

**Helle Breth Klausen****T.L. Taylor:*****Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming.*  
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Every day thousands of streamers worldwide plug in their technical setup – involving graphical overlays, green screens, and chat bots – and put on a show, while pressing play, to broadcast live to audiences over the internet using streaming platforms such as Twitch, reaching more than one hundred million viewers a month. Game live streaming is a rapidly developing phenomenon, and more complex than it might initially appear, as it combines entertainment and community management with branding and business practices, while balancing work and play.

*Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming* by T.L. Taylor, a Professor of Comparative Media Studies at MIT, is, to my knowledge, the first book to fully dedicate itself to exploring Twitch and the rise of game live streaming. The book is therefore a welcome and necessary contribution to an area of research that is in need of more study.

The book is divided into six chapters. The first, “Broadcasting Ourselves”, serves as an introductory chapter, as it begins by presenting a brief overview of how the idea for the book arose. The author then goes on to explain ‘why games matter’, and more specifically how gaming as a leisure practice is also a civic space, a political domain, and a media sphere (p. 13). The chapter ends by presenting the author’s comprehensive multi-sited research, in which she undertook rich, extensive fieldwork for several years and mixed interviews with archival work in order to immerse herself in the gaming scene.

In Chapter Two, “Networked Broadcasting”, Taylor moves on to a detailed walk-through of how game live streaming is tied to a longer historical trajectory, focusing on,

for example, television and internet broadcasting, the use of webcams, participatory culture, and microcelebrity, in order to show how the phenomenon did not spring into being out of nothing. The chapter ends with an overview of how Twitch came to be an important actor in a larger process of cultural co-creation – not only as a platform, but also as a media company.

The third chapter, “Home Studios: Transforming Private Play into Public Entertainment”, is a unique look into the heart (and home) of live streaming – the home studios from which the magic (and money) happens. The chapter is a fascinating in-depth analysis of the typically domestically-set, complex and multifaceted ‘work of play’ that is live streaming. Taylor invites us into a world of tight-rope walking, in which the Twitch streamers – and to some degree also the esports streamers – are trying to curate ‘private’ and ‘public’ versions of themselves, while having to deal with problematic stereotypes, harassment and regulation, as well as the many layers of production and organisation expected and required when streaming (professionally) online. The author’s vivid and detailed analyses of performativity, relationality, work (and play), as well as economic and commercial frameworks, in relation to live streaming provide an important insight into what can seem to be ‘all play’ from the outside, but is not.

In Chapters Four, “Esports Broadcasting: Ditching the TV Dream”, and Five, “Regulating the Networked Broadcasting Frontier”, Taylor focuses on the esports industry, from ‘DIY productions’ to ‘esports media products’. The chapters are not just about the players/streamers, but take into account the organisational, commercial, ethical, and competitive aspects of esports. In Chapter Four, the author goes into detail about ‘major money’ entering the scene, elaborating on business models used and (imagined) audiences. She also returns to the dichotomy of private/public in this chapter, and adds to the complexity of game live streaming, by noting that live event esports tournaments are caught somewhere between their roots in LAN parties and ‘putting on a show’ in front of thousands of viewers, both online and on-site, cheering and clapping, putting the players/streamers in difficult positions with regard to “hype bubbles, shady promoters, and impatient investors” (p. 175).

Chapter Five is more specifically an exploration of how law and policy affect the governance of game live streaming, and the author wraps up both chapters four and five by declaring that “game live streaming is made up of a complex assemblage of human and nonhuman actors, organisations and platforms, enacting their vision via practices and policies” (p. 251).

The book ends with Chapter Six, “Live Streaming as Media”, in which Taylor reflects more broadly on what is in store for Twitch and game live streaming in the future, concluding that perhaps the platform has, in some ways, returned to its earliest roots.

T.L. Taylor’s *Watch Me Play* is well worth reading, as it is a timely, wide-ranging introduction to, immersion in, and analysis of, Twitch and game live streaming. The book’s strength lies in its thoroughness and immersive methods, showing a wealth of citations

and sources – often in the form of first-hand experiences and interviews with streamers, companies and executives, all conducted personally and over a longer period of time. The reader is thus left wanting even further examination of the actual content and variety of emerging genres available on Twitch, as briefly touched upon in Chapter 2 in the book.

Overall, *Watch Me Play* is of great value to researchers and teachers within a wide range of fields, and especially those dealing with gaming, streaming, online celebrities and digital economies.

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