

***Gran Turismo 7* and Me: An Autoethnographic Approach to Ludic Subjectivity**

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Ludic subjectivity, assemblage, autoethnography, habitus, *Gran Turismo*

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Building on the concept of the implied player (Aarseth 2003) as an element of a game's structure of meaning, the theory of ludic subjectivity (Vella 2015; 2016) highlights how, through its formal structures, a game establishes a ludic subject-position from which the player is invited to inhabit and engage with the game. Drawing upon phenomenology and existential philosophy, this theory considers how, by inhabiting this subject-position and existing in, and towards, the game from this position, the player enacts a ludic self that takes shape through their actions and choices, and that embodies a particular comportment or way of being equally determined by the game's formal structures and the player's disposition.

This presentation shall contextualize the notion of ludic subjectivity within T.L. Taylor's concept of the assemblage of play (2009), unpacking, by means of an autoethnographic case study founded in the author's self-observation and examination, the complex negotiations of meaning that play out in the encounter between the game's formal structures of ludic subject-positioning and the socio-cultural situatedness of an individual player. The aim shall be to demonstrate, by means of close engagement with an individual playing, how the lived meaning of gameplay plays is negotiated at the interface between the network of cultural and material agencies in which the game, the player and the habitus of playing are enmeshed.

The focus of analysis shall be the author's own playing of *Gran Turismo 7* (Polyphony Digital, 2022). The autoethnographic method is demanded by the nature of the investigation, which requires paying attention both to the formal properties of the game and to the situatedness of an individual player (and an individual playing) towards, and in relation to, these formal properties.

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Attention shall be paid to the various ludic subject-positions the game established. Primary among these is the embodied ludic subjectivity of the player as racing driver in the game's central activity of car racing, and the demands it places in terms of kinaesthetic precision and the adoption of the goal-oriented attitude towards winning races, or completing missions, that characterizes "striving play" (Nguyen 2020). However, the presentation shall also consider other ludic subject-positions the player is invited to occupy while engaging with the game: for instance, that of the collector aiming to gather all of the game's hundreds of car models in their garage, or the gearhead invested in tweaking their car's settings to perfection, and expected to draw on extraludic knowledge of automotive engineering and car modding culture to do so.

It shall also touch upon notions of gamebour (Lund 2014) to theorize the accumulationist drive by which play is rewarded with the in-game credits required to purchase new cars. The 'Daily Workout' system, which rewards players for completing a certain number of in-game miles every day, shall also be highlighted with a focus on the way it structures a habitual obligation, invoking a similarity with familiar neoliberal practices of quantifiable self-optimization (Han 2017) to interpellate players into neoliberal subjectivities of play (Möring and Leino 2016).

The paper shall also pay attention to the way the player is invited to identify with markers of wealth, status, and the accumulations of economic and cultural capital. It shall highlight the game's fetishistic relation with the car as a commodity and a cultural object, and the ways in which the decontextualization of the car from the material and labour conditions of its production – and from the effects of climate change for which the fossil fuel industry is culpable – allow *Gran Turismo 7* to present itself as a cozy game, portraying a world of safety, abundance and softness (Waszkiewicz and Bakun 2020) in which the player is free to indulge in the aesthetic celebration of car culture, the fantasy of easy ownership and accumulation of exclusive commodities like luxury cars, and the assumed social capital such ownership is perceived to convey. It shall consider the extent to which the game participates in the gender politics of car culture and its long association with masculinity (Walker 1998), as well as with Western-centric discourses of centre and periphery in its foregrounding of a cultural sphere that centres western Europe, the United States and Japan.

In relation to all of this, however, the presentation shall also consider how the experienced meanings emerging from inhabiting the game's multiple subject-positions is the result of a process of negotiation. This shall be done through a reflection on the author's own playing, and on their situatedness towards the game – as a player of a particular gender, social class, semi-peripheral national identity, cultural background, political beliefs, etc. This autoethnographic reflection shall be informed, among other salient conceptual tools, by notions like the idea of aesthetic self-fashioning through the development of personal playstyles (Zhu 2018), the expressive freedom to dress one's avatar (Tosca and Klastrup 2009) in user-created outfits, constituting "tools of agency used outside the conventional play frame" (Felczak 2018) – as well as, more broadly, a framework for conceptualizing lived disposition and experienced cultural value invested in Bourdieu's notions of habitus and cultural capital (1984).

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