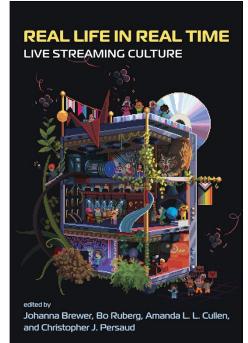Johanna Brewer, Bo Ruberg, Amanda L. L. Cullen, and Christopher J. Persaud (Eds.), **Real Life in Real Time: Live Streaming Culture**, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2023, 352 pp., $40.00 (paperback).

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The frenetic chat streams, the flood of emotes, and the player's medium close-up superimposed on the game feed—these are the common elements composing the visual vernacular of live streaming. This phenomenon has gained popularity in recent years, especially in gaming circles, thanks to platforms such as Twitch and Facebook Gaming. This compendium from MIT Press, curated by Johanna Brewer, Bo Ruberg, Amanda L. L. Cullen, and Christopher J. Persaud, delves into various aspects of this phenomenon. *Real Life in Real Time: Live Streaming Culture* provides an excellent overview of the current debates surrounding live streaming and will serve as a useful resource for scholars approaching this area of inquiry.

The book's opening chapter contextualizes live streaming as a phenomenon built on multiple gendered and racialized histories rather than portraying it as the latest revolution in content creation and consumption. Bo Ruberg rewrites the history of live streaming by offering an alternative narrative to the one focused on White male visionary entrepreneurs and gamer bros. Instead, Ruberg argues that the origin of live streaming can be traced back to webcam modeling (camming) and the innovations in content production brought about by the "camgirls" of the 1990s. Erasing this history, Ruberg argues, would mean marginalizing the work performed by women, queer folks, transgender people, and people of color and would legitimize social media companies' current attempts to deplatform sex workers. The issue of marginalization resurfaces in the other chapters of Section 1 (chapters 1–4), where the authors discuss how streaming culture and practices reinforce existing forms of racial and gender discrimination. Gabriel Pereira and Beatriz Ricci discuss such forms of discrimination concerning Brazilian artists performing live during the pandemic while Olivia Banner focuses on live-streamed surgeries as sites where race and gender politics are performed within the dominant White, patriarchal frame. The intersection of two themes, the COVID-19 pandemic and healthcare, resurfaces in Kelli N. Dunlap, Marie Shanley, and Jocelyn Wagner's chapter about the role streamers had in supporting people struggling with mental health issues during the pandemic.

In Part 2 (chapters 5–8), the authors delve into the darkest side of the streaming world. They discuss the various forms of trolling, harassment, and abuse that streamers often have to face in their quest for visibility. Olivia Rines uses the case of PaladinAmber, an Australian female Twitch streamer, to demonstrate how cyberbullying can be tackled through satire and irony. Rines highlights how streamers'

responses to hateful attacks can help reform community guidelines and have broader implications on platforms' governance. Arun Jacob and Christine H. Tran offer a historical overview of disruption in streaming, covering practices such as Zoom bombing, the infamous practice enacted by uninvited trolls of spreading toxic and offensive content in Zoom meetings, to swatting, a subgenre of doxxing in which the target is reported to police to have their residence raided by the SWAT team. They view these forms of aggression as cultural techniques that build on previous forms of disruption. By doing so, they encourage readers to focus on the moments of disruption as revealing the technological conditions that systematically position streamers as the target of hate campaigns. To conclude this section, Aaron Trammell and Andrew Zolides explore how audiences police their communities and resist attempts at promoting diversity and inclusion. While Trammell focuses on tabletop game communities, Zolides focuses on Twitch live streams. Both cases reveal similar homophilic tendencies, which are enforced through toxic forms of policing that determine who is and who is not part of the community.

Authors of Section 3, "Broadcasting Gender and Sexuality," explore another fold of the live-streaming world. They discuss the challenges that content creators face in navigating the heteronormative culture of live streaming, the monetization models that come with it, and the need to appear authentic to their audiences. In addition to discussing the problems affecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) streamers, the authors foreground the critical role, actual or potential, that live streaming–based communities have. For instance, Jin Lee introduces readers to the *ssulpulgi* genre, a confessional style of storytelling where LGBTQIA+ streamers reveal intimate details of their past sexual and emotional lives. Christopher J. Persaud examines how the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent halt to in-person events led to the rise of live-streamed performances of queer nightlife. Persaud uses Black Girl Magic as a case study to showcase how live-streamed drag performances brought to light issues of race, sexuality, gender justice, and labor that are often overlooked in mainstream representations of drag. Amanda L. L. Cullen discusses how the pregnant body is abjectified (Creed, 1993) in live streaming and how motherhood is framed as abnormal, monstrous, and unpredictable, therefore needing scrutiny and control. This commodifies intimacy and invites viewers to enter the personal sphere of pregnant streamers. Lastly, Matt Knutson's interview with Super Smash Bros pro player Sasha Magi Sullivan focuses on the issues experienced by Magi as she was transitioning while competing at the professional level.

There is something to live streaming that sets it apart from other online media forms. The colorful interfaces, the frenetic rhythms, the cacophonic and intertextual ensemble of slang, abbreviations, and emotes. These elements create a unique feeling, which the authors describe and explore in Section 4. For instance, how can we talk about Twitch without mentioning emotes? In this respect, Nathan J. Jackson provides an in-depth analysis of how the PogChamp emote came to represent values that Twitch considered antithetical to those animating the platform—or, at least, its designers. Removing the PogChamp emotes from the platform shows how Twitch is deeply connected with and reactive to events happening in real life. The author concludes by reinstating the importance for Twitch to safeguard its user base, especially those users who are historically subject to harassment by the default (i.e., masculine, heteronormative, White) gaming culture. Similarly, Emma French analyzes how Wizards of the Coast, the publisher of the popular tabletop game Dungeons and Dragons (D&D), has made efforts to increase diversity among the players featured in their promotional materials. This initiative, coupled with the

support from fan-run channels like Critical Role, has helped to break the stereotypes surrounding tabletop players and has brought more visibility to a diverse group of nerd celebrities. In addition, French continues, live streaming of actual plays has lowered entry barriers to D&D and offered new, diverse players with new modalities to familiarize themselves with the sometimes complex rule systems governing the game.

It would be limiting to think of Twitch only as a platform for viewing content. Michael Anthony DeAnda shows how Twitch can be used as a platform for creating meaning by examining the case of Twitch plays Pokémon. This experiment allowed Twitch users to collectively control the game Pokémon Red avatar using the in-channel chat. DeAnda's analysis illustrates how live streaming can facilitate collaborative meaning-making between users and brands. Twitch's ability to create meaning is also evident in Evelynn Kersting, Janelle Malagon, and Casey O'Ceallaigh's experience as participants of *The Arena*. This was a weekly live show run by students that provided a safe space for them to test academic concepts, engage in meaningful interactions with others, and participate in critical discussions about various games. Through the analysis of their own experiences as participants and hosts of the show, the authors discuss how the affordances of Twitch fit nicely with the needs of graduate students and create possibilities for remediating the seminar room, thus making it possible to expand the space for higher education and learning beyond the institutional boundaries of modern academia.

The book's final section advances an intriguing idea for researchers studying media industries. The idea is to examine live streaming's aesthetic, economic, and cultural aspects in a manner that is consistent with, rather than distinct from, the analysis of previous cultural industries such as music, print, and television. The authors in this section demonstrate the value of following such an approach. Charlotte Panneton talks about the phenomenon of "grinding" and its relationship with Twitch's monetization strategy. Her analysis sheds light on how grinding affects the streamer's individuality and promotes self-exploitation. On the other hand, Robyn Hope provides a historical account of the practice of speedrunning, which involves completing a game as quickly as possible, and how it has evolved from an elitist activity to a means of social change.

The book ends on an optimistic note, presenting a positive view of the future of live streaming. In the closing statements of the book, Johanna Brewer highlights the potential of live-streaming platforms as a means for social transformation and advocacy. Despite the use of surveillance technologies, the exploitative monetization schemes, and the toxic culture that pervades these virtual spaces, Brewer emphasizes how content creators from minority groups are actively transforming streaming platforms through their live performances. Like flaneurs discovering the beauty of urban landscapes designed to control their inhabitants, live streamers use surveillance and exploitative technologies to foster inclusion and diversity in gaming culture.

Reference

Creed, B. (1993). *The monstrous-feminine: Film, feminism, psychoanalysis*. London, UK: Routledge.