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Hyperreality Among Defense of the Ancients 2's Players

Putri Surya Cempaka & Haryatmoko

Abstrak/Abstract

Studi ini meneliti kondisi dan praktik hiperrealitas di antara para pemain game online Dota 2 yang menunjukkan perspektif yang disebut pasca-manusia, sebuah perspektif yang percaya bahwa kemajuan teknologi akan memudahkan kehidupan secara umum. Dalam istilah kritis, ini mengurangi akal sehat manusia karena percaya bahwa teknologi telah mengambil alih fungsi manusia. Dalam memahami konsep post-human, dalam penelitian ini, kami merujuk kondisi post-human sebagai praktik hiperrealitas dengan berfokus pada persepsi visual para pemain Dota 2 selama aktivitas permainan mereka dan makna tentang permainan video mereka. Penelitian ini menggunakan konsep simulakra, simulasi, dan hiperrealitas menurut Jean Baudrillard. Dalam kondisi hiperrealitas, representasi yang tertanam dalam otak manusia mengubah imajinasi menjadi kenyataan, yang dapat dilihat dari representasi aktualisasi diri yang dirasakan oleh masing-masing individu, dalam hal ini pemaian Dota 2. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan pengumpulan data yang diperoleh dari wawancara mendalam dengan empat informan, yang dipilih secara purposif, dengan dua kategori siswa dan karyawan perusahaan. Studi ini menemukan praktik hiperrealitas yang nyata dari pemain Dota 2 yang menunjukkan kondisi pasca-manusia, di mana pemain lebih nyaman untuk bersaing dan mencapai sesuatu secara virtual. Pemain Dota 2 bertindak seperti pelarian yang mengejar sesuatu yang bisa mereka banggakan bukan dari dunia nyata

This study examines the condition and practice of hyperreality among players of online game Dota 2 that demonstrates a perspective called post-human, a perspective which believes that technological advancement will ease life in general. In critical term, it diminishes human sense because it believes that technology has taken over human's functions. In understanding the concept of post-human, in this study, we refer the post-human condition as hyperreality practice by focusing on the visual perception of Dota 2 players during their gaming activities and the meaning about the video game for them. This study uses the concepts of simulacra, simulation, and hyperreality according to Jean Baudrillard. In hyperreality conditions, the representation that is embedded in human brain transforms imagination into reality, which can be seen from the representation of self-actualization felt by each individual, in this case Dota 2 gamers or players. This study was conducted using qualitative approach and data collection derived from in-depth interview with four informants, who were chosen purposively, with two categories of students and corporate employees. This study finds obvious hyperreal practice of Dota 2 players that indicates post-human condition, in which players are more comfortable to compete and achieve something virtually. Dota 2 players act like the escapists who pursue something they can be proud of not from the real world.

Kata kunci/Keywords:

Hiperrealitas, Dota 2, pemain game, pasca-manusia, virtual, simulasi

Hyperreality; Dota 2; gamers; post-human; gaming; virtual, simulation

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Introduction

Development of computer science and advancement of technology have brought online games as one of entertainment sources for games enthusiasts. As a product of internet technology, online games, one of which is multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA), provide a platform for gamers to communicate virtually while gaming. MOBAs are a hybrid of massive multiplayer online game and real-time strategy (RTS) game. MOBA is the most popular genre in gaming industry. Valve's Dota 2 is the most played game on its Steam service, while League of Legends is arguably the most popular game in the world (Funk, 2013). Such

games gather around two small teams competing against one another (Kahn & Williams, 2016, in Xia et. al, 2017, p. 2). Previous discussions about MOBAs have explored gaming phenomenon in certain perspectives, such as game addiction, motivation, leadership, and cultural differences (Xia et. al, 2017, p. 2). This study examines the hyperreality practices done by gamers while playing one of the most famous MOBA, Defense of the Ancients 2 (Dota 2).

In its analysis, this paper also includes a supporting source from a documentary of Dota 2 which provides numerous explanations about the game for non-gamers. One of game analysts and commentators, Su-Leo Liu, said that "Dota is a combination of American football and chess" (Valve Production, 2014). Moreover, commentator Toby Dawson explains that "Dota [also] is a momentum play which consists five players in a team battling another five players team. Every player controls one hero. The ultimate goal is to crash opponent's last building, the final throne, called "The Ancient" (Valve Production, 2014).

There is a testimonial from a gamer who is a competitive player in both physical sports and e-sports. Jeremy Lin, a professional NBA player who is also a Dota 2 enthusiast, stated that "when playing Dota, there are countless possibilities", it shows the same map or arena but players would never get bored and tired from playing (Valve Production, 2014). He also claimed that "Dota is way of life. It is similar to basketball, the team has to work together, think of perfect timing, and make certain sacrifice" (Valve Production, 2014).

In summary, Dota 2 is played with two teams, each consisting of five players who act as heroes in the battle arena between the Sentinel team and the Scourge team. The battle arena, according to Dota 2 map, is divided into three paths where various creatures (creeps) spring up automatically. Right in the center of each base, there are ancient Sentinel's world tree and Scourge's frozen throne. In this game, every player must focus not only on defending or killing the opponent's ancients, but also on teamwork in killing heroes from the opposing team. Its goals are to increase level, kill opponents' heroes, and colonize enemy base with allied creeps.

In addition, players can purchase a variety of virtual tools that can be used to assist them winning battles. The selection process of heroes and items on each battle will affect the strategy and the course of the game. In playing Dota 2, players not only master team strategy, but individually, players must also be qualified to farm the field, communicate with team members, and understand the ins and outs of the base and opponent's areas on the map. Dota 2 players indicates the phenomenon of hyperreality in (at least) choosing their heroes or items and in their virtual communication system. As a result of technological advancement, this kind of online game "forces" communication practices to be conducted in order to

pursue victory, yet again, virtually.

The objective of this study is to point out the condition and practice of hyperreality among players or gamers which demonstrates human activities called post-human. Post-human is understood as a shift in the construction of subjectivity from a unified self, endowed with a determining will, to a multi-layered, multi-modal subjectivity constructed through mediated and digital relations to organic and inorganic or technological others (Braidotti, 2013, in Blaagaard, 2013, p. 360). In brief, it is a perspective which believes that technological advancement will ease life in general. In critical term, post-human condition diminishes human sense because technology has gradually taken over human's functions. In understanding the concept of post-human, in this study, we refer post-human condition as the hyperreality practices by focusing on the visual perceptions of Dota 2 players during their gaming activities and beyond the gaming itself.

Literature Review

This article will explore the thoughts of France philosopher Jean Baudrillard, specifically his thoughts about condition related to post-human. In this section, Baudrillard's thoughts on simulation, simulacra, and hyperreality will be explained. These three aspects are sequences of representations sequences in the process of creating a particular object. Last part of this section elaborates the definition of post-human and how its condition is related to the Baudrillard's conceptions of simulation, simulacra, and hyperreality.

Simulation

Baudrillard conceptualizes the idea of something more real than the object itself. Starting with a defined simulation term, which is no longer a reference to an object or a substitute for that particular object. Simulation is a derivative of the model or object of the real thing without necessarily being real, or can be called as hyperreal (Baudrillard, 1994: 1). The simulation is constructed by referring to an already existing and real thing. Thus, in other words, simulation is the representation process of an object as a reference that is ultimately considered to replace the original object. Representation becomes real, more real than the original object, like a simulation (Baudrillard, 1994: 2).

For example, the simulation of natural disasters is carried out as an attempt to anticipate the real disasters and in order to socialize the ways to survive in emergency circumstances. Various simulations of disasters, such as earthquakes and wildfires, have been performed. In an earthquake simulation, people involved in the simulation will experience shaking as if it really occurs naturally. The earthquake representation generated from its own simulation is considered as a real disaster until the participants in the training simulation start feeling fear. As for wildfire simulations, peo-

ple or building inhabitants are trained how to react when there is real wildfire happening.

When it comes to games, there are many simulation games which can generate identical feeling as the real thing does to the players. There are simulators type of games, such as social simulation games and vehicles simulation games. In terms of social simulation games, one popular example is *The Sims*, whose tagline is "Enjoy the power to create and control people in a virtual world where there are no rules." From the tagline itself, it clearly shows the game's intention to persuade the game's player to enjoy the virtual life they create on their own without being bothered with rules or laws existing in the real world. Another genre of simulation video game is vehicles simulation games, one of which is *Microsoft Flight Simulator X* which allows its players to experience the flying sensation behind control panel of an airplane as a pilot. This kind of game also gives identical sensation or at least real analytical procedures to those who are not able to feel such experience in real life because of specific condition (i.e. fear of heights).

In the simulation, things become abstract as the real thing and its representation merges. The simulation is surrounded by references that are merged into each other. Furthermore, the simulation builds an object of representation with sign system. The sign system does not merely imitate, duplicate, or even parodied the original object, but it also becomes a substitute of the real signs (Baudrillard, 1994: 2).

The opposite of simulation is dissimulation or false pretense. In simulations, all symptoms that describe particular states or objects are presented as substitutes for the real thing. Meanwhile, in dissimulation, the symptoms presented are limited to those which are sufficient or fit to describe the desired state. For example, a person who can feign illness by only faking a cough or laying down while wrapped in a blanket in bed (Baudrillard, 1994: 3).

Simulacra

In the simulation state, the sign still represents and refers to the original object. Meanwhile, at the simulacra situation, the sign will still represent the original object, but it is no longer real in reality. The simplest examples of simulacra (plural form of simulacrum) can be found in many advertisements. Models in commercial advertisements are often portrayed as perfect as possible. Such portrayal occurs a lot in cosmetic product advertisements. If the advertisement commercializes a hair product, then the model's hair is usually long, black, smooth, soft, straight, and easy to style. If the advertisement promotes a face product, then the model has bright skin with no pores or any blemishes.

Simulacra can also be found in food advertisements. Because television commercials often aim to spoil human's vision and hearing, models on food advertisement often act excessively in con-

veying the delicious smell of the advertised food to the audience. Exaggerated visualization using slow motion or particular body languages is often performed in depicting the delicacy of the advertised food so that the sensation can be imagined by audiences.

Those examples demonstrate that there is no longer a concrete reality referred to by the simulacra, especially in commercial advertisements. The objects represented still refer to the concept of beauty or delicacy. However, in reality, human hair is not all straight, smooth, or manageable as portrayed in the advertisements, human face is not all bright without any blemishes, and if in real life people eat or drink in very slow motion or with exaggerated body languages, it will certainly look very strange. The reality shown in simulacra have put aside the reality that occurs on daily life. In simulacra, everything is perfect and flawless.

Another example of simulacra that is difficult to distinguish from reality is political campaign or propaganda. For example, during the campaign period, news coverages are produced to benefit or disadvantage certain parties by building certain image regarding political figures so that the public forms a perception in such a way. The audiences will be made to think that the signs presented in campaigns are the reality, so they do not question any longer whether the actions and promises of political figures are true and sincere or not. Furthermore, hoaxes nowadays are tremendously unstoppable as people find it more difficult to distinguish between what is right and wrong. The next stage or condition of this phenomenon is called hyperreality, in which reality can no longer be identified because the simulated exposure and simulacra are continuously occurred

Hyperreality

In hyperreality conditions, the representation embedded in human brain transforms imagination into reality, which can be seen from the self-actualization felt by the individual. Self-actualization or consciousness is still debated by many philosophers. One category of thought states that being conscious is being conscious of something (Pepperell, 2003, p. 175, in Haney, 2006, p. 1). It gives particular sensation that people do not feel empty. This also enables people's ability to be fully aware of their self and subjectivity. Subjectivity tends to be associated with body, nature, and culture as the extension of thinking process. Meanwhile, another category of thought believes that consciousness is a vacuum of conceptions in the midst of thoughts (Maitri Upanishad 6, p. 18-19, in Hume, 1921, p. 436, in Haney, 2006, p. 1). In other words, the mind is one of consciousness' contents.

This paper in general will employ the conception of reality according to the first category of thought, that hyperreality condition is more like a response of certain circumstances which happen to the body, nature, and culture. This thesis

of consciousness highlights the strong standpoint of post-human definition which carries important meaning for not only what it means to be human, but also for the relationship between humans and the environment.

In hyperreality, interaction and participation are made by the audience in response to the simulacra presented by the media, in this case the game Dota 2. Baudrillard (1994:2) provides an illustration of Disneyland as a perfect example of simulacra that lead to hyperreality. The miniature of the world and the fictional figures realized in this playground enable visitors to experience the world of pirates, fairies, kingdoms, and various other fantasies. Disneyland is presented as an imaginary world to convince its visitors that the real world is the world presented at Disneyland. Meanwhile, the real world surrounding it is no longer real, but rather it is above reality (hyperreal) and composed in the simulation process (Baudrillard, 1994:). A theme park presents a utopian picture and allows adults to fulfill their desire as a child. In the hyperreal world of Disneyland, childish desire becomes natural and relevant.

Hyperreality also occurs on the internet as human activities increase in on social media platforms and mass media. In the current era, friendship that is woven through social media is sometimes realized in the real-world (offline) too as if the world on social media is the reality of friendship that is lived. There are individuals who are difficult to distinguish cyberspace from the real life. As the two worlds gradually emerge and the participation of individuals online increases, hyperreality occurs.

In addition, hyperreality also occurs when various interesting contents, either important or trivial, become viral. This includes contents of political reality arising from digitizing information. The simulacra depictions displayed by various media, especially social media, have thus become realer compared to what is actually happening. Ultimately, a large number of hoaxes pops up in the media and lies are then considered to be true and interpreted as correct information as well as signs of the object itself (reality), ending with the simulacra being accepted as real (Piliang, 2017). Many of social altruism carried out by the masses is triggered by propaganda or engineered and dramatized reality that utilizes digital information technology (Piliang, 2017). In coping with these phenomena, the public should be wise in selecting valid news and filtering hoaxes by first checking the credibility of the media before actually interpreting anything from the contents offered.

Relation of Simulation, Simulacra, and Hyperreality

Hyperreal condition is realized through stages. It should be noted that the three simulation conditions, simulacra, and hyperreality are inseparable from each other. To achieve hyperreality, there should be a form of simulacra presented by the media so that the exposed audience perceives the

representation as real. The significant difference between simulation and simulacra its nature as the process and the result or artefact of a process (Giddings, 2017: 418). Simulation is the process of the whole formation of representation until hyperreality occurs. Meanwhile, simulacrum is a manifestation of the process in which human action ultimately leads to hyperreality.

There are levels of process that make a discourse to finally reach the stage of hyperreality. Hyperreality is formed from abstract images that are separate from reality in the form of simulation (Baudrillard, 1994: 6). The abstract image consists of simulated good signs (like utopian things) and real ones. Representation seeks to absorb the form of simulation by interpreting objects into different forms (Baudrillard, 1994: 6). However, this understanding is somewhat different from the meaning of the simulation. Simulation strongly rejects that a sign is a preferred value. In simulation, the sign turns off each reference. Simulation surrounds the formation of representation as simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1994: 6). Both representations and simulations form an image of an object, which usually leads to hyperreality. To quote Baudrillard (1994: 6), there are four phases in imaging:

*“it is the reflection of a profound reality;
it masks and denatures a profound reality;
it masks the absence of a profound reality;
it has no relation to any reality whatsoever;
it is its own pure simulacrum.”*

1. A sign is a reflection of a reality. An example is a landscape painting made as a reflection of a real landscape.
2. A sign of covering, hiding, or even misleading reality itself. An example is the understanding that by possessing certain sophisticated and expensive devices, one is considered to be of a high social class.
3. A sign of absence of reality. Thus, the sign appears as the embodiment of reality. Examples are beauty product advertisements featuring models with bodies that are considered perfect.
4. A sign has nothing to do with reality. The sign has been established without any reference. An example is the science fiction genre film that presents the alternative world.

With these four levels, it can be understood at what stage an object is represented. At the first and second level, true/false positions and real/virtual are still relevant and easily identifiable. However, at level three and four, binary perspective regarding true/false or real/virtual is no longer questionable.

Post-Humanism in Visual Text

Scientific developments in the last century, such as plastic surgery, prosthetics, neuropharmacology, robotics, genetics, and also information technology, have help people to actualize post-human visions. Visions of new category of human include superhuman, artificial intelligence robots, and so on. New technology continues to produce and create robotics or cyborg realities. Science fictions become science realities. However, it all started from fictions of superhero comic books. Small, niche comic book fandoms have been brought onto the big screen of mainstream audiences (Jeffery, 2016, p. 2). Superhero is the first post-human vision that became popularized in both science and science fiction. Later then, computer games also gradually became popular.

The embodiment of certain characteristics of post-humanism is related to fictional representation of post-human bodies, resulting in transhumanism (Jeffery, 2016, p. 2). Transhumanism, according to Jeffery (2016), refers to

[G]enerally, though certainly not exclusively, to a philosophy and practice of human enhancement that runs from the Renaissance humanism of Mirandola and the Enlightenment conception of the human as rational, autonomous subject, to the increasingly popularized ideology of Transhumanism proper, which calls for the active use of science and technology to improve the cognitive and physical abilities of human beings (p. 2).

In brief, transhumanism enables the realization of post-humanist condition, in which humans get improved abilities in both physical and cognitive abilities. This is exactly what happens when people play video game. The players somehow experience the superhuman abilities which the characters they play virtually in games have.

Post-humanist perspective is a critical view that may be briefly mapped by three modalities of post-humanist thought identified by Castree & Nash (2004, in Jeffery, 2016: 11). The first is post-humanism as an initial historical condition. Second, it is a set of ontological theories about human that never was and never will be. The third is post-human as a form of deconstructive reading, which means it can be seen as either an object analysis or as an analytical-theoretical position (Jeffery, 2016: 11).

This research highlights the second modality by observing the players' activities pertaining to online video game when they are becoming an avatar in a virtual world. Then, the third modality serves the theoretical comprehension of post-human condition in its relations to the hyperreality condition of online gaming activities. To emphasize the relation between post-human and hyperreality, this research borrowed statements from Jeffery (2016)

"Indeed, if it were desirable to make any claims for what exactly Post/ Humanism "is" or "does" then it would almost certainly hinge upon just such a blurring of categorical boundaries, wheth-

er between the natural and the artificial, the human and the machinic, fact and fiction, or critical theory..." (p. 11)

Earlier, the researchers mentioned that in hyperreality conditions, the representation embedded in human brain makes something that is only imaginary becomes reality, which can be seen from the self-actualization felt by individual. In post-human condition, it is similar except that the reality and the fiction become blurry. To sum up, from both conditions can be derived that players' self-actualization or awareness and activities are the red lining of all binaries between human/mechanic, natural/artificial, fact/fiction, real/virtual, and so on.

Research Methodology

This research used qualitative approach. Inductive research begins with field data collection through various methods so that it would be able to recognize certain patterns after analysis about the phenomenon. Qualitative research is a method of exploring and understanding meaning that – by some individuals or groups of people – is considered to be derived from social or humanitarian problems (Creswell, 2010: 4). In this study, the researchers want to reveal the in-depth experiences and views of Dota 2 players and enthusiasts. The game itself will be described and explained using the concept of hyperreality.

Moreover, this researchers also try to explore the understanding of communication system held virtually by Dota 2 players as the form of hyperreality practice in post-human condition. Primer data collection was done through in-depth interviews of four informants chosen purposively. The four Dota 2 players chosen as are corporate employees (informant 1 and 3) and students (informant 2 and 4). The purposive selection was intended to examine the differences between employees and students in regard to their online gaming activities and how they affect their unawareness of the state of hyperreality and the post-human condition they are actually in. The secondary data is collected by observations of the informants' gaming and communication activities.

Secondary study was also conducted from a documentary film about Dota 2 professional players (Benedict "Hyhy" Lim from Singapore, Danil "Dendi" Ishutis from Ukraine, and Clinton "Fear" Loomis from United States of America) entitled *Free to Play* (2014) to collect the glimpse of Dota 2's professional players' activities. The documentary tells the story of Hyhy, Dendi, and Fear competing in a world tournament with a total price of US\$1,600,000, where the winner gets a price of US\$1,000,000. During their struggle as professional gamers, they experience personal identity awakening, family pressures and troubles, as well as other life realities.

Other than that, the researchers gathered many information from the internet which tell stories about Dota 2 communities such as costume play of

Dota 2 Heroes to support this paper's arguments regarding post-human condition and situation.

Results

In this section, we will describe the application of Baudrillard's thought regarding simulation and simulacra presented on Dota 2, the game itself.

Short Reviews About Online Game Defense of the Ancients 2 (Dota 2)

Defense of the Ancients 2 (Dota) is a role-playing game (RPG) with a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) strategies. Dota 2 is played with two teams, namely the Sentinel team and the Scourge team, with both teams consist of five players who act as heroes in the battle arena. The battle arena is divided into three paths where various creatures (creeps) spring up automatically. Right in the center of each base, there are ancient Sentinel's world tree and Scourge's frozen throne. In this game, every player must focus not only on defending or killing the opponent's ancients, but also on teamwork in killing heroes from the opposing team.



Figure 1. Scenery in Dota 2

Players' strategies are to increase level, kill opponent's heroes, and colonize enemy base with allied creeps. In addition, players can also purchase various virtual tools that can be used to win the battle. The process of selecting heroes and items in each battle will affect the strategy and the course of the game. In playing Dota 2, players must not only master team strategy, individually, but also be qualified to farm, communicate with team members, and understand the ins and outs of the base and opponent's areas in the map.

Simulacra and Representation in Dota 2

Dota 2 is a fantasy game involving science fiction, in which there is a sub-theme like the imaginary world emphasizing creatures or monsters, advanced technology, planetary existence or a different environment from the real world. Baudrillard (1994, p. 122) states that in science fiction there is a utopian form of the real world, allowing various possible scenarios and schemes to occur, such as mechanical systems, metallurgy, robots, and so on. Utopia world presents alternative and ideal universe according to human desire. Fur-

thermore, other world models in simulacra are no longer merely fantasy related to the real world, but also a form of anticipation of the real world (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 122). Then, as a basis for understanding the utopian world created from the simulacra, Baudrillard (1994: 121) states three kinds of simulacra:

1. The natural form of a simulacra which is found in images and artificial, harmonious, or optimistic in nature. It aimed to restitution or restoration of ideal institutions as naturally created.
2. The productive form of a simulacra which is obtained from energy and pressure. It involves the process of formation requiring systematic machinery and production and aims for sustainable globalization and unlimited energy development. (In this form, desire belongs to those who believe in the utopian world).
3. The simulacra form of simulation which is found from information or messages, models, cybernetics and hyperreal games. It aims to acquire full power over the formation of simulacra.

In addition to simulacra, Dota 2 also represents every activity or choice made by its players. The representation itself, according to Baudrillard (1994, p. 6), is the significance of a sign that refers to the depth of meaning, that a sign can be interpreted as something more than the sign itself. Dota 2's players' activities focus on the third form of simulation in the selection process of heroes and items.

Heroes and Items Selection and Representation in Dota 2 (Simulacra Form of Simulation)

In the role-playing game, players can choose one avatar out of a hundred to use. In this case, the avatar in Dota 2 is called heroes. Each player's chosen hero has their own advantages (strength, agility, or intelligence). In selecting heroes, the players choose heroes in accordance with personal characteristics they believe they have in the real life. At this point, the players positions their chosen hero as themselves. Thus, there is a belief that the players themselves are the ones who fought in the game that lasts approximately 55 minutes in each session.

Based on poststructuralism, feminism, science and technology studies, post colonialism, and even fictional narratives, post-human condition can be considered as "a general critical space in which then techno-cultural forces which both produce and undermine the stabilities of the categories of 'human' and 'nonhuman' can be investigated" (Waldby, 2000, in Jeffery, 2016, p. 22). Hence, the statement concisely defines Humanism as

"a discourse which claims that the figure of 'Man'...naturally stands at the center of things;

is entirely distinct from animals, machines, and other nonhuman entities; is absolutely known and knowable to 'himself'; is the origin of meaning and history; and shares with all other human beings a universal essence" (Badmington in Jeffery, 2016: 22).

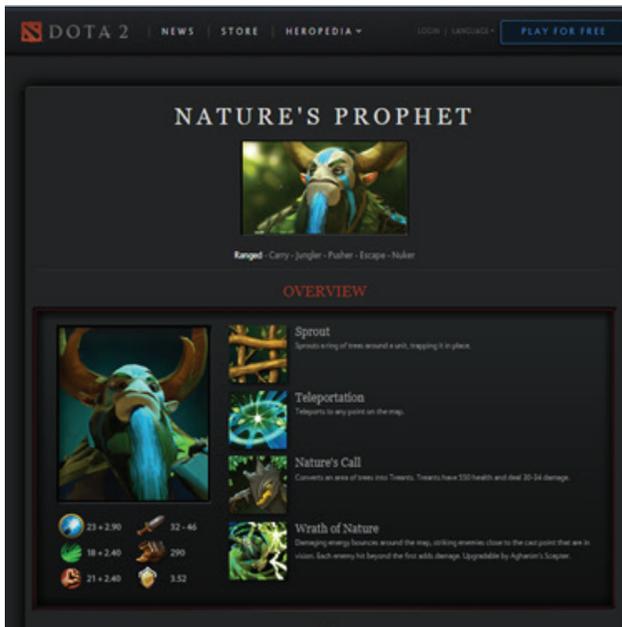


Figure 2. One of Heroes in Dota 2, called Nature's Prophet

In other words, players who are aware of themselves put certain meaning to the avatars or heroes they choose. However, sometimes, they do not even know that they experience self-actualization; they just choose certain heroes they believe represent the closest personalities and abilities of theirs. This shows that there is already a blurred boundary between what is human and post-human; what is fact and fiction. It is now understandable "that the common threads that link together work on bodies (both human and post-human) are concerned with social construction and, most often linked to this, control and regulation of bodies" (Mordan & Scott, 1993, in Jeffery, 2016: 24).

Some paragraphs below will elaborate the conditions which relate work on bodies of both human and post-human construction that help players to win the game. Informant 3 selected hero is the Nature's Prophet, which has the advantage of intelligence an ability to teleport to any location. As observed, informant 3 is a player with an outgoing personality and comfortable in various social circles to realize his understanding of chosen hero.

In addition, items selected in supporting players' strategies in the game, which indicate that the hero represents itself, is worth using and able to make certain items. For example, the item chosen by Informant 2 is Force Staff, which is able to provide help and protection for their heroes and teams and even to lure the opposing team to enter the team's territory and be crushed.

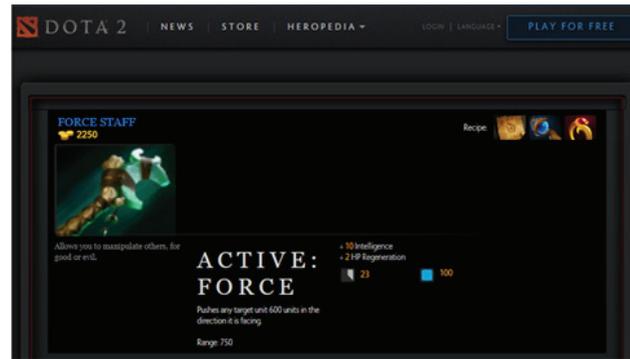


Figure 3. One of Items in Dota 2, called Force Staff

Hence, players who choose to use Force Staff are represented as players who tend to help the people they care the most as well as care more about the interests of other people more than they care about their own interests. Players' selection process of heroes and items becomes simulacrum of their self-realization that considerably affect the simulation being formed. Heroes chosen in the game become the hyperreality of the players in the real world.

Informant 1 admitted that he chooses hero or item which will give more opportunity to win the game, and the informant is eager to win because of his competitive personality. When not playing games, the informant's other activities include exercising at gym or playing sports such as badminton and basketball. He also admitted that it stresses him out if he loses while playing sports in the real life. In order to soothe his disappointment, he finds that playing e-sports, including Dota 2, quells his competitiveness at least virtually. This indicates that games like Dota 2 provides an opportunity for those without physical skills to compete in a physical sport competition.

This is similar to a story about a professional gamer, Clinton "Fear" Loomis, who once failed in physical sport. Fear channeled his competitive self when gaming. He did not succeed in physical sports like basketball as he was told that he was too short to become a basketball player. Then, he discovered computer games and became really good at it (Valve Production, 2014). This way, Fear could fulfill his aspiration by playing Dota. Plus, he did not have to devote his efforts in playing sports he was not very good at like basketball.

Team Strategy and Battle Process in Dota 2 (The Productive form of Simulacra)

In Steam, a platform where players gather online, players, for most of the time, do not know who their team mates are at all. Players are practically strangers in real life. However, communication is a must while playing online game. According to all four informants, the most important thing in playing Dota 2 is a good communication with team mates. In Dota 2, players can communicate via chat room or microphone (if provided). During the communication process, players generally dis-

cuss about two main things, namely the division of heroes with the most benefits for the team among players and the division of tasks among players.



Figure 4. Productive Form of Simulacra: When the players communicate with their team mates

In forming these simulacra, an effort is needed in order to ensure that the battle will work as planned, leading to a victory for the team. Thus, team mates often create a kind of secret codes or terms in communicating to each other and devising game strategy. By using secret codes that are incomprehensible for the enemies, simulacra in the course of the game seem to imitate war in the real life.

Every decision made is different in different game's session. This is because Dota 2 server automatically yet randomly team up the players, unless when the players purposefully create personal and private session to have fun with their friends. All four informants, however, do not like the private session because it is less challenging. Furthermore, winning battles in private session does not affect their ranks or skills also.

Dota 2 Universe (The Natural form of Simulacra)

The world in Dota 2 where the battle between teams takes place is illustrated on a map. On the map, there are buildings and terrains such as towers, temples, barracks, rivers, lowlands, highlands, ravines, water sources, and valleys as the ones in the real world where battles may occur. The universe of Dota 2 as illustrated by the map becomes a natural simulacrum that mimics nature in the real world created by God.



Figure 5. Natural Form of Simulacra



Figure 6. Natural Form of Simulacra

Discussion

Referring to the four levels of representation leading to hyperreality, the overall practice of Dota 2 reflects hyperreality that no longer refers to anything in the real world. The game's sign, in this case the existence of mystical heroes and items, is no longer related to the reality; it is stand-alone without any real reference. Dota 2 presents an alternate world that allows players unleash their abilities in defeating opponents or even feel superior and proud over their achievements.



Figure 7. Ranks Medal in Dota 2

Dota 2's players also feel pride in their achievements of reaching certain levels in the game. In Dota 2, the game's levels, which are called badge, are ranked from the lowest to the highest rank. The ranks are Herald, Guardian, Crusader, Archon, Legend, Ancient, Divine, and Immortal. All four informants stated that their steam accounts mean the world to them since the accounts showcase their badges, and thus their achievements in playing the game. Informant 4 is still attempting to reach a higher level than the Legend badge, while the other three informants are pretty satisfied with their Archon badge since they managed to secure their badge from difficult gaming sessions.

Attaining a high badge gives players a symbolic status that can make them respected by others players with lower badges. Moreover, the badge status also illustrates players' dedication, hard work, and good collaboration with other players. In addition, informant 2 said that the badge system in Dota 2 is similar to the belt systems in martial arts. The informant, who gave up pursuing black belt in martial arts, found another

means to feel proud of himself, that is by attaining Dota 2 badge. He even feels that Dota 2's system is more difficult to master than martial arts' as the online gam requires him to defeat completely unknown stranger in the game, adding suspense to the whole game as he is often unaware of his opponent's skills.

This kind of story also happened to a Ukrainian professional gamer called Dendi. He was once very good at music and played piano. He then stopped pursuing his musical hobby and tried computer games instead. His experience in playing piano results in his unique movements when using the computer's keyboard while playing Dota 2. Instead of becoming a professional pianist, his fingers' movement have led him to be a professional Dota 2's player instead (Valve Production, 2014).

Not very different from amateur gamers, some professional gamers also experience self-actualization and fulfillment when playing Dota 2. The story of Benedict "Hyhy" Lim in the documentary film shows that he feels more mature and becomes aware of his skills in the first time he started playing Dota. He is proud for the achievements he got from playing the game. He has represented his country international Dota 2 Tournament. When he won the tournament, Hyhy said that he got a kind of satisfaction he would never get anywhere else. He claimed that gaming is his pride (Valve Production, 2014).

Another story comes from Danil "Dendi" Ishutis from Ukraine who believes that playing Dota is more than being a gamer. For him, playing is a means of escape. He forgets his pain while playing Dota 2 as the game requires his full attention. He actually thinks that computer games, especially Dota, are everything in his life (Valve Production, 2014).

Last but not least, a gamer from United States, Clinton "Fear" Loomis, has a particular conception about being successful. As a professional gamer, he feels successful when he can bring victory to his team. For him, what makes him happiest is when people see him as a winner (Valve Production, 2014).

As a continuation of the simulacra resulting from the Dota 2, other hyperreality emerged alongside the increasing popularity of eSport world championship, where the best participants from all over the world take part. eSport's players often feel as if they are real athletes competing in physical championship.

In the world championship called *the International*, every player is searching for something, either self-fulfilment, fame, satisfaction, money, or freedom. It allows them to become someone else, someone who is powerful, someone who can take down five strong opponents, someone who can express their creativity, or even someone who can break the rules without getting punished. Tammy Tang, a team manager and a professional gamer, confirmed such phenomenon in the documentary film. She stated that some players might not real-

ize those feelings and realizations as some of them just do not understand themselves, but the feelings are clearly there (Valve Production, 2014).



Figure 8. Na'Vi or Natus Vincere: One of professional eSport teams in World Championship of Dota 2, The International 2011

The International offers an ultimate prize of US\$1,000,000 from total US\$1,600,000. That is a considerable prize for gaming industry. It also gives "real" motive and goal for players to improve their skills. This shows that gaming industry acknowledges the players' existence and skills.

In addition, there is also a community created by players as a platform for players to meet in the real world. Meeting in the real world is important as there are even players who are better known by their Steam account' usernames rather than their real names.

Furthermore, fans of Dota 2 usually participate in cosplay (costume play) as one of the game's heroes. By participating in the cosplay, someone can embody another figure and feel like they are in another world, in this case in the Dota 2 universe. When performing cosplay, the characters the cosplayers embody become more real than their real identity. The cosplayers' passion for a certain hero makes them feel that the apparent thing that gets found becomes more fun than when he is himself in reality.



Figure 9. Some of Best Cosplay of Dota 2

Conclusion

Based on this research's results and discussions, the hyperreal practice found among Dota 2's players demonstrate a post-human condition in which the players are more comfortable to compete and achieve something in the virtual world. Professional online gamer Benedict "Hyhy" Lim, for instance, plays to make him forget about his bad personal life. Similarly, professional gamer Danil "Dendi" Ishutis plays to forget his father's death and the sadness that it creates. Dota 2's players are like escapist who pursue and feel proud over something not from the real world, as illustrated by Hyhy's and Dendi's cases.

The technical dynamics of the informants who are corporate employees and informants who are students are very much the same. Their different occupations only result in different amount of the informants' time spent for playing game. Since the corporate employees have played Dota 2 since they were still students, they have more experience in playing the game. Hence, they are often

more confident and calm while playing the game. However, they are still eager to win the game and assist their team mates while playing. On the other hand, the informants who are also have more time for playing the game and are more ambitious, unwilling to stop playing until they achieve satisfying results from hours and hours of gaming.

According to the four informants, competitiveness is very much needed in playing Dota 2. They are inspired by the professional teams of Dota's players who participate in eSports tournaments to achieve victory. While playing the game, the informants feel like they are conducting real physical sport exercises to win medals, except for that everything happens in a virtual world.

This research is a preliminary study on hyperreality and post-human condition. The researchers are very much aware of this research's lack of in-depth observation. Thus, future research on hyperreality and post-human condition is encouraged.

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