Technicity in/of Esports

: A case study of *LCK*

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

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INTRODUCTION

Like any other industry operating in the digital world, the gaming industry has been massively relying on and influenced by the ever-changing technical environment. Technical development transformed not only gaming hardware and platforms but also cultural practices in the gaming scene. One of the most exemplary sectors is esports. Once regarded as a "paratext"(Consalvo, 2017) of games has been exponentially popularized with the development of network technology and streaming platforms. It is now one of the most popular global entertainment cultures.

While the growth itself is noteworthy, the more exciting aspect of esports is its' 'convergent nature'(Jin, 2010). From becoming "One of the biggest entertainment business trends of the year"(Hu, 2018) to the official medal events in Asian Games 2022, esports transverses beyond sectoral boundaries. By doing so, challenging the norms of collaborating sectors(i.e. Sports, music, fashion, etc.), while continuously innovating itself in industry structure, forms of expression, and how it is experienced(Jin & Yoon, 2021). In the process, esports affect how gamers engage with games and how broader human relations are mediated by gaming, and how the world perceives games.

However, such a convergent tendency raises a few 'unique challenges' for esports research that is still nascent(Cranmer et al., 2021). While there are numerous disciplines in esports research, there is "a little consensus across the [diverse] domains as to how to define or bound esports itself as a phenomenon,"(Steinkuehler, 2019, p.5);the work 'to synthesize various perspectives and develop a uniform research stream has been difficult(Cranmer et al., 2021). In addition, the fluidity of esports that keeps changing how esports appears to us also is an obstacle to forming a holistic understanding of esports. Lastly, despite the fact that esports is closely related to technology, the complexity of digital technical structures and its' (im)material conditions has been often trivialized in both esports research(Cranmer et al., 2021) and Game Studies – which "today constituted by humanities, qualitative social sciences, and design scholars

focused on games and play as cultural phenomena of meaning making, with homogeneous epistemic cultures"(Deterding, 2017 p.533; Gekker, 2021).

Thus, this ongoing research attempts to shape an alternative lens to fill the gaps among various fields by reconsidering the status of technology, following a particular strain of philosophy of technology(Simondon, Stiegler, Hui) to rethink the existential meanings of technology in contemporary culture and how such understanding can assist us in answering "fundamental questions about how the field is unfolding."(Reitman et al., 2019, p.12) The key concept here is 'Technicity', which refers to 'the mode of existence of technical objects'(Simondon, 1958/2011) and 'original condition of human life.'(Stiegler, 1994/1998)

This research will be constructed into two parts; first, I theoretically examine the meaning of Technicity and try to build a conceptual framework for understanding e-sports as a technical being. Next, I analyze the existence and development of technoculture through the case study of specific esports – *LCK(League of Legends Champions Korea)*.

TECHNICITY

In Simondon's theory of individuation, which discusses how technological and human objects evolve, technicity is a significant concept in understanding the co-constructive development of technology and humans(Simondon, 2005/2020). In his discussion, technicity, the mode of existence of technology, is concerned with how technology exists in the world, that is, how technology changes the human(s)-human(s) and human-nature relationship, and how such relationship becomes a dynamic relating to invention and development of technical objects. In this respect, technicity has blended meanings, both the nature of technology and how humans perceive and do things with technology.

In the theory of individuation, Simondon defines three different technology modes as element, individual, and ensemble. In elements, technicity resides purely. Nevertheless, on more complex levels, the technicity of a technical object is negotiated within its specific structure and with a close relationship with its' associate milieu. For humans, individuation unfolds from vital to collective (psychical, transindividual). Here, technicity mediates new types of human-human and human-nature relationships and enables the construction of the transindividual. At the same time, it also becomes an 'ontological force' because it leads to the invention of new technological structures (including aesthetic actualization) by arousing specific thoughts to humans(Sissel Hoel et al., 2012). In this respect, considering technoculture as Simondon's Technical Ensemble can be a helpful frame to shed light on various relationships and the dominant relational aspect of a specific technical object, for example, as a tool for labor in production.

However, since Simondon's discussion is mainly based on the technology in the 1950's, before digital and network technology, it is necessary to supplement the approach with the understanding of modern technicity. In the aspect of digital technology, Hui suggests that digital objects have various levels; while they "appear to humans as colorful and visible beings", at the same time, they are 'text files, binary codes, circuit boards.' (Hui, 2016, p.27) Hui's "order of magnitude/granularity" (Hui, 2016, p.29,30) approach to effectively positioning his inquiries of digital objects, needs to be applied to understand complex technological culture. In addition, Stigler's analysis of technic in the hyper-industrial period is also relevant as contemporary technoculture, especially esports, is almost always combined with the industry schema. (Stiegler, 2015/2016).

CASE STUDY: *'LEAGUE OF LEGENDS CHAMPIONS KOREA (LCK)'*

The empirical research focuses on *LCK*. Lolesports, *League of Legends*(Riot Games, 2009) esports, is one of the most successful esports currently and the South Korean league, *LCK*, is the first official local leagues established. Both have greatly contributed to what we recognize as contemporary esports these days.

The data was mainly collected through the on-site ethnography of two years as an insider, esports broadcast global producer, and additional information was supplemented through a literature review. In two-step analysis, I first analyze LCK's 'mode of existence' diachronically to draw out transductive events; where and when the major connections and relations alter. After, I re-sort the findings into three different modes based on Hui's approach to analyze technicity in each layer of ontologies.

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