

# Introduction: Performing Rurality with Computing

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## 1 THE GENESIS OF OUR SPECIAL ISSUE ON RURAL COMPUTING AND HCI

From the recognition that computing users are socially and culturally situated in space and place [18] to the contemporary third (and beyond) waves of **human-computer interaction (HCI)** research that recognize the ubiquity of technology and its relationship with context, identity, and subject position [8, 19, 20], the location of computing has long been a concern of HCI and its related disciplines. Yet, computing research has been slow to leave the labs and hallways of big metropolitan universities [3] and corporations. Furthermore, computing researchers have been reticent to think outside the normative and harmful framings of engineering and technological progress embedded in the growth narratives that drive the contemporary Information Age [2]. This special issue offers an alternative narrative, one in which computing intersects with rurality.

While rural places are just one context in which to locate our research, they are culturally, socially, and economically complex, and home to nearly half of the world's population. Though HCI research has fruitfully looked to these rural places since its earliest days [17], rural places have often been approached from a deficit model. As we set out in this call, more recent scholarship in HCI has instead begun to amplify the already innovative practices and opportunities of rural communities. For example, research on the role of social technologies for LGBTQ people living in rural towns [14, 16], agricultural experimentation and sociotechnical interventions in rural

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Taiwan [32], and hunters and small farmers in the Midwestern United States [45, 48] reveal alternative relationships between people and technology. The urban bias of user-generated content on sites like Wikipedia [26], the creation of digital community boards in the rural UK [38, 53], the innovative potential for repair work as design in rural Kenya [58], and the deployment of interactive voice forums for farmers in rural India [39] demonstrate the need for unique technological interventions in rural communities. Overall, this research highlights characteristics of rural areas that make them potentially ill-suited for technologies designed with the city in mind—sparse populations, limited Internet bandwidth, practices in primary production environments (e.g., agriculture, forestry, and fishing), and different modes of knowledge production and sharing.

Rural areas thus offer us novel insights on topics such as privacy, location, values, and space for imagining more diverse forms of information infrastructures and technologies. HCI can and is offering an important counter to popular media that often emphasizes the apparent helplessness of rural people in the face of complex sociopolitical and economic crises—whether it be about outmoded infrastructure, lack of jobs, and health crises.

This special issue is just one effort in a recent timeline to extend a study of rurality in HCI research and beyond. This particular timeline started in 2017 with a “Birds of a Feather” lunch at the ACM **Computer-Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing (CSCW)** conference in Portland, Oregon, that brought together conference attendees interested in the topic of “rural computing.” The initial conversation unearthed questions that, at this point, we understand as being central to a rural computing and HCI project: What is unique about the rural? Is Internet access the key issue? What is the difference between rural computing and research that is considered **Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICTD)**? What about rurality matters for design? A small group of lunch attendees met shortly after to discuss the possibilities of a workshop on the topic of rural computing. The resulting workshop took place at CSCW 2018 [13]. Bringing together a methodologically diverse group of international computing scholars, this workshop sought to answer some of the initial questions at the prior year’s lunch, unpack the commonalities in our rural research, and chart a path forward for rural computing research that could address some of the barriers that we faced in our research (e.g., limited opportunity for collaboration at our home institutions; recognition of rurality as a valid framework for doing computing research). For many of us, this was the first time that we were in a room with scholars who were also asking what it meant to research and design for rural places and people. The connections made that day were not only generative, but also fruitful, leading to an ACM *Interactions* article that took cues from feminist and postcolonial research to wonder what it would look like to design from the rural rather than for the rural [15], and now to this special issue.

## 2 MOVING BEYOND THE DEFICIT MODEL

While this special issue is now a part of a genealogy of rural computing research, we owe much to scholarship in rural studies, especially from sociologists and geographers who have been critical to our understanding of rurality and the urban-rural relations that dominate so much of rural computing scholarship. Much of existing computing research performed in rural places has been about bringing them “up to speed” with the technological capabilities of urban places [17]. In other words, existing research in rural computing has been about achieving technological parity with urban areas. An overwhelming focus on parity reflects histories of rural development that focus on growth and opportunity. Critical conversations in rural sociology and demography have long questioned the relationship between rural development, growth, and decline [7, 35, 44], and most recently shown that in some cases rural decline is primarily a statistical artifact [27]. In other words, “success” in rural communities, which often looks like economic and population growth, results in them being transformed, for statistical purposes, into urban areas. In fact, as Johnson and

Lichter [27] argue, in the context of the United States, the proportionate growth of urban areas from comprising 67% of the American population in 1970 to 86% of the American population in 2017 is entirely due to the reclassification of rural places as metropolitan.

By falling into the trap of urban parity, that rural areas just merely need to be brought up to date (e.g., have the same types and quantity of technical infrastructure and digital tools), we argue that computing research could replicate this same statistical bias. By merely replicating urban narratives of access, infrastructure, and use, computing researchers are potentially taking away from the possibility of rural communities for ideas, inspiration, interventions, and design. The idea that rural computing could be a place to explore assets and opportunities of/for rural places is in line with recent work in HCI and CSCW that has sought to push back against deficit framings of computing research. Drawing from theories and practices of asset-based community development [37], this scholarship [6, 28, 56] encourages researchers and designers working with marginalized or otherwise underfunded communities to reframe their work towards discovering unrealized or latent assets in communities, rather than relying solely upon deficits to inspire and frame design interventions. We believe that a research agenda that focuses on urban parity through a lens of rural deficits is antithetical to understanding the realities of rural computing experiences, and we crafted this special issue with that sentiment in mind.

### 3 OUR PROCESS

Our initial call for submissions to the ToCHI Special Issue on Rural Computing and HCI was distributed in October 2019. We received over 40 abstracts and, after two rounds of reviews from our special issue editors and external reviewers, eventually accepted six articles for our special issue in February 2021. During the process, we asked authors to ensure that they addressed the goals outlined in our call for the special issue as follows:

- Define rural, incorporating participant perspectives where possible. Studies in HCI often do not define rurality or instead rely on definitions based on population density or size [17]. By asking authors to explicitly define rurality, our special issue sought to diversify and explore the very notion of rurality in computing and HCI research.
- Include a discussion of how rurality shaped the findings or what the implications are for our understanding of relationships between computing and rurality.
- Not rely solely on novelty of field site or population to frame contributions.

While one might expect any special issue to face its usual delays, ours happened in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Originally, we had planned for a publication date of December 2020. Work then became difficult for everyone. We extended and made flexible many of our deadlines. Some authors had to unfortunately, but understandably, withdraw their work. Coming into 2021, we are appreciative to our authors for their patience.

### 4 SITUATING THE AUTHORS

Taking the metaphor of place perhaps too far, we reflect on our own proximity to rural places. These reflections look both inward to our own identity as HCI researchers and outwards to our relationships to rurality. However, as Rose [42] highlights, there is always an inherent contradiction in trying to situate oneself with respect to their research subjects—no matter how we seek to transparently situate ourselves with rurality in a certain “landscape of power” in order to build nuanced relationships, we cannot help but always remain somewhat in-between ourselves and our subjects. It is this uncertainty that we do not shy away from below:

**Norman Makoto Su.** My family dreamt of living on a large one-acre plot of land, escaped suburbia, and left for San Martin, California—a rural census-designated place an hour south of the Silicon

Valley, arguably the birthplace of computing. This special issue speaks to my identity of having the rural and computing in my neighborhoods. I have both hated and loved the rural. I have sought its nature and solitude and, at other times, envied the riches of the “proper” Bay Area. Since then, I have experienced many ruralities [47], such as those by my current Midwest institution at Indiana University Bloomington. I have come to value my experience with rurality, though incomplete, as informing my research on design and cultures. Underlying my research on rural cultures is a conviction that knowledge work tied to rurality is undervalued and that HCI research to make visible the innovative practices and values of rurality can prove beneficial for everyone.

**Jean Hardy.** As a tenure track faculty member at a land grant university, my work is deeply intertwined with legacies of settler colonialism in rural America. Like many other American universities, my employer was able to establish its position of power because of endowments raised from the sale of rural land historically protected and preserved by Indigenous people [30]. As a gay cisgender man, I grew up in and spent time in many rural communities that were very accommodating to me as a white man, yet often felt like they were never going to be accepting of me fully. Escaping to the city, like so many other young queer people, I found a community that shaped who I am. But coming into my professional identity as a researcher, I returned to the rural places where my family lives, finding important and impactful communities that are home to myself and my research. This special issue is close to my heart as someone who often feels like they are not doing the right kind of computing research. I am much more concerned with interpreting the impact of ruralness on contemporary technological life than I am with translating rural experiences to better serve the needs of the corporations that have become synonymous with that same technological life. I hope that rural computing work moving forward, inspired by the words in this Special Issue, can recognize its own complexity as it grows in scope and impact.

**Morgan Vigil-Hayes.** I was raised to recognize and identify with multiple facets of my heritage and I am the embodiment of Hispanic, Indigenous, and White Settler ancestors who came together across time and rural spaces through the consequence of violence, collaboration, and survival. Geographically, I was raised in the San Joaquin Valley, a Californian rural context defined by distance from prosperous cities and agricultural dependence. Based on this location and my continued personal and professional experiences, I am deeply committed to serving rural communities through scholarship. My dissertation training focused on characterizing and designing community-based network infrastructure for rural tribal communities through a computer networking lens. In my role as an assistant professor of computer science at a public institution, my research continues to focus on rural information networks and extends this focus to examine both the human and technical infrastructures that support information for educational and health equity applications in rural tribal communities. As a faculty member at a public institution that sits less than 50 miles from multiple tribal communities, my personal and professional experiences expose me to rural realities and resilience on a daily basis. I am excited for this special issue to share lessons from the rural with the broader HCI community.

**Tiffany Veinot.** I approached this editorial role from my social location as a female, white, tenured faculty member and administrator at a well-resourced public university in the United States. My own location also involves being raised in a large, Canadian city, but working professionally on issues of violence against women in rural areas, and receiving my doctoral training at an urban university with large, surrounding rural areas. My dissertation research was grounded in these surrounding rural areas, which were primarily economically based in agriculture and manufacturing. This research also extended to two other rural regions of Canada: an island with a strong history of fishing, and a mountainous area known for mining, forestry, and tourism. This work focused on HIV/AIDS information exchange in these areas, and I currently have a project focused on

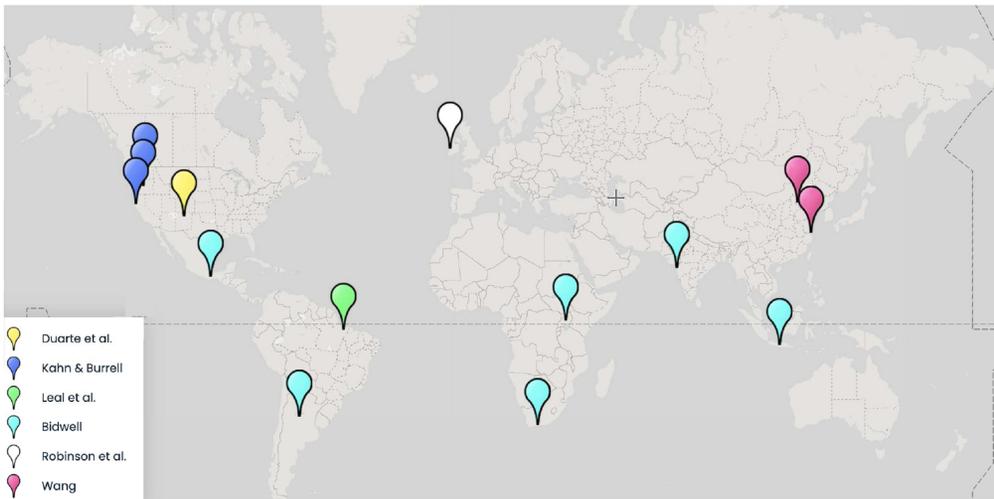


Fig. 1. Localities represented by the articles in this issue.

transportation to health care for people with HIV in the rural Midwest. This previous research has given me a strong commitment to investigating rural areas as productive places in which there are both resource challenges, and tremendous strengths upon which HCI research can build. I am also strongly committed to work that centers marginalized people, so I value research that investigates the sources of marginalization and offers new ways of thinking about rural differences. Grounded in my family’s own experiences of poverty and illness, I also have a strong commitment to work that addresses rural health disparities and their origins.

**Rob Comber.** I am a white cisgender man from the Republic of Ireland, with a permanent academic position in a publicly funded Swedish technical university. I come to this special issue editorial as something of an outsider, having joined the editorial team as a last minute replacement for the irreplaceable Shaowen Bardzell. For this special issue I also come somewhere in-between as a researcher—I have done and am doing work in rural and remote contexts, including rural-adjacent but urban-placed practices such as agriculture, but do not consider rurality to be the object of study or frame from within which the work I do should be considered. Instead, my concern is with how typically marginalized people and communities [41, 46] utilize technologies and design practice within the space and places they find themselves [51, 52] to assert alternatives to the socio-political and epistemically violent status quo. The deficit model of rurality, narratives of the digital divide, and even the romanticisation of the simple life of rurality, all point to the erasures of the ways in which people live in and use technology in ruralities. Instead, I view ruralities, such as those demonstrated in this special issue, as productive alternatives to the status quo.

## 5 THE ARTICLES: PERFORMING RURALITY WITH COMPUTING

We now turn to the six articles of our special issue through the lens of “performing” rurality with computing. The articles represent a diverse set of localities (Figure 1) across Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas—rural is everywhere. While not all articles explicitly adopt this perspective, on the whole, we see the articles in our issue as informing a symbolic view of rurality [17]. This symbolic view veers away from the meanings of rurality rooted in population density or differences with the urban [31] toward how people relate to, feel, talk about, and themselves employ rurality [12].

How might this perspective intersect with computing and HCI? By seeing rurality as an active, not a staid concept that is continually configured and replicated by people and their artifacts [29], we can begin to see rurality as *performed*. Woods [57] sees promise in focusing on performance in rural geography; it goes beyond the limitations of social constructivism to act as a bridge between the experiences of the rural and its real materials dimensions—the places, artifacts, and resources that are so important and unique to rurality [15]. As our past work [15, 34, 48, 55] and the articles in this issue attest, technologies play an important role in this performance of rurality. For us as researchers, this performativity is also reflexive: technologies in rurality are at once a mundane feature in the research endeavours and the means through which we understand what it means to be “rural.” In sum the articles in this special issue, perhaps instigated by our call for papers (cf. Section 3), approach technologies as artifacts situated in political-economic structures that enact ruralities which are social and embodied.

It is from this approach that we see these articles as centrally concerned with their definitions of rurality. Certainly, ICTD work often adopts a symbolic approach in unpacking the socio-technical practices in rural fieldsites [1, 49], and overall we see synergy at work that is grounded in rurality and ICTD [4, 54]. However, a preoccupation with unpacking technology’s role in reifying *rurality itself* is what we see as a unique contribution of this special issue to ICTD and HCI generally.

In this introduction, we highlight the performance of rurality with computing across three themes: infrastructure, situated use, and geography. With *infrastructure*, technologists—who may not be from rural places—can imagine new, vibrant ruralities together with rural communities by building Internet infrastructures. On the other end, infrastructuring can also mean re-enacting and reinforcing current social inequities, even in new infrastructures.

*Situated use* highlights the contingent nature of technological practices and values in rural places. Technologies enact values (e.g., consumerism) that may be at odds with the values of certain ruralities such as sustainability. A classic CSCW-trope, technologies are then sometimes refashioned to resist the overreach of outside influences in rural places. In other cases, we see technologies amplifying ingrained, gendered practices (such as those in some cultures of farm work) of the rural.

Lastly, turning to *geography*, we can locate rurality’s performance in terms of relations between spaces. Technology allows urban spaces to have pockets of experiential rurality in them. Technologies can perform a kind of rurality that rejects certain (or all) kinds of proximity to places (e.g., like urban spaces), instead reveling in its own unique location, controlling its own visions of rurality. Instead of rejecting proximity, new forms of technological practices inexorably intertwined with their relation and history to urban spaces can arise in the rural.

We caution that these themes of rural performance with technology are not discrete. Nevertheless, they serve as a useful starting point for unpacking technology’s role in the performance of rurality, to identify the opportunities and tensions that arise as rurality and technologies mutually define and adapt to each other.

## 5.1 Infrastructure

Often, rurality is defined by its lack of infrastructure or distance to critical infrastructure [33]. However, the truth of rural infrastructures is more nuanced than mere absence. In some cases, rural HCI researchers have noted that the relationship between infrastructure and rurality is defined by freedom, abundance, and autonomy. Perceptions of the rural with respect to infrastructure are also deeply contextual. Tensions between infrastructural dearth and abundance are consequences of policy for how resources might be used and prioritized and are highly dependent on local, regional, and national policy frameworks [5, 10, 24, 25]. Similarly, the perception of rural places as “removed” from infrastructure or as wellsprings of infrastructural opportunity largely depends on the social

infrastructures that are available to imagine, build, and maintain physical infrastructures [9, 21, 22, 40, 43, 59].

In this special issue, several articles engage with rurality and infrastructure. Marisa Elena Duarte, Morgan Vigil-Hayes, Ellen Zegura, Elizabeth Belding, Ivone Masara, and Jennifer Case Nevarez probe the complex social and political textures that shape the contours of broadband infrastructure in rural New Mexico in *“As a Squash Plant Grows”: Social Textures of Sparse Internet Connectivity in Rural and Tribal Communities*. The article highlights how wireless spectrum access policies formed in Washington D.C. and filtered through national and state agendas can disenfranchise entire communities and challenge tribal sovereignty over spectrum resources. The authors discuss how an action research approach grounded in awareness of colonial power structures allows technologists from “non-rural” spaces to engage meaningfully and sustainably with partners in rural communities to imagine, deploy, and grow around Internet infrastructure.

In *Rural Un-commoning: Women, Community Networks and the Enclosure of Life*, Nicola J. Bidwell expands this issue’s scope on infrastructure through an ethnographic investigation of the commoning of CNs across multiple sites in the Global South. Bidwell examines the striking tensions of the work of women who support and sustain community network commons and the male biases of technoculture that often exclude women from making decisions about and using community network infrastructure. This points to the complex interactions that take place between social power structures and the evolution of infrastructure in rural spaces and the implicit and explicit negotiations that are inherent to the design, deployment, and management of rural infrastructure.

## 5.2 Situated Use

Ruralities, as with other socio-spatial frames, position technologies’ adoption, use, values, and evolution as contingent. Technologies in rurality are typically recast among new needs for connectivity [13, 38], ecologies of human and worldly relations [23, 53], histories of labor and infrastructures [24], and practices of being including persisting and resisting in rural spaces [28]. Across all the articles that make up the special issue, this situated use of technology is evident, sometimes subtle and sometimes substantiating. And as Ursula Le Guin noted:<sup>1</sup> “Technology is the active human interface with the material world.” Throughout the articles in the special issue the focus is on digital technology, but whether it is the seemingly mundane use of mobile phones, social media, and technologies of remote working, or the exceptional reworking of technologies within rural contexts, the influence of ruralities produces new configurations of “use,” and “technology” in Le Guin’s terms, that call our attention to the intersections of normative (urban) design [14] and the resourcefulness of rural populations. Rurality seeps into the technologies and the practices of technology, and in some cases it breaks and remakes them.

In *Digital Technology at the Edge of Capitalism: Experiences from the Brazilian Amazon Rainforest*, Débora de Castro Leal, Max Krüger, Vanessa Teles e Teles, Carlos Antônio Teles e Teles, Denise Macahdo Cardoso, Dave Randall, and Volker Wulf examine pericapitalist practices in the Amazon and on the periphery of the global capitalist system. They highlight how rural community members draw on mobile phones to conduct entrepreneurship. While demonstrating the contingent nature of that technology—connected only on a windowsill; networking customers who are not networked—they also show the practices which they produce such as enforcing curation of consumerism and distancing social and sales interactions. This work too shows the resistance to the alliance of techno-capitalism demands, where growers seek new and direct routes to markets without altering their production. Here, the potential of the digital—to scale up contacts and thereby demand—is in contrast to the local values and situated practices of sustainable

<sup>1</sup>A Rant About “Technology”: <http://ursulakleaguinarchive.com/Note-Technology.html>.

production. Through these practices they resist demands for exponential growth, but maintain stable and diverse networks as a market. In this sense, the market forces implied by techno-capitalism are rejected and themselves made contingent on the pericapitalist values of the Amazonian growers.

Most striking is how contingent use becomes synonymous with rural ways of living. In *Rural Islandness as a lens for Rural HCI*, Sarah Robinson, Nicola J. Bidwell, Roberto Cibin, Conor Linehan, Laura Maye, John McCarthy, Nadia Pantidi, and Maurizio Teli detail their work on rural and remote islands of the west coast of Ireland where “islanding” is a resourcing practice through which technologies are made to work through an ethos and ethic of local resilience. The “outsider” technologies are remade in the fashion of and available technologies of the island; this make-and-make-do approach centers the situation of use and the situation of production.

Yi Wang’s article, *Living in A City, Living A Rural Life: Understanding Second Generation Migrants’ Experiences with Technologies in China*, on second generation rural-urban migrants draw our focus on the consequences across generations of the universalizing systems of national identity management. With hukou—the socio-technical infrastructure of geographic household residency, and thereby, citizenship in mainland China—the identity of rural migrants is attached to the persistence of one’s rural origins across generations. The consequences of this, in the form of the decontextualized application of legal residency, is that second generation migrants are excluded from participation as rightfully urban natives, including access to education. Trickling down from this, the conditions of daily living (economic, spatial, and social) directly impact on ownership and access to specific technologies (HDTV, PC, and gaming consoles).

In *A Sociocultural Explanation of Internet-Enabled Work in Rural Regions*, Zoe Kahn and Jenna Burrell evidence the historical and normative forms of technology-mediated work. In contrast to assumptions on the digital divide, they show how those in power in certain rural contexts, specifically white male ranchers, do not use or need to use technology to maintain power. Echoing findings on technology practices in patriarchal contexts in rural Bangladesh [50], instead the increasingly digital work of farm management is a task predominantly taken up by women. While narratives of digital empowerment hold true in some cases, here it is seen as a continuity in hegemonic and patriarchal oppression. This is an important point in how we understand the deficit model and its problematic framing: the increase of “digital” work is increasing work unevenly and along historical lines of oppression.

### 5.3 Geography

Rural areas are routinely defined or conceptualized based on their proximity (near and far) to urban areas. Common narratives pose that the more remote a rural place is or how far away it is from an urban area, the less influenced it is by urban resources. But rather than think of rural and urban areas as being distinctly separate, as if there is a distinct and material border that you cross when moving from one to the other, Doreen Massey [36] and other scholars in geography [11] encourage us to think relationally about space. Indeed, rural and urban areas historically have been reliant upon each other for different resources, services, and flows of people and capital. To highlight a computing analogy here: the precious metals that make most computing technology function are largely mined in rural communities by people originating from rural places. Yet those precious metals, once processed, are largely assembled with other material in the factories of large urban centers. The articles in this special issue each highlight unique and interesting aspects of geographic relationality that provide nuance and complexity to our understanding of computing in rural places and with rural mindsets.

In Wang’s work, we see the second generation migrants who live in the Shuimo Community—a typical urban village—having little connection to their parents’ rural hometowns. Discriminated

by their ancestry to the rural, they live in crowded shared rooms with little privacy and work long hours for little pay. In these huddled urban spaces, there are pockets of rurality. They enact rurality, enthusiastically consuming video content from rural content creators such as those featuring life in a rural village. This nostalgia for a rural past they did not experience gives them respite from the harsh realities of their lives, reducing their anxiety and providing positive affect. Thus, these technologies allowed second generation mingongs to create a shared nostalgia—to “reconstruct the ‘collective memory’ of their rural hometowns, even if they could never nor want to go back to their parent’s rural lives.”

With Robinson et al.’s work the concept of “islandness” is performed partially through the deployment of a radio platform. Geographically, islandness is of course inherently remote, but it relies on the lack of proximity to the population. Islandness is a virtue and rejects the need to be proximate, or connected, to the outside world. Interestingly, while islandness certainly helps to distinguish between the rural and the urban, it also highlights the differences between island dwellers—such as in different views about the future of the island, “as the boundedness of the island creates a heightened awareness and performance of identities.”

In their article, Leal and colleagues theorize the boundary between rural experiences in a small village in the Brazilian rainforest, the encroaching demands of largely urban capitalism, and the role of technology in facilitating material, economic, and environmental relationships between the residents and the outside world. Rather than relying on tired tropes of rural villagers as being somehow regressive and backwards, Leal et al. demonstrate that the residents of their fieldsite are active participants in seeking out a balance between leveraging their local resources for economic purposes by selling to outsiders, and not being overexploited by urban parties. Taking relationality seriously in their writing, Leal et al. argue that casting rural as “that which is not urban” presents it as a liminal space that is only enacted when the people who inhabit rural spaces merge into urban spaces. They argue that a framework of pericapitalism maintains that notion, but also preserves the autonomy of rural economic practices.

In their exploration of remote work practices and Internet-enabled markets, Kahn and Burrell emphasize the importance of rural-urban relationships in new forms of digital work. While the sites of their research are incredibly remote and distant from large metropolitan areas, their legacies of natural resource extraction provide a history to understand the economic relationship between rural and urban. This relationship continues through patterns of migration, through the lens of the urban-originating remote worker who seeks some sort of respite and different life in the rural. Access to broader national urban markets and urban travelers is essential for understanding how Internet-enabled remote work has become possible in these remote rural communities.

How rural spaces are proximate to local and distant cultures and their gendered practices is of concern in Bidwell’s work on community networks. Despite the promise of rural CNs—locally owned and operated telecommunication networks—as empowering spaces, Bidwell’s multi-sited ethnography in the Global South found local political and moral economies of commoning end up perpetuating the exclusion and marginalization of women. Long-standing governance structures where men do the decision-making were carried over to rural CNs. Distant organizations that hold dominion over technological expertise also end up affecting CNs; network technicians reinforce a “machismo” that views women’s bodies as not strong enough (e.g., in climbing up towers) for technical work.

## 6 THE RURAL IS RIGHT HERE IN HCI AND COMPUTING

Computing research has been, at least implicitly, predominantly the computing of cities. Given the geographic and economic diversity of rural computing and HCI research, “rural HCI” as a collection of scholars and scholarship, represents a unique opportunity to traverse the

developed-developing binary that is so prevalent in much of the computing research and which is often done in places deemed “underdeveloped.” This special issue foregrounds the rural, not as something “out there” [52], but rather as something, yes, distinctly vital, but something that intersects everyone’s lives.

As academics, we should challenge ourselves on how, “right here” [52], our own practices perform rurality whenever we do HCI research. We identified three themes on this performative perspective on rural computing that may tentatively point towards future trajectories: infrastructure, situated use, and geography. Overall, the articles in this special issue speak to the project of recognizing that our work is not merely—as Lilly Irani and colleagues [24] so succinctly put it with respect to postcolonial computing—“of making better design for ‘other’ cultures or places. It is a project of understanding how all design research and practice is culturally located and power laden.” The articles included reflect this positionality, the breadth of experiences represented, and the depth in which the articles think through and with rurality as a means of understanding and making sense of computing.

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