

# Going Where My Heart Will Take Me: Editorial, Volume 9, Part 3

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*It's been a long road, Gettin' from there to here.  
It's been a long time, But my time is finally near.  
I will see my dream come alive at last, I will touch the sky.  
And they're not gonna hold me down no more,  
No they're not gonna change my mind (Warren & Watson, 2001)*

## Introduction

Welcome to the twenty second edition of *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, and our first special issue this year. If you have never read *Exchanges* before, then you are obviously most welcome, as it is always a pleasure for us to have new readers. Naturally, you also as welcome if form part of our ever-growing community of regular readers too. As always, this editorial piece provides an overview of the pieces published within the main body of the issue, alongside offering some reflections spurred by its contents. Moreover, if you read on you will also find I have once more highlighted the various ways readers can contribute to future *Exchanges* issues: especially as part of our 10<sup>th</sup> birthday issue. There is also a guide to engaging with the journal via our social media presences, which where you will frequently find myself holding forth on quotidian developments and matters of relative import to the title.

### *It's Been a Long Road*

Technically speaking this issue of *Exchanges* you hold in your, figurative, hands was the third special issue we began preparatory work on. Although, with developments in the interim it actually comprises the fourth one to reach publication. From my perspectives this issue started its life as a conversation over coffee at SOAS, London between myself and the two issue leads, Ben Schaper and Filippo Cervelli. Outline plans were made to host an event mid-2020 to which we would gather scholars from around the world to contribute to both the workshop and then subsequently the special issue. We all left that first meeting with a strong consensus that we would likely see a publication of the issue somewhere early to mid-2021.

Oh, what sweet summer children we were in those pre-COVID days.

As everyone reading this will be acutely aware, the events of 2020 happened and our plans for the issue, like so many others that year, suddenly went awry. Thankfully, the shift to remote working and dealing with the lifestyle impacts arising from the pandemic only introduced a delay to our proceedings rather than bringing them crashing to an end. Nevertheless, with the sudden new working arrangements, additional responsibilities and precautionary challenges faced by ourselves and our potential contributors, the special issue took somewhat of a longer gestatory trajectory before it could emerge into the light of day. Incidentally, if you have a desire to learn more about the genesis of this project, you can hear myself in conversation with Ben and Filippo in an episode of the *Exchanges Discourse* podcast from last year (**Exchanges, 2021**).

I am glad to report that by 2021 we were able to bring things back on track. Alongside successfully hosting the workshop over two days and receiving the subsequent manuscript submissions, we were able to also recruit another willing cohort of associate editors to assist in the issue's development. All of which means as articles have begun in recent months to emerge from their editorial and review cycles, and certainly since the publication of our April issue (v9.2), getting this issue ready for launch has been increasingly my central focus. While I always experience elevation and relief with any issue's publication – what editor wouldn't - given the lengthy duration of this particular project I suspect the sense of satisfaction upon its completion and release will be a markedly greater.

In keeping with my own disciplinary research traditions of making one's bias abundantly clear, I should state the issue's theme is one directly of personal interest to me. I guess, in describing my editorial experience on the issue, Jen Barber probably phrased it best:

*I am one of them. That's why you need me. I am your conduit. I am your bridge. Ich bin ein nerd! ('Tramps Like Us', 2008: 17:07)*

Consequently, editing the issue, reading the manuscripts and undoubtedly working alongside my two special issue leads and contributing authors has been a particular pleasure. We routinely refer to *Exchanges* as a journal 'by and for early career researchers', although it's noticeable we have increasingly received more content from established scholars in recent years. Nevertheless, given this special issue's title theme – *the lonely nerd* and our examinations of their cultural representations – combined with the wonderful exchanges enjoyed back at our instigating 2021 workshop (**Johnson, 2021**), I am half tempted to suggest for one issue only we are a journal by and for nerds. However, I might also be inspired to suggest in their heart of hearts – are not all scholars nerds when it comes to their disciplinary and subject passions?

That aside, developing this issue has been an undoubtedly genuinely, fascinating and rewarding experience for myself and I hope this has also been as true for all those who have contributed to its creation in any manner. Certainly, I can only thank my two collaborators for instigating this project on that frosty November day and wish them every success for their future ambitions too.

## **Papers**

Enough self-congratulatory prose! Let us turn to consider the actual intellectually nutritious morsels within this issue, as we turn to consider the contents in a little detail.

### *Introduction*

While I will be highlighting the volume's contents here, I would strongly encourage readers seeking a more contextualised introduction to the issue's theme, to consult **Filippo Cervelli** and **Benjamin Schaper's** excellent introductory essay. In it the authors contrast the prior reductive, stereotypical representation of the 'lonely nerd' as being recontextualised as 'cool' within a technological age. They highlight how within this special issue, the collected authors works can be viewed as a move away from a predominantly Anglo-American 'hegemony' of interpretation to better encompass the nerd experiences of many nations. This introductory paper concludes by offering by way of interpretive lens a 'five analytical category' system to represent a more diverse positioning of the modern 'nerd' ([1](#)).

### *Articles*

Moving to the major articles within the issue, we begin with **Benjamin Schaper's** *Conquering the Meatspace* wherein he explores conceptions of the lonely nerd within the films *The Social Network* and *Who Am I*. With the modern, public-sphere conception of the 'lonely nerd' as embodied by 'tech-bro' figures such as Zuckerberg and Musk, such examinations continue to make such an examination a timely consideration. In particular the paper explores the disparities and contrasts between these 'lonely' conceptions as presented within both movies, in presenting a more nuanced and even positive image of the nerd ([11](#)).

Next, an article which strongly inspired me to seek out the media in question is **Janée Burkhalter's** piece entitled '*Gus, don't be the comma in Earth, Wind & Fire*'. The paper expands scholarly discourse concerning the representation of the black nerd 'blerd', *Burton 'Gus' Guster* in the American TV programme *Psych*. Burkhalter considers how Gus can reveal much about nerds, Blackness and types of loneliness throughout his portrayal in the series. The author notes especially how despite a lengthy show (8 seasons), how the character is not able to embrace an intimate,

committed relationship to alleviate his 'most painful' type of loneliness (30).

With its recent MCU (Marvel Cinematic Universe) debut, **Alena Cicholewski's** exploration of loneliness within the *Ms. Marvel* comic books feels like a particularly timely addition to our discourse. In '*A place where everybody is a legendary hero... and a total dork*', Cicholewski considers the role 'nerddom' plays within the series, and how the community presents a safe space of likeminded individuals for the titular hero to escape interpersonal conflicts and familial pressures. While acknowledging its community as idealised, the author nevertheless heightens an awareness of the diversity of nerd culture as going beyond that comprised solely of a 'white, socially inept young men'. Furthermore, the author argues such work encourages greater understanding between diverse communities through its positive exemplars (46).

In *Within So Many Ways to be an Outsider*, **Sharon Coleclough** examines concepts of loneliness within popular television cultural, specifically as framed within the French TV series *Caïn* and the lead character *Nassim Borel*. The author notes that while nerds may be often perceived as outside the cultural norm, they are often presented within media as possessing qualities which convey a heightened value on them. Hence while they are still typically positioned as 'outsiders', such a detached status allows insightful exploration, counterpointing and exposure of more 'typical norms' and mores within their counterparts (62).

For **Rebecca Lewis** musical theatre is an oft neglected area of cultural studies investigations. Correcting this omission, the author offers a psychoanalytic exploration of *The Simultaneity of Loneliness and Popularity in Dear Evan Hansen*. In doing so Lewis draws parallels between the titular character's experiences and those of many in American society. Alongside an examination of the play's acts, the author further considers how its motifs of loneliness and social belonging can stimulate conversations. In this way, musical theatre can within audiences serve to engender reconsiderations of its themes while simultaneously engaging them in its narrative (84).

In *From Misfit to Guide*, author **Daniele Durante** addresses themes of social alienation and perceptions of the *otaku* and *hikikomori* within Japanese culture. At times perceived 'nonconformists', threats to national 'cohesion', Durante highlights how issues of personal anxiety and dejection may be drivers for their societal isolation. It is this latter view, as exemplified through the game *Persona 5*, that the piece explores to a greater depth: focussing on the character *Sakura Futaba*. As such, the author argues *Persona 5* constructs a revisionist and more positive socialised representation of these 'hermit' social groups (104).

**Natakua Rumak's** article *Sherlock And Shārokku: Nerdy Detectives* meanwhile explores the 'archetypal features' of Sherlock Holmes, in the context of his evident 'nerd-like' characteristics. When viewed through a post-modern lens, the paper argues how modern depictions of such characters seek to explore them from original angles, and thus provide fresh depictions. By introducing shifts in focus, established characters can be naturalistically transplanted into new environments. In this manner, Rumak explores recent British and Japanese representations of Sherlock and how despite the 'drastic changes' from the original source materials, the detective's 'archetypal identity' is maintained and recognisable ([124](#)).

In *Social and Spatial Representations of the Nerd in Donnie Darko* **Kwasu Tembo** tackles questions relating to nerds and their interactions with social and personal space. Acting as a close reading of the outstanding film *Donnie Darko*, the paper considers the titular character, and what their experiences reveal concerning socio-spatial relations as a nerd representative. It concludes by challenging assumptions of disaffected and dissociated 'others' as occupying spaces as nerds, and in particular positions Donnie himself as occupying more of a cultural outside space ([145](#)).

**Carolin Fleischer-Heininger** takes as her central thesis *Loneliness as the New Human Condition in Murakami Ryū's In za miso sūpu*. Beginning with an overview loneliness within early Heisei Japan (largely contemporaneous to the 1990s), the paper progresses to consider Murakami's literary contributions. Through hermeneutically considering the titular work, Fleischer-Heininger considers how loneliness of the period is emblematic of the cultural characteristics recognisable within 1990s Japanese society ([162](#)).

**Christopher Smith** expands on the themes of lonely nerds by considering its intersection with queer identities and nonconforming gender expressions. In *Consumable Bodies, Consumable Self* the author explores the queer potential and otaku subjectivity within the manga *Genshiken*. Smith argues that *Genshiken* frames the otaku subculture as a social space ready, willing and able to accept such nonconforming gender and sexual identities, because their media and social relationships. Nevertheless, the author sounds a note of caution in accepting such positive conceptualisations as they may diverge from the authentic experiences of queer otaku ([185](#)).

Finally, we arrive at **Filippo Cervelli's** piece, *Saved by the Nerd*, which casts its analytical lens upon Hosoda Mamoru's anime *Summer Wars* and its conceptions of the 'lonely male otaku'. Cervelli argues that *Summer Wars* acts as counternarrative to such stereotypical perceptions, through offering an otaku-centric which is tale riven with interpersonal riches. Additionally, with a shift to a rural setting, this further dissociates its narrative from that more frequently encountered 'lonely nerd' embedded within an urbanised and technologically-enabled cultural base (203).

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## **Calls for Papers**

I would be remiss if even in this special issue, if I let our two principal calls for papers to pass-by unhighlighted.

### *Authentic Interdisciplinarity: Anniversary Issue Call for Papers*

Tying into the 10th anniversary issue of *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal* (October 2023) we are seeking contributions which seek to celebrate, challenge or define ideas around authentic interdisciplinarity. Authors may wish to draw on their own research practices and activities or adopt a more holistic stance in engaging with the prior literature and activities within this broadly demarcated field. As is *Exchanges'* tradition, we will potentially consider any work which its authors choose to present which seeks to address the themes evident within this call.

Contributing authors may wish to draw upon methods or methodological practices within a variety of field. Alternatively, they may consider explore if there are discrete or disparate audiences for interdisciplinary rather than unitary disciplinary work in academia today. Additionally, pieces considering, rationalising or amplifying cross-disciplinary discourse concerning centring on the concepts of authentic interdisciplinarity would be warmly received.

Potential authors looking for further inspiration to frame their articles are encouraged to download the full text of the call, which is available on the journal's site (**Exchanges, 2022a**).

### *Open Calls for Paper*

Thematic call aside, you will be pleased to know the journal welcomes submissions throughout the year on any subject, with no deadline. Articles which pass our review processes and are accepted for publication will subsequently appear in the next available issue. As *Exchanges* has a core mission to support the development and dissemination of research by early career and post-graduate researchers, we are especially pleased to receive manuscripts from emerging scholars or first-time authors.

However, contributions from established and senior scholars are also welcomed. Further details of our open call requirements can be found online (**Exchanges, 2022b**).

Submissions may be made under our peer-reviewed articles or review articles format, or alternatively our editorially reviewed shorter critical reflections and conversation formats.<sup>i</sup> There are no submission deadlines and manuscripts are accepted for consideration throughout the year. Manuscripts which pass our review requirements will be published in the next available regular journal issue. Regular issues of *Exchanges* are typically published in late April and October.

### *Informal Approaches*

The Editor-in-Chief welcomes approaches from authors via email, or video-call, to discuss prospective articles for themed and regular issues of the journal.<sup>ii</sup> However, abstract submission or editorial discussions ahead of a submission are not a requirement, and authors may submit complete manuscripts without any prior communication. Authors are encouraged to include a note to editor indicating the format of their work (e.g. article, critical reflection etc.).

All submitted manuscripts will undergo editorial review, with those seeking publication as research articles additionally undergoing formal peer-review by external assessors. Editorial decisions on manuscript acceptance are final, although unsuccessful authors are normally encouraged to consider revising their work for later reconsideration.

Advice for prospective authors appears frequently in our podcasts, editorials and throughout the *Exchanges* author portal pages (**Exchanges, 2022c**). *Exchanges* is a diamond open access, scholar-led journal, meaning there are no author fees or reader subscription charges (**Fuchs & Sandoval, 2013; Bosman et al, 2021**). Authors retain copyright over their work but grant the journal first publication rights as a submission requirement.

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### **Forthcoming Issues**

Our next regularly scheduled issue (v10.1) will hopefully be arriving in late October 2022. However, progress towards our other two special issues - relating to the Anthropocene and pluralities of translation – continues apace. As of this editorial's writing I couldn't estimate if they will see publication ahead of the next regular issue, but at the same time I wouldn't entirely bet against this eventuality! Nevertheless, I am happy with the progress being made on them both.

Behind the scenes I have been talking with collaborators concerning calls for further special issue contributions to be launched in 2023 and 2024. While these discussions are well advanced, it is perhaps too soon to talk about these in any detail as of yet. Nevertheless, I hope to be able to enlighten our readers further in the October issue.

As always, keeping a close watch on the journal's announcements page and social media accounts will ensure you see any notifications, new initiatives or calls as they are announced.<sup>iii</sup>

Naturally, as EIC I continue to welcome further approaches and exploratory discussions for further special issues from our contributor community both home and abroad.

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## **Acknowledgements**

My thanks as always firstly to all our authors and reviewers for their vital intellectual contributions towards this issue. Without you, producing a quality-assured, peer-reviewed, scholar-led publication would not be possible.

Especially thanks undoubtedly goes to Ben Schaper and Filippo Cervelli, for instigating this special issue in the first place, alongside being two of the most gracious and enthusiastic collaborators it's been my pleasure to work alongside. It has been a wonderful have our fantastic associate editors working on the issue too. A round of applause therefore for Anna Rivers, Jo Parsons, Pallavi Joshi and Valentino Paccosi. Each of your contributions has been deeply appreciated by myself, the special issue leads and I have no doubt your respective authors too. Thank you!

My continued thanks to the members of our Editorial Board for their suggestions for suitable reviewers during the production of this issue. While none of them worked directly on the manuscripts for this issue, nevertheless they have remained valuable source of insight. In a similar vein my gratitude too to Rob Talbot and Yvonne Budden at the University of Warwick for their technical support. My thanks as well to the IAS' John Burden and Sarah Penny for their various conversations and suggestions relating to the journal's progress.

Finally, my grateful thanks as always to our publisher, the [Institute of Advanced Study](#) at the University of Warwick for their unceasing financial and strategic backing for *Exchanges* and our related activities. Notably, I'd like to especially salute our outgoing Director, Prof Peter Scott for his unfailing support and enthusiasm throughout my tenure on the journal.



## Continuing the Conversation

*Exchanges* has a range of routes for keeping abreast of our latest news, developments and calls for papers. In-between issues to continue the interdisciplinary exchange of experience underlying our operations you may wish to listen to our growing range of podcasts or read our blog posts. Please do contribute as we value hearing the thoughts of our author and readership communities.

Editorial Blog: [blogs.warwick.ac.uk/exchangesias/](https://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/exchangesias/)

Linked.In: [www.linkedin.com/groups/12162247/](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12162247/)

Twitter: [@ExchangesIAS](https://twitter.com/ExchangesIAS)

As Editor-in-Chief I am also always pleased to discuss potential publications, collaborative opportunities or invites to talk further about *Exchanges* and our activities. Contact me if you would like to arrange a consultation via Teams – or even (dare I say it) on campus!

### *The Exchanges Discourse*

More new episodes of the companion podcast series, *The Exchanges Discourse*, have appeared over the past few months. As always, episodes continue to include a focus on including advice for new academic authors. Once more with the publication of this issue, I will be inviting our latest authors to appear as guests on the podcast over the coming months, as a compliment to their written work.

I heartily encourage all readers of the journal, and especially first-time authors, to like, share and subscribe to our episodes: available on all major podcast platforms, and specifically hosted on the *Anchor.fm* site.<sup>iv</sup> All episodes are free to stream or download and listen to at your leisure. Naturally, we also welcome approaches from potential guests or suggestions for topics we could address as part of future episodes too.

Podcast: [anchor.fm/exchangesias](https://anchor.fm/exchangesias)

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Gareth has been *Exchanges'* Editor-in-Chief since 2018. Along with a doctorate in cultural academic publishing practices (Nottingham Trent), he also possesses various other degrees in biomedical technology (Sheffield Hallam), information management (Sheffield) and research practice (NTU). His varied career includes extensive experience in running regional and national professional bodies, academic libraries, project management and applied research roles. His professional and research interests focus on power-relationships within and evolution of scholarly academic publication practice, viewed from within social theory and political economic frameworks. He has extensive skills in areas including academic writing, partner relationship management and effective communication practices. He is an outspoken proponent for greater academic agency through scholar-led publishing. Gareth is also a Fellow of the *Higher Education Academy*, and hosts a number of podcasts, including *The Exchanges Discourse*.



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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> **Word counts:** We do not include abstracts, references, endnotes or appendices for the purposes of establishing a submissions word count. While submissions just over or under their word count will still be initially considered for review, those significantly in excess of these numbers will be declined and returned to their authors with advice for revision.

<sup>ii</sup> **Contact Details:** The EIC's address is given at the head of this article, and on the Exchanges Contact pages. <https://exchanges.warwick.ac.uk/index.php/exchanges/about/contact>

<sup>iii</sup> **Initiating Special Issues:** If you are seeking a suitable home for a dedicated volume of the journal we certainly welcome outline discussions for the ways in which *Exchanges* could become your publication partner. While our facilities are modest, we have been excited to work with various scholars on special issues past and future (**Exchanges, 2022b**). You are warmly invited to contact myself as Editor-in-Chief to discuss any prospective ideas, without commitment. You may also wish to listen to a past episode of *The Exchanges Discourse* (**Exchanges, 2020**) wherein I discuss the thinking and pragmatic concerns around initiating a special issue collaboration with our journal.

<sup>iv</sup> **Podcast:** The podcast is also streamed on Spotify, Apple and Google Podcasts and other podcasting platforms. Search for it by name.