

# Streaming Persona as a Toolkit for the Analysis of Performance in Videogame Livestreaming

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Twitch, livestreaming, persona, performance, spectatorship

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Videogame livestreaming (hereon “streaming”) involves the synchronous sharing of videogame content, typically accompanied by streamer commentary and equipped with a text chat to enabled streamer-viewer interactions. Twitch.tv (Twitch) is synonymous with streaming and is one of the world’s most visited websites in any category. It is well-established that performance is a key attribute of streaming (Scully-Blaker et al. 2017; Taylor 2018; Woodcock & Johnson 2019) but the exact nature of this performance, and how one might examine it, is yet to receive sufficient scholarly attention. In this talk, I introduce *streaming persona* as a negotiated social identity performed by individual and collective (human and nonhuman) actors within a stream. Drawing upon a multi-year ethnographic study of Twitch now in its final stages, I argue that the idea of streaming persona expansively captures complex interactions between stream actors and, through the lens of performance, the effects of those interactions. To elucidate the concept I present an overview of streaming persona through its emergence from streamer performances of self and authenticity, collective behaviours and practices, rules, temporality, and videogames. Through these key pillars, I assert that streaming persona is more than a concept, but it is also a toolkit for the analysis of performance on Twitch. Streaming persona presents a novel approach for stream scholars that stands to unveil new insights into the sociality, culture, politics, and economics of the platform that attends to individual user actions and behaviours while contextualising them within individual streams and the platform as a whole.

Specifically, I frame streaming persona through five lenses that inspired my definition to demonstrate its scale and potential for additional applications. Firstly, I present perceptions of authenticity crafted by streamer performance, for which I extend upon theatre scholars Garde and Mumford’s concept of Authenticity-Effects as ‘on the one hand, theatre techniques and modes of representation, and, on the other, the resulting perceptual experiences’ (2016, 9) of something free from façade or pretence. Secondly, I move to the normative behaviours of non-streamer actors with a focus on spectator interactions facilitated by the Twitch platform. Thirdly, I bring together streamer and non-streamer actors through the role of stream rules as bounds for streaming persona. Fourthly, I demonstrate that streaming persona is in a constant state of flux through temporal arrangements and experiences within, across, and between streams, aided by Costello (2018) and Keogh (2018). Finally, I assert games as stream actors by framing games as acting upon streamer players, rather than being acted upon by them. I do so through Jayemanne’s examination of videogames as

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performative (2017). I present these lenses together to demonstrate how streaming persona has the potential to capture and communicates the complexities of streaming.

In this presentation, I therefore introduce streaming persona as a concept of interest and analytical toolkit by distilling it down to its core constituent components. Game studies and performance studies share historical scholarly interests in play (Carlson 2013; Mäyrä 2008; Nitsche 2014), and streaming persona serves as evidence of the fruit that those shared interests may continue to bear. As games continue to be engaged by spectators as well as players (Orme 2021), frameworks of performance have become increasingly relevant for the analysis of their social and cultural significance. Streaming persona demonstrates how the performance of play has become inextricably bound to the act of playing, and as such, I offer it as a disciplinary bridge to expand the knowledge that game studies can generate going forward.

## BIO

Nathan J Jackson (he/him) is a PhD candidate working across performance and media studies in the School of the Arts and Media at UNSW Sydney. His thesis, which is currently in its final stages, is based on an ethnography of Twitch and centres the development of streaming persona based on the practices and behaviours of Twitch users. He is interested in ways that game play is performed and the associated cultures and politics of these performances and has been published in *Persona Studies* and *Convergence* journals.

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