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4)   The existence and well-spread circulation of privacy screen protectors for smartphones that prevents bystanders from seeing the screen from an angle suggest that a significant proportion of cellphone users are mindful of letting other people look at their phone activity in public. This also reinforces the idea that the space of the smartphone constitutes an abstract private domain.

4   Conclusion

The case study of Tsujishōten reveals the many forms that processes of cabinet territorialization may take, and thus challenges the ludo-centric perspective on the social function of arcades. Although game cabinets hold certain affordances that facilitate a specific type of play, they do not impede alternative and creative ways to repurpose the machines to fit the ludic, or non-ludic, needs of different users. To play in public is first to occupy a territory and always negotiate one's position in the liminal space between the private sphere and one's exposure to the public.

Beyond their prescribed ludic functions, game cabinets have been shown to be sometimes perceived, and used, in very basic ways. From glorified benches to makeshift beds, and from sleeping to eating surfaces, machines have been shown to facilitate certain types of hanging behavior that go beyond preconfigured ludic activity. The use of cellphones as a device which inserts itself within hanging behavior has also shown to provide a path to understand this practice as acts of negotiation between the private in the public. Users are not so much severing themselves from the social sphere of the venue, but they rather make visible the creation of instances of rejuvenation within a public space, preparing one to re-engage with others in a better disposition. However, hanging behavior is not inherently self-serving or emancipating as its potential can also be harnessed by neoliberal interests in specific contexts where non-ludic activities are directed towards other activities.

At a fundamental level, the results of this study complexifies the definition of arcade gaming as an activity geared towards performance or casual experience, as it is often described. Rather, it prompts us to look at game centers as a space structured in specific ways that affords certain types of behaviors and presence. Game centers are sites of multiplicity arranged in different co-occurring layers that span both ludic and non-ludic forms of engagement which, through their coexistence, impact one another. Game cabinets, as the primary material of game centers, are privileged points of investigation and studying them,

after having dispelled a ludic essentialist bias, may reveal other, fundamental reasons behind the persisting relevance of game centers in Japan.

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