

Guest Editor's Introduction**INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE OF *HUMAN TECHNOLOGY*: GAMES AND PLAY AT THE MARGINS: BETWEEN VISIBILITIES AND INVISIBILITIES**

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How does one code for silence? In which ways, subtle and otherwise, are voices present and accounted for, yet not in certain spaces? Sometimes, the important work is indeed being done, but the means of communicating that contribution faces substantial barriers to its conveyance. This is the everyday reality of scholarship, and one goal of this special issue of *Human Technology* has been to focus on the publication of research that provides insight into the niches and nuances of online game communities. Academic researchers and media scholars stand to be bridges, rather than barriers, in this process. Among members of the media, their multitudinous audiences, stakeholders in a game industry in convulsions, and decision-makers at every level of education and training has been frustration at the lack of progress, and sometimes regression, when it comes to opportunities to create and participate.

As in the very theme of inquiry of this issue—Games and Play at the Margins: Between Visibilities and Invisibilities—the handful of manuscripts and, importantly, their authors, consistently research and navigate spaces of tension, ambivalence, and conflict in bringing these issues to light within a system that often presents much of a headwind toward doing so. Too often, systemic barriers and the very sociotechnical systems of the research and publication process itself present consistent challenges that themselves are a process of enculturation favoring established systems of dominance.

Despite the oft-lauded emancipatory possibilities cyberspace affords, the study of people and these environments continues to uncover vastly understudied populations, deep-seated systems of oppression, and unsung heroes. This thematic issue of *Human Technology* was an opportunity to explore a bit of the unconventional in games and play, particularly in the ways that game spaces serve as hosts to everyday acts of resistance to stereotypical or hegemonic means of understanding cultural forms of communication and recreation. In this sense, this collection of works highlights gameplay as it winds in and out of institutions, social relations,

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and media platforms. Games are just one example of how communities, their practices, and culture manifest through mediated environments.

There is power in what exactly gets a platform and is read and cited as part of collective knowledge. This is especially important in a relatively new and international field such as games. Games and game studies are in no way exempt from the tendency to play into hegemony (Fron et al., 2007) and, to its own detriment as a field of study, exhibit its own complicity in the process of silencing marginalized subjects, including scholars and resultant scholarship. The opportunity to serve in ameliorating this situation with the creation of this special issue was extremely compelling from an editorial standpoint.

Forging new paths in scholarship has always taken courage. However, the level of risk and exposure demanded of contemporary knowledge creators, especially those who advocate and agitate for the marginalized, continues to increase. One may see the critical work herein that endeavors to inform, enlighten, and most of all, help others make decisions about the kind of world they envision individually and collectively through policy. Because creation does not occur in a vacuum to produce isolated artifacts (Winner, 1986), the common thread throughout the research herein is the link to broader social forces and meaning-making practices to the critical study of games and play. For every microcosm representing an online community, there is personhood, nuance, and a range of complexities that lend themselves to deeper understandings.

In researching the liminal spaces that illustrate the richness and diversities of practice, this collection contributes to a body of scholarship that draws attention to the gray zones, silences, and work behind the scenes that present their own particular challenges in elucidation. Nevertheless, the papers in this collection draw attention to the importance of interrogating the processes of production, distribution, publication, and audience reception. Rather than an afterthought, everyone involved in the creative process must pay attention to diversity, inclusivity, corporate responsibility (Busch et al., 2016) and find creative ways to work towards more ethical and just solutions in the everyday.

In the first article of this thematic issue, “EVE Online Is Not for Everyone: Exceptionalism in Online Gaming Cultures,” **Kelly Bergstrom** foregrounds the ways that play is shaped and constrained by forces beyond the game itself. Through an analysis of how a particular game, EVE Online, is marketed, its coverage in enthusiast gaming press, and player interviews, she weaves together a critique of the premise—and indeed promise—of an archetypal and folkloric EVE player. Through this systematic mapping out the forces that lead to disengagement, she highlights how these forces serve as a barrier to the inclusion of potential players. The work to be done implicates the industry and its adjacent communities in fostering more inclusive and welcoming communities that ultimately better the collective experience of play.

In “Toward a Formal Sociology of Online Harassment,” **Katherine Cross** identifies cross-contextual similarities in social practices that encompass forms of online harassment that transcend boundaries of gender, race, class, or political affiliation. She uses Simmel’s (1908/1959) formal sociological method to frame the insights of contemporary gaming and technology scholars in order to better understand how harassment occurs online and offline. Through the provision of a predictable macro-order of events, her article makes sense of an otherwise chaotic presentation of toxicity and structural abuse often aimed toward those most marginalized online or advocating for the marginalized. In addition to individual bad behavior of those who garner a disproportionate amount of attention, the platforms that game communities use to foster increased social cohesion may be weaponized through a multitude of public and private organizations. In order to deal with

these multitudes, she illustrates what collective action work toward better design and problem-solving may look like.

The third article, “Growing the Otome Game Market: Fan Labor and Otome Game Communities Online,” provides insights into the practices surrounding otome games, Japanese-originated games specifically marketed to women that typically feature topics related to romance and dating simulations. Of primary importance in what author **Sarah Ganzon** highlights is the processual and agentic motivations of this amorphous fan blogging community. Resonant with Radway’s (1984) foundational work that drew attention to emancipatory practices associated with reading of romance novels that could be dismissed as sexist, Ganzon presents how the growth of otome game communities worldwide represent a complex set of motivations and circumstances.

The final article, “(Re-)Balancing the Triforce: Gender Representation and Androgynous Masculinity in The Legend Of Zelda Series,” provides research into the globally renowned, critically acclaimed, and financially successful video game series The Legend of Zelda in order to demonstrate how traditional stances on what the hero/protagonist may look like in terms of gender and sexuality are dynamic. **Sarah Stang** engages the nuances of gender representation in a male-dominant industry, while drawing attention to the dynamic between an ever-diversifying and visible fanbase, with a reluctance to decentralize maleness in corporate structures and practices. The illuminating theoretical contribution to how gender is cast in games indeed derives from corporate culture and practices that replicate and perpetuate established and powerful gender roles, that, though tropes unto themselves, require persistent effort to engage and critique.

Collectively, the articles in this issue peek behind the curtain regarding how who is at the games tables and also at the boardroom tables are interrelated and codependent. Systemic barriers to women in the game industry extend well beyond mere STEM education and training and into access and retention in the workforce (Chee, 2016). One might see similar, though less obvious, manifestations of circumstances that precipitate attrition of minoritized and racialized individuals in the industry as a whole. This special issue specifically focuses upon and showcases work with the express purpose of lending particular insights into the typically marginal or invisible aspects of games and play. Given that original scholarship is rare toward this goal and sometimes faces barriers to seeing the light of day through publication, this collection is all the more valuable in its mission. Ultimately, the work here comes from a deep-seated desire for games and game communities to be better understood, better for play, and better for more of humanity.

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