Esports Careers

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INTRODUCTION
Over the last five years, the professionalization of esports has seen an increase in five-figure standard player contracts (Wolf 2017), North American colleges offering esports scholarships (Wingfield 2014), Twitch broadcast micro-celebrities (Partin 2017), shoutcaster stardom (Witkowski 2018), and foundational media sports scaffolding in the domain via esports agents, major non-endemic brand sponsorships, and media conglomerate acquisitions of companies as well as leagues. As a result, grassroots esports practitioners are now finding new opportunities to make a living in this dynamic media-esports merger—and the present panel sets out to explore *how*. The four respective perspectives from which our panelists look at the phenomenon are described below.

Ben Egliston: Esport Broadcasting through Phenomenality and Affect

The work performed by those who translate and transmit complex happenings in the esports arena is of significant value, as the current literature suggests (e.g. Seo, 2013; Taylor, 2012). Distinct from these accounts, while still focusing on "broadcasting careers," this presentation takes as its focus the 'phenomenality' (Ash, 2012; Stiegler, 2011) of esport—understood as how complex, often temporally fine-grained processes in high-level gaming are organised as to become accessible to viewer consciousness through the technologies and techniques (or technics) of broadcast.

I argue that the technics of esport are a process of 'articulation' (after Latour, 2004), allowing viewers to discriminate subtle variations in play and become affected in particular ways through watching. I discuss two examples: commenting game analysis and statistical work, which function as two important broadcasting careers involving the invocation of technology and technique. I contend the technics of broadcast esport work to transmit and generate affect: ordering our experience of the game and modulating viewers' own embodied states in watching particular matches, with the end-goal being to mould viewing and consumption habits to derive economic value from viewers.

Rhys Jones and Hanna Wirman: Professional Player-actresses in Hong Kong

As the esports industry grows in Hong Kong, female only events and female only teams have become particularly pervasive in the competitive gaming scene. Seo (2016) suggests that Asian esports in general "is now associated with female esports players", while our

earlier work (Wirman and Jones 2017) discusses how all-female tournaments strive on player celebrity culture rather than professional play.

Instead of condemning female-objectification in such events, the Hong Kong scene has embraced the traditional performances of gender identity on stage and beyond. More than their male counterparts, female players often serve in additional roles in promoting products or modelling, for example. Branding and marketing of the teams and events all draw on the traditionally feminine representations and rhetorics, making them "professionalised actors" (Seo & Jung 2014). In our presentation, we establish the ways in which current esports events and practices position and sell women as esports players.

Nick Taylor: Collegiate Esports and the Invisible Work of Getting Good

This presentation documents the labor involved in training for and managing semi-professional, collegiate esports teams. I draw on qualitative research with a campus-based *League of Legends* squad, as they strive for success in the increasingly crowded collegiate scene. In particular, I highlight team activities that seem tangential to normative understandings of how we get good at games. Members write and review technical reports on upcoming opponents, hold team-building exercises, and watch extensive footage. Operating without a formalized infrastructure increasingly associated with top esports university programs (coaches, scholarships, training facilities), they are largely carrying this work out on their own.

While players themselves frame this work in the readily-available discourses of esports and more conventional collegiate athletics, I situate them alongside alternative cultural analogs. Specifically, I compare their activities to the kinds of labor associated with intelligence communities. These comparisons not only shed light on the often invisible competencies players develop, but may also be a productive way of theorizing the social futures associated with competitive play, beyond the mercurial world of esports.

Emma Witkowski: Esports Coaching as Practice

In 2012, TL Taylor stated:

> there is rarely a consistent coach who acts, and mediates, between the owner and the players. Sometimes you find teams taking on coaches during boot camps or intensive practice sessions but they are rarely kept over the course of running an international circuit of events (150)

Fast forward to 2018 and we see coaches in waged positions, taking the role as seasoned experts and tacticians, and acting as a key intermediary between players/recruits and (often) non-endemic management. While the presence and opportunity for coaches—often former players—has grown, the role is a precarious one, altered by tournament rules, secured through non-coaching specific/multi-role contracts, and determined by the "needs and stipulations" along the vertical chain between players and management (Van Allen 2018). This presentation explores the precarious position of the

coach, and some of the home-brew solutions and contingencies encountered during the solidification of this esport career.

SUMMARY

The above four perspectives provide a timely look at the evolving notion of "career" within a rapidly changing sector bridging digital games, sports, and entertainment. The panel contributes to the academic discussion of competitive game cultures, with a significant exploration of auxiliary and identity-specific practices in esports, research of which is still relatively scarce (cf. Zolides 2015; Keiper et al. 2017; Salo 2017). The panel is chaired by Veli-Matti Karhulahti.

BIO

Ben Egliston is a PhD candidate and sessional lecturer at the University of Sydney in the Department of Media and Communications. He researches and teaches in games and new media. His current research is focused on developing a post-phenomenological account of new practices and technologies in gaming – such as livestreaming, esport and data analytics.

Rhys Jones is a PhD candidate at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University at the School of Design. His research interests include video game fandom and spectatorship, especially the phenomenon of Let's Plays and eSports. He has authored conference papers on the topics of room escape games, and socio-political representations in videogames. He is one of the organisers of Global Game Jam Hong Kong as well as RETRO.HK, Hong Kong's first retro gaming convention.

Veli-Matti Karhulahti (PhD, University of Turku) is a research fellow in an Academy of Finland venture and has been conducting research on various play and game related areas. His present main interests tangle around the development and evolution of play in human lives. He has published in various international journals, and recently finished a book on the psychology of competitive play titled *Esport Phenomenology: Passion, Obsession, and Psycholudic Development*.

Nick Taylor is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at NC State University, and the Associate Director of NC State's PhD program in Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media. His work applies posthumanist and feminist perspectives to qualitative studies of mediated play practices and platforms, including esports, man caves, and modular construction toys. He is also the lead editor on a volume exploring the intersections of masculinities and gaming, entitled *Mediated Masculinities in Play* (Palgrave Macmillan, Spring 2018).

Hanna Wirman (PhD) is an assistant professor at the School of Design of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University where she leads the MSc study stream in game development. Her research interests focus on marginal and critical ways of playing and making games, including design and research of animal play. Hanna serves on the board of Chinese DiGRA and on the DiGRA Executive Board. She has lead the Global Game Jam Hong Kong since 2013.

Emma Witkowski is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Design and the co-director of the Playable Media Lab at RMIT University (Melbourne). As a socio-phenomenologically informed ethnographer, her research explores esports cultures, high performance teams, LAN tournaments, and networked play. During 2016 - 2017, she was a postdoc researcher with Locating Media, University of Siegen, studying top-tier EU esports teams and emerging franchise involvements with traditional sports leagues. Her most recent publications explore esports cultures from the perspectives of player rights, gender and livestreaming, and spectatorship.

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