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Play Globally, Act Locally: The Standardization of Pro *Halo 3* Gaming

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws from an audio-visual ethnography of a North American community of competitive [Halo 3](#) players, documenting the similarities in players' embodied and verbal performances of professional gaming, across local, national and international events. I demonstrate that mapping the material landscapes of an emergent 'e-Sports' industry in North America is central to understanding the highly constrained gender subjectivities associated with and performed through competitive video game play. Applying actor-network theory to an analysis of the technological infrastructure common to each e-Sports event I attended, I show how elite team-based *Halo 3* gaming becomes homogenized and standardized through the collective work (and play) of actors both human and non-human, virtual and material. This approach provides a methodological means for identifying and accounting for continuities and similarities across disparate contexts, linkages made possible by a shared apparatus for networked, co-situated competitive gaming. One of the effects of this apparatus is to bring young and predominantly male bodies together in close proximity, eliciting embodied performances of competitive digital play that are at once hyper-masculinized and deeply homosocial.

KEYWORDS

e-Sports; Halo; gender; World Cyber Games; Major League Gaming.



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INTRODUCTION

In the past several years in North America, an e-Sports industry has emerged that frames digital play as a professional, intensely masculinized sport with its own leagues, mainstream sports media coverage, and cadre of 'cyber athletes'. Following the lead of established e-Sports industries in South Korea (Jin and Chee, 2008) and Europe (Rambusch, Jakobsson and Pargman, 2007), [Major League Gaming \(MLG\)](#), the most visible and most successful North American e-Sports organization, televises its tournaments – its main draw is team-based competition in the Xbox 360's *Halo* franchise – and offers lucrative rewards for its most successful professionals.¹

This paper draws from my doctoral research with a community of competitive *Halo 3* players based in Toronto, Canada. I report on the three different local area network (LAN) gaming events in which my audio-visual ethnography of pro *Halo 3* play unfolded: a small-scale, grassroots gaming club in Toronto, Canada, the Toronto stop on the 2008 Major League Gaming (MLG) Pro Tour, and the 2008 [World Cyber Games \(WCG\)](#) in Cologne, Germany.

I document how a configuration of material and virtual technologies common to each event helped 'format' players' embodied performance of elite, competitive gaming. This shared socio-technical apparatus accounts for how and why professional *Halo 3* play at the events I attended largely looked and even *sounded* the same from one event to another, regardless of players' cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Employing actor-network theory, particularly as articulated by Bruno Latour (1992, 2005), I explore how the constitutive elements of this 'structuring template' for competitive *Halo 3* gaming worked to 'frame' (Latour, 2005, p. 194) the embodied actions and communicative resources of players. The virtual and material agencies I examined – the gameplay settings and virtual arenas used at each event, rules for conduct in co-situated play, and the material configuration of chairs, desks, consoles and screens - co-created 'LANscapes' of elite, competitive team-based play that remained remarkably similar across venues, from the cramped quarters of a gaming club in downtown Toronto, to the polished, highly-corporatized WCG convention hall in Cologne, Germany.

The resulting depiction is of a digital 'technoculture' (Crogan, 2006; Giddings, 2007) where highly-specialized forms of play are prescribed not only by a heavily-gendered discourse around pro-gaming, but also by a technological assemblage that regulates how participants interact with one another and the game. This analysis makes clear that the emerging professionalization of console-based competitive gaming in North America is enacted through, and made possible by, a standardization of the apparatuses required for co-situated tournament play. Furthermore, it demonstrates the ways in which, by bringing young male bodies together into a space that is otherwise discursively constructed as hyper-masculine, this stable socio-technical apparatus produces a very highly-constrained range of interactions between players that are deemed acceptable by this community: forced to sit close together, these players tend to engage in only the most heteronormative forms of physical contact.

CYBER ATHLETICISM

The masculinity enacted in the competitive gaming events reported on here is enacted through the discursive association between gaming and sports, and the sexualization, marginalization, and exclusion of women (Taylor, Jenson, and de Castell, 2009). Players are often described (by each other, journalists, and promoters) as athletes and as young men whose innate competitive drives somehow transfer to, and are satisfied by, competitive gaming. In *Game Boys*, a journalistic investigation of competitive [Counterstrike](#) players in North America, Michael Kane (2008) repeatedly plays up his participants' involvement in athletics. The coach of the *Counterstrike* team he focuses on is an ex-college football player (p. 110), while the team's star player was an accomplished athlete in high-school until injuries put a halt to his career (p. 112). Largely on the basis of these two examples, Kane claims that competitive gaming "is for athletes too old for the junior varsity team and not good enough to make varsity. So they get their competitive fix where they can, in e-Sports" (p. 113). However tautological this line of reasoning may be (pro-gaming is athletic, because those that play it are athletes), it works to buttress the discursive association between gamers and athletes: competitive gaming is another outlet for the 'inherent' competitive drive of the athletes who participate.

Similarly, in competitive gaming journalism and on official websites, players are described as possessing game-related skills that are somehow analogous to 'real life', male-dominated sports. Kane, for instance, notes that the former star athlete and *Counterstrike* star is highly-regarded in the competitive community for his skills with the sniper rifle. Kane even suggests a certain amount of transfer between the skills required for baseball pitching and those demanded of *Counterstrike* sniping (p. 113). In promotional videos for Major League Gaming (MLG), the largest and most successful e-Sports league in North America, players are described as possessing the reflexes and hand-eye coordination that far exceeds those of 'normal' humans (see, for instance, the MLG's first Top Ten highlight package, at <http://espn.go.com/video/clip?id=3253039&categoryid=3208334>). Similarly, an interview with a MLG pro called Strongside describes the player's rise to success as if he were a dedicated athlete, citing the "daily training regimen" he underwent in order to "refine" his "raw talent" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzx9ARA-pjs>).

These rhetorical strategies invoke the masculinized world of professional, mainstream North American sports, represented and popularized by the National Football League, National Basketball Association, and Major League Baseball. In the face (and often in spite) of ongoing attempts to open professional sports to female participation, the North American sports-media industry continues to celebrate the hypermasculine: physical violence against self and others, aggression, individual skill, and the desire and ability to inflict pain and humiliation over those less capable (Brackenbridge, 2002; Messner, 2007; McDonagh & Pappano, 2008). Women (and most men) are regarded as lacking the physical capability or 'guts' to participate in these lucrative arenas on equal terms, even as female athletes in many mainstream sports undermine the physiological rationales for keeping female athletes and leagues separate from - and lesser than - their male counterparts (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008). In invoking *this* particular sporting tradition, then, the North American pro gaming industry, and Major League Gaming in particular, constructs a similarly misogynistic and exclusionary set of criteria around who can play. This is the discursive terrain that I encountered in my ethnography of competitive *Halo 3*

tournaments, through which participants' embodied interactions become intelligible as performances of 'cyber athleticism'. As I demonstrate in the following sections, these performances are rigidly constrained by the technological and material configuration of e-Sports tournaments.

STUDY DESCRIPTION

My ethnography focused primarily on participants at a small-scale competitive gaming club, named NerdCorps,² in Toronto, Canada. At the start of my research in March 2008, NerdCorps had been running monthly competitive *Halo* tournaments (beginning with *Halo 2*, and then moving to *Halo 3* upon its release in Spring 2007) for four years at various venues (game stores, bars, art galleries) in Toronto. For the duration of my research, I worked as the club's videographer, recording monthly tournaments, interviewing the small group of about twenty young men and women (aged 16-21) who regularly attended events, as well as the two event organizers (who called themselves 'Generals', following their appropriation of militaristic language), and producing promotional videos. In August 2008, I attended Major League Gaming (MLG)'s Toronto Open, the only Canadian stop on the North American organization's pro circuit and, for many NerdCorps players, the focal point of their participation at NerdCorps events. This event, the second time MLG hosted a tournament in Toronto (or any other Canadian city), was a major draw for the NerdCorps participants, almost all of whom used MLG-endorsed game settings, rules, and arenas at NerdCorps LANs and in their online Xbox Live play.

My fieldwork culminated in November 2008, when I had the chance to follow the top NerdCorps team, Final Round, to the finals of the World Cyber Games (WCG) in Cologne, Germany, after they had won the Canadian national qualifiers for the WCG *Halo 3* tournament. Final Round's qualification for this large-scale, high-profile tournament afforded me a chance to document a global competitive gaming event (described in its press release as a "World Cultural Festival") that drew over 800 participants from 78 countries, to compete for bronze, silver and gold medals in fourteen different games, including *Halo 3*.³

My observations at NerdCorps events and at the 2008 MLG Toronto Open illustrated the extent to which participants geared their play towards MLG tournaments. The Generals deliberately framed their small-scale events as training grounds for MLG play, deploying the same virtual arenas and game settings in their tournaments as those used on the MLG tour. At the MLG event in Toronto, therefore, I was not surprised to see that gameplay generally looked the same as I had observed at NerdCorps events, albeit within a much larger, more polished and corporatized venue.⁴ The *Halo 3* tournament at WCG, on the other hand, involved players from around the world, representing different nations, cultures and linguistic backgrounds – and yet, I found that WCG *Halo 3* play looked and even *sounded* remarkably similar to what I had seen at both NerdCorps and MLG events. Players' embodied actions, including the cadence, distribution, and *content* of their verbal interactions, how they sat, and their physical contact (or lack of) during and between matches, were similar to those I had observed and recorded at the North American events.

To account for these similarities, I turn to Bruno Latour's (2005) articulation of (and introduction to) actor-network theory (ANT). In *Re-assembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (2005), Latour puts forward ANT, "an object-oriented sociology for object-oriented people" (p. 74), as a means of mapping the

choreography between human and non-human, including material, actors. In Latour's view, the establishment and maintenance of social phenomena are made possible through delegating agency to non-human objects. Agency is therefore not a property of humans exclusively, but of a relation between humans and non-human actors to which certain properties, powers and responsibilities have been delegated. As Latour says, "things" not only "determine" or "serve as backdrop for" human action – they "allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on" (Latour, 2005, p. 72). In this way, technologies not only mediate but prescribe certain forms of action. Latour (1992) uses the mundane and seemingly simplistic example of a door to illustrate these notions of prescription and delegation: a door does not just enable travel from one side of a wall to another, but its hinges, locks, doorknob, springs, and the material it is made of all contribute to how and under what conditions passage is made possible.⁵

Studies of digital play have started to make use of this approach (Giddings, 2007; Giddings and Kennedy, 2008; Linderoth and Bennerstedt, 2007), but they have yet to do so with regards to the material apparatuses – the hardware, seating arrangements, desks - in which we play (see Figure 1, a photograph of the LAN setup at MLG Toronto 2008).



Figure 1: Halo 3 play at MLG Toronto 2008

GAMING LANSCAPES

Associations of humans and non-humans, Latour notes, follow "structuring templates" (p. 196),⁶ material and immaterial blueprints that format work carried out across different locales. This section looks at some of the elements that constitute the structuring template of the LANs I attended: a blueprint generated out of practical considerations, limited resources, technological requirements, and agreements around which rule sets and configurations to use, collectively realized by game developers, tournament organizers and promoters, and players.

From an ANT perspective, these LANs are "concatenations of actors" (Latour, 2005, p. 58) that string together game settings and rules, players, televisions, consoles and other equipment into networked, competitive play. I work outwards from a consideration of the *Halo 3* game settings and formats used at competitive LAN's, to an account of how

material equipment (hardware and furniture) supporting LAN play were organized at each event. Together with the discourse around cyber athletes, this network of actors produces stable terrains in which players' bodies, including how and when they can move, touch one another, leave their seats, and speak to one another, are tightly constrained and, as a result, play largely looks the same across these different LANscapes.

Gameplay Specs

Virtual agencies in player-versus-player (PvP) *Halo 3* play are built into the design of its arenas, weaponry, game formats, and rule settings,⁷ all of which can be customized. Players and tournament organizers choose: which arenas are used; which weapons players start with and what other weaponry and power-ups, such as camouflage and added damage reduction, are made available over the course of play; objectives and victory conditions (the most common in *Halo 3* being "Slayer", in which two teams compete to see who gets the most "kills" against one another, either within a set time limit or to a certain number of kills); whether players can wield two weapons at once ("dual wield" – disallowed at every event I attended); and, number of players per team (*Halo 3* allows up to 16 players in an arena at once, but again, I only saw 4v4 play at larger tournaments, with some 2v2 play used as warm ups at NerdCorps events). Advance settings include considerations such as how long power-ups last, how long it takes for players to re-spawn after they are killed, and even how much damage particular weapons inflict. The game settings for a particular event, or even for certain game formats, read like the specifications for a complex technological system: like other forms of highly-technologized work, they require and presume a high degree of literacy with a codified/specialized system of meaning (Kress, 2003; Lanham, 1994; Lankshear, Gee, Knobel, and Searle, 1997).

For competitive *Halo 3*, settings are saved as a single file that can be uploaded and downloaded for activation on players' Xbox 360s, making it possible for settings to be easily accessed, shared, and deployed by hundreds of thousands of players. [MLG's settings for tournament play](#) served as the template not only at MLG Toronto, but also at NerdCorps and WCG. That MLG's settings were the primary configuration used at each event I attended made this highly specified version of the game, quite literally, the 'only game in town' for the (global) community of competitive *Halo 3* gamers. It prescribes which tactics and skills are of particular value, compelling players to develop and refine specialized competencies: aiming and shooting while jumping; leading shots (i.e. aiming at a point where players *anticipate* their target to be) shaving valuable milliseconds off of weapon re-load times; executing multiple kills with minimal ammunition;⁸ and, performing and responding to precise, timely verbal instructions from other players ('call-outs').

Soundscapes

By the time I attended the MLG Toronto Open, I had observed six monthly NerdCorps events (March to August 2008) and had noticed the extent to which organizers and players positioned these events as training grounds for MLG play, rehearsing the same tactics, using the same call-outs, and employing the same game specifications, formats and arenas as at MLG tournaments. Attending the WCG Grand Finals, however, I was surprised by the extent to which I could understand verbal communications among the many non-English speaking teams in the *Halo 3* tournament. I not only heard and watched non-English-speaking teams employ English-language descriptors of specific

areas on specific arenas, but I also noticed that call-outs were uttered in similar ways and at similar times: the content, as well as cadence and occurrence of call-outs, remained largely consistent despite linguistic differences between teams. The similarities in terms of *what* players said as they uttered call-outs illustrates the degree to which players from different linguistic backgrounds employ a set of English-language descriptors, developed by a primarily English-language/North American community, in their team-based play of a game published exclusively in English.

The similarities I observed in not only what was said during game play, but how and when, can be accounted for by looking at the pace of competitive *Halo 3*, as dictated by the specific gameplay settings and arenas used consistently across each tournament. The timing of where and when weapons and power-ups appeared in specific arenas remained the same across events, and therefore, the timing of players' call-outs, signaling to their teammates the location of the power-ups, weapons, and opponents, followed roughly the same pattern. With the conditions for virtual combat so intensively scripted, players' strategies for, and reactions to, these conditions became similarly prescribed, making this one very significant way in which players were 'acted upon' in their embodied performance of *Halo 3* competition by a network of virtual agents.⁹

(X)Boxed-in bodies

Despite the stark differences in the scope and semiotics of the venues I attended, the organization of hardware and seating I saw at each remained the same. Medium-sized TV screens (22-27") were perched on rows of tables, each with an Xbox 360 attached. Rows of game terminals (TVs and 360s) faced each other, permitting opposing teams to physically face one another during play, separated by the screens and consoles. Tables were placed in tightly spaced rows, and game terminals were similarly spaced tightly along tables. The cords, powerbars, modems, and routers required to power and connect terminals were clumped in the middle of tables, resting either on the ground beneath the tables or, at NerdCorps events, partially on the tables (see Figures 2, 3 and 4 for images of the LAN setup at NerdCorps, MLG Toronto 2008, and WCG 2008, respectively). With the exception of NerdCorps events, where there was very little spectatorship except during the finals, spectators were separated from the play area by structural barriers (stanchions and/or walls).



Figure 2: A typical NerdCorps Halo 3 LAN, Summer 2008



Figure 3: The MLG Toronto 2008 Halo 3 LAN



Figure 4: The WCG 2008 Grand Finals Halo 3 LAN

Hardwired play

The close proximity of players to screens and to each other was a product, partially, of limited space, though the expansive floor of the 2008 MLG Toronto Open suggests that the layout of the venue alone did not account for the tight spatial constraints of all the LANs I attended. To a significant degree, the lengths of the cables involved in setting up a LAN – RCA cables, ethernet cables, and especially, power adapters - limited how far apart game stations (and players) could be. The relatively short length of power cables in particular, and the arrangement of power outlets (and electrical circuitry),¹⁰ fairly rigidly prescribes how far apart game consoles can be spaced (see Figure 5).



Figure 5: "Missing masses" (Latour, 1992)... of wires

Another association of wires and bodies concerns the rule, at all the LANs I attended, against players' use of wireless Xbox 360 controllers. While players were invited (and required, in most cases) to bring their own controllers, the rules at each site required the use of *wired* controllers, which connect to Xbox 360 consoles via USB cables. As wireless controllers can be assigned to any console in range, their use can significantly tamper with and slow down the organization of a LAN. Here, a hardware affordance with regards to Xbox 360s – the ability to assign any wireless controller to any Xbox 360 console – is expressly forbidden at *Halo 3* LANs. In turn, the rule mandating users to physically connect their controllers to their console producing a further constraint upon players' embodied actions, constraining how far away from the console (and as a result, how close to one another) they could sit.

This material blueprint is arguably as limiting with regards to players' embodied movement as the game settings are with regards to players' in-game actions: movement, motion and play in both the virtual and real spaces of competitive *Halo 3* play are constrained along rigidly-prescribed routes. This organization of bodies in narrowly confined spaces also seems to generate a bodily discipline and self-regulation among participants. In these intensely homosocial spaces, it appeared that young males' close proximity to each other was strongly 'policed' in order to maintain and re-affirm participants' heterosexual identities (Martino, 2000). At each event, participants negotiated the tight physical boundaries of the LAN apparatus by positioning themselves in ways that minimized intrusion into one another's spaces; their default posture during play seemed to be leaning forward in their chair, elbows resting on knees, head and neck craned towards the game terminal (see Figure 6). Participants reached across one another's bodies only to point at on-screen events unfolding on another teammate's screen, or to 'high-five' one-another after a victorious round. On rare occasions – after a particularly heated or significant match, such as in the latter rounds of MLG play, and upon Final Round's victory at WCG – I observed participants briefly getting up from their seats to hug one another or pat each other's backs, as well as to mock or shake hands with their opponents. Losing teams seemed to touch less often, usually in the form of reassuring pats, fist-bumps, or fives.



Figure 6: Typical posture during Halo 3 LAN play

As this analysis suggests, the postural immobility (punctuated by brief periods between play, involving usually celebratory touching and relaxation of a rigidly-held posture) that characterizes competitive *Halo 3* play is not only a product of the attentional demands of frenetic, fast-paced and highly complex gameplay, but also of the material conditions of an apparatus that brings male bodies into close (and, from the point of view of heteronormative masculinity, potentially unsafe) proximity. These forms of safe or sanctioned physical contact at competitive gaming tournaments can be seen as “technologies of the self” (Foucault, 1988) – forms of self-regulation and bodily discipline in the service of a gendered subjectivity. The regulation of gendered subjectivities heavily invested in the association of gaming as a form of digitally-mediated athleticism does not happen simply through participants’ embodied interactions with one another. Rather, I argue that this regulation has been at least partially “delegated” (Latour, 1992) to the socio-technical apparatus of LAN events that push male bodies into close proximity, creating a space in which only the safest forms of heteronormative male-to-male contact –congratulatory gestures such as high-fives and the clichéd ‘male hug’, punctuated by claps on the back – are allowed.

Rules of Conduct

The blueprint for LAN organization I look at here also includes the rules of conduct NerdCorps, MLG and WCG enforce to govern participants’ behaviour. These rules (MLG’s are online at <http://www.mlgpro.com/2009-Pro-Circuit-Conduct-Rules>) all prohibit touching LAN hardware (TVs, consoles, connectivity equipment) -- the only exception being that players can adjust their TV’s volume, so long as they do not turn it up past a certain level.¹¹ MLG and WCG also prohibit arguing with and ignoring the instructions of tournament referees. The only significant difference in rules of conduct between WCG and MLG regards taunting and mocking opponents. At MLG events, a certain amount of ‘trash-talking’ is sanctioned, even invited: it is part of an attempt to connect the event to North American spectator sports, where banter between opponents is often a celebrated accompaniment to competition. MLG draws its lines at what it calls ‘excessive’ use of vulgar language and taunting, as well as physical abuse (or the threat of) between players. The many outbursts I saw at MLG Toronto, where victorious teams leapt out of their seats to yell or laugh or point at opposing teams, were all within the range of ‘acceptable’ behaviour. WCG, however, enforces strict rules prohibiting any kind of

taunting, as part of its attempts at ensuring a degree of 'Olympism' (Hutchins, 2008) and fair play. Players are not even allowed to stand up between rounds. In the semi-final *Halo 3* match between France and Netherlands, one of the French players left his seat to point derisively at a player on the Dutch team following their first-round win: the entire French team was penalized by awarding the Dutch a victorious round (the French went on to win and play Canada in the finals).¹²

With the exception of WCG's prohibition of celebration/standing up, however, the rules of conduct between MLG and WCG were largely the same, and largely superfluous; much of the work for regulating bodily discipline was delegated to the technological layout of events. For instance, the barriers separating participants from spectators (stanchions at MLG, short walls at WCG) embody and enforce the stated rule at each event prohibiting spectators from entering the play area. While the differences in their rule sets may denote significant differences between MLG and WCG in their notions of proper 'sporting behaviour', particularly around what kinds of celebration are sanctioned, they prescribe very similar rules around how and when participants can interact with spectators and with the material equipment. Like other elements of the shared blueprint for competitive *Halo 3* play (game settings and the technological apparatus), these codes of conduct constrain players' performances along narrow channels.

In their look at *Counterstrike* play, Rambusch, Jakobsson, and Pargman (2007) show that regional differences in 'play styles' disappear at the elite level of play showcased at LAN events like the World Cyber Games (p. 162). They do not, however, account for this homogeneity. My analysis suggests that such (alleged) differences – and even, to a significant degree, differences in players' linguistic backgrounds – largely disappear among elite players because of a standardization of material and virtual technologies across the local contexts where professional play is carried out, at least in this study.

IMPLICATIONS

In this paper, I have developed this insight with regards to competitive *Halo 3* play by accounting not only for the virtual agencies at work in LAN play, but for the *material* agencies as well. These sets of non-human actors make up a structuring template for competitive *Halo 3* play that produces important similarities and overlaps in terms of the skills and embodied work demanded of participants across different LANscapes. Here, I outline one possible implication of this analysis, which concerns the limits of studying gaming as a purely or even primarily 'localized' phenomenon, as if the material and discursive terrains of digital play do not extend to or imbricate other spaces and times.

'Glocal' Play

Thus far, accounts of the non-human agencies at work in game play have stopped short of accounting for the *material* actors involved. This paper broadens this methodological lens by engaging in a consideration the conditions of play in and across different LAN tournaments. As groups of *Halo 3* players gather at local, national and international events to engage in professional competitive gaming, the similarities not only in what they play but *how*, as well as in how they communicate with one another both verbally and non-verbally, can only be fully accounted for by examining the configurations that connect the virtual and material technologies common across these sites. While this insight is *not* intended as the basis for the kinds of generalized accounts of digital play that T.L. Taylor (2006) cautions against, it does qualify her assertions about the unpredictability and heterogeneity of localized gaming cultures.

In the view I offer here, a degree of homogenization across localized sites, what I describe as the formatting of players' embodied performances, is made possible in so far as the same technological agencies are deployed across them, enacting what Latour (2005) calls a "redistribution of the local" (p. 193). Actor-network theory maps the empirically traceable linkages between particular contexts, each of which are at once local by virtue of occurring in specific times and places, yet also global in so far as they "overflow" with agencies coming from outside that time and place (p. 196). By pointing to a shared technological blueprint for formatting the different LANscapes in this study, this paper demonstrates the importance of identifying and making sense of the degrees to which, and ways in which, non-human agencies can standardize and render stable the embodied work carried out by participants across different locales, particularly for communities engaging in such highly-technologized practices.

In doing so, this study lays the theoretical and methodological groundwork for explorations of digital gaming communities that approach gendered subjectivities as the product of interactions and relationships not simply between other individuals, but also between specific and contingent configurations of non-human agents. Extending into the field of digital games studies the work of feminist science and technology scholars (Haraway, 1991; Wajcman, 1991) and their insights into how technologies become 'gendered', this analysis provides a productive theoretical framework for exploring how other socio-technical assemblages involving digital games and gamers become masculinized or feminized. That is, it looks to gender as both an effect and a condition of the transactional, co-constitutive relationships between humans and non-humans at play.

ENDNOTES

¹ For instance, in 2008, "pro" *Halo 3* player "TSquared" signed a sponsorship deal with Dr. Pepper, major sponsor of the North American-based Major League Gaming Circuit. TSquared's face now appears on select bottles of Dr. Pepper (<http://www.mlgpro.com/content/page/196498/DR-PEPPER-SIGNS-ON-AS-THE-OFFICIAL-BEVERAGE-OF-THE-2008-MAJOR-LEAGUE-GAMING-PRO-CIRCUIT>).

² The name of the organization I worked with, and the names of teams and players involved with it (including the monikers players used in tournaments), have been changed.

³ Please see the WCG 2008 website (http://www.wcg.com/6th/history/wcg2008/wcg2008_overview.asp) for a more complete overview of the event.

⁴ Regardless of venue and city, MLG layouts remain consistent: a 'main stage' facing a production booth and seating section, flanked by rows of networked televisions and Xbox 360 consoles.

⁵ Please see Latour's "Where are the Missing Masses? Sociology of a Door" (Latour, 1992) for a more nuanced discussion (<http://www.bruno-latour.fr/articles/article/050.html>).

⁶ Latour is quick to point out that "structuring templates" themselves are produced through "local", "face-to-face" interactions, giving the example of an architect planning the layout of a classroom (p. 196).

⁷ Unlike Seth Giddings' (2007) analysis of *Advance Wars 2*, which focuses on the behaviours of the computer-controlled characters players must face off against, player-versus-player *Halo 3* has no overt/personified 'agents' of this kind.

⁸ For instance, a highly coveted skill with the sniper rifle is taking out multiple opponents with a single shot. By exploiting brief milliseconds where opponents' are lined up in a row, such as when players are weaving back and forth (strafing) down a narrow corridor, a single well-timed sniper rifle shot can pierce through multiple opponents' heads, killing them all.

⁹ This insight might account for North American success at the *Halo 3* WCG tournament, where the Canadian and American teams, neither of which have placed in the top 8 at MLG tournaments thus far, placed 1st and 3rd respectively. As one journalist explained in conversation to me at WCG, *Halo 3* is far more popular among 'pro-gamers' in North America than it is in Asia and Europe, where there are already significant competitive gaming communities around *StarCraft* and *Counterstrike*, respectively (Fieldnotes, November 9, 2009). It may be that European and Asian competitive *Halo 3* gamers are still catching up to their North American counterparts in terms of their competency with the game and, as importantly, with MLG game settings.

¹⁰ The Xbox 360s used at the events I attended required a substantial amounts of power (as one of the NerdCorps organizers described to me, running two consoles on a single electrical circuit will blow most "average" home or business circuits); mapping the electrical circuitry required for large-scale Xbox 360 LANs might provide further insight into the technological constraints of LAN play and subsequent implications for players' embodied performances.

¹¹ For theories that connect gaming to the cultivation of technocultural competencies (for instance, Simon, 2005), this rule forbidding players' *touching* the technological infrastructure, much less re-tooling it – and players' general acquiescence towards this rule – might be significant.

¹² T.L. Taylor (2009), in her account of prior WCG tournaments, examines the enforcement of rules for *Counterstrike* and *Starcraft* tournaments. She comes to the conclusion that far from being 'hard coded' into the game, rule formation is a contingent and dynamic process of negotiation among players, organizers, referees, and technologies.

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