Review: *Posthuman Gaming: Avatars, Gamers, and Entangled Subjectivities*, by Poppy Wilde. 2023. Routledge. 232 pp.

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Poppy Wilde's (2024) latest book, *Posthuman Gaming: Avatars, Gamers, and Entangled Subjectivities*, explores the "entangled subjectivities" emerging from the interplay between gamers and their avatars within the digital landscapes of massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), specifically the game *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004). Couched within the interdisciplinary nexus of posthumanism, media studies, and game studies, Wilde's text engages with the philosophical underpinnings of critical posthumanism while also grounding her analysis in the tangible experiences of digital gameplay.

Wilde's book contains eight chapters and aligns with key trajectories in posthumanist thought. Throughout her work, Wilde interrogates the anthropocentric assumptions underlying the "liberal human subject" (first introduced on p. 3)—an autonomous, bounded individual central to humanist thought—and instead proposes a model of "entangled subjectivities," where identity is produced through relational, intra-active processes between human and non-human actors. Rather than viewing gamer and avatar as separate entities, Wilde conceptualizes subjectivity as fluid and emergent, shaped through their ongoing entanglement within digital play. This framing lays the foundation for Wilde's elaboration in Chapter 2 of the "posthuman gamer" as a theoretical construct that challenges individualistic, human-centered approaches to game studies. In invoking Karen Barad's (2007) concept of intra-action, Wilde aims to disrupt the binary distinctions between self and other, subject and object, and human and non-human. This philosophical framing situates *Posthuman Gaming* within the broader discourse of posthumanism while offering a novel empirical lens through which to examine these ideas—a notable contribution in a field that often risks becoming overly abstract.

Wilde employs a multi-faceted methodology that combines autoethnography—drawing on her own experiences as a gamer to generate insight—with textual analysis of *World of Warcraft*'s mechanics, narrative, and design. While her firsthand gameplay is central to the work, Wilde also treats the game as a cultural text, analyzing how its structures and affordances shape player-avatar relations. By intertwining her personal interactions with her avatar, Etyme, and broader theoretical frameworks, she grounds abstract concepts in lived experience, offering both philosophical rigor and accessibility. Moreover, Wilde's autoethnographic approach underscores the situatedness of knowledge production within digital environments. For instance, Wilde reflects on how her choices to shape Etyme, such as customizing the avatar's appearance and class to align with her own aspirations and ideals, reveal the dynamic and contingent nature of identity formation in digital spaces. Through these decisions, she demonstrates how the avatar becomes a site where personal, cultural, and in-game factors intersect, highlighting the interplay between player agency and the constraints of game mechanics.

In Chapter 2, Wilde elaborates on the posthuman gamer as a theoretical construct, proposing it as a way to move beyond anthropocentric approaches to game studies. This chapter serves as a bridge between her philosophical foundations and the empirical work that follows, grounding her analysis in the specificities of *World of Warcraft*. In the realm of game studies, Wilde's focus on *World of Warcraft* contributes to a robust body of scholarship specifically centered on that game and its virtual community dynamics, including the works of Lisa Nakamura (2009), Bonnie Nardi (2010), Jenny Sundén and Malin Sveningsson (2012), and Patricia Alexander (2018). However, Wilde's approach diverges by emphasizing the affective and embodied dimensions of gaming as an entry point into posthuman subjectivities. Her analysis extends beyond representational critiques, such as those focused on race, gender, and sexuality, to consider how the act of gameplay itself generates fluid, contingent subjectivities.

One of the book's most innovative contributions is its theorization of "posthuman empathy," first outlined in Chapter 3. Wilde aims to redefine empathy as an entangled, intra-active phenomenon that emerges between gamer and avatar. Wilde develops the concept of intra-action further in Chapter 4, where she examines how the entangled dynamics between gamer and avatar disrupt traditional notions of individuality. By exploring how these interactions generate new subjectivities, she describes the avatar as an active participant in co-creating identity. This approach challenges traditional humanistic conceptions of empathy as predicated on the recognition of separateness. Instead, Wilde illustrates how the alignment of affective, cognitive, and embodied states in gameplay dissolves the boundaries between self and other, demonstrating the emergence of posthuman

empathy. Drawing on moments where the gamer feels the avatar's vulnerabilities, such as the physical strain of in-game combat or the emotional stakes tied to narrative decisions, Wilde underscores how these experiences generate a shared state of being. She explores, then, how the gamer's protective instincts toward the avatar mimic real-world empathic responses, collapsing distinctions between digital and physical realms. By framing empathy as a dynamic co-creation between human and non-human entities, Wilde highlights how the avatar not only reflects but actively shapes the gamer's subjectivity. This reconceptualization expands the posthumanist discussion of empathy by shifting the focus from one-directional, human-centered empathy to relational networks of affect and agency, resonating with broader posthuman critiques of anthropocentrism.

Equally compelling is Wilde's exploration of "boredom and disaffection" (p. 154) in gaming. Rather than romanticizing the immersive or flow states often associated with gaming, she attends to the mundane, repetitive, and even frustrating aspects of gameplay. These moments are integral to understanding posthuman subjectivity in Chapter 6, as Wilde highlights how the repetitive tasks inherent in games, such as grinding for resources or leveling up, mirror everyday human activities that are similarly steeped in monotony yet imbued with meaning through their contexts. These actions, while ostensibly tedious, become sites of posthuman emergence where the gamer and avatar are entangled in shared labor and objectives. By focusing on these less celebrated aspects of gaming, Wilde reveals the nuanced ways in which posthuman subjectivities are formed not in moments of heightened engagement but through the rhythms of persistence and routine.

Additionally, Wilde's engagement with feminist and decolonial critiques of posthumanism, acknowledging the field's potential to reproduce Eurocentric and elitist biases, demonstrates a commitment to situating her work within a broader, more inclusive intellectual landscape. Her approach encourages readers to critically engage with the ways in which power and privilege manifest within digital environments, and to consider how posthumanist frameworks might be used to address these inequities. In Chapter 6, Wilde examines how digital worlds replicate systemic inequalities, emphasizing the importance of applying intersectional approaches to both theory and practice by interrogating the roles of race, gender, and socioeconomic status in shaping digital and posthuman experiences. Wilde situates this critique within broader trends in decolonial game studies, exploring how gaming spaces often perpetuate colonialist logics through mechanics, narratives, and aesthetic choices. She draws specific parallels between the commodification of avatars and virtual territories and historical patterns of exploitation and marginalization. This critique underscores the importance of decolonial approaches in reimagining games as platforms for inclusive storytelling and agency, aligning with and extending

existing scholarship by demonstrating how posthumanist theory can unsettle power structures and challenge systemic inequities in digital environments.

While Wilde's contributions are substantial, certain aspects of the text warrant further interrogation. For instance, her reliance on *World of Warcraft* as the primary case study, while methodologically sound, may limit the applicability of her findings to other gaming genres or platforms. Future research could build on Wilde's framework by exploring posthuman subjectivities in diverse gaming contexts, including single-player narratives, mobile games, or virtual reality. Moreover, while Wilde's autoethnographic approach is effective, it raises questions about the generalizability of her insights. As she acknowledges in Chapter 3, gamer experiences are highly subjective and context-dependent.

Nevertheless, Poppy Wilde's *Posthuman Gaming* is a significant contribution to both posthumanism and game studies, offering a nuanced and empirically grounded exploration of how digital gameplay shapes and is shaped by entangled subjectivities. The book moves beyond MMORPGs to offer broader insights into digital identity, AI, and human-technology relations. Wilde critiques anthropocentrism and promotes a relational, distributed view of subjectivity, encouraging a rethinking of agency and ethics in increasingly technologized environments. Her integration of philosophical rigor with personal insight ensures that the text is both theoretically robust and accessible. But the book's greatest strength lies in its ability to bridge theoretical posthumanism with the lived realities of digital interaction. By examining the intricate entanglements of players and avatars, Wilde sets a precedent for future studies in digital media and philosophy, urging scholars to explore the affective and embodied dimensions of human-technology relations. *Posthuman Gaming* is an essential resource for scholars of media studies, cultural studies, and game studies, as well as anyone interested in the intersections of technology, identity, and subjectivity in the digital age.

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