

Agency Co-Creation in Speedrunning: A New Form of Community Driven Value Creation Through Transgressive Behaviors

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Abstract

Agency Co-Creation in Speedrunning: A New Form of Community Driven Value Creation Through Transgressive Behaviors

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While prior literature has studied how communities can co-destroy value when producers and consumers are misaligned in their goals, little research has focused on how transgressive consumer behaviors—behaviors that go against a producer’s intent—can create value. To this end, I study the speedrunning community, a subset of the gaming community focused on beating games as fast as possible, through any means available. In their search for faster times, they often find themselves radically altering games against producers’ intents. My findings reveal ways in which communities can co-create a new temporary agency for games—speedrunning—that is to say new ways to interact with them, by altering either the gameplay offerings of their games, or by introducing new forms of sociability. Speedrunning creates value by extending the longevity of products, increasing their customizability, as well as offering expanded social opportunities that deepen individuals’ connection with the game. By creating a new temporary agency, speedrunners find themselves more fulfilled as both individuals and consumers. The findings deepen our understanding of co-creation and co-destruction, demonstrating that transgressive behaviors can create value.

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1 Introduction

On March 23rd, 2019, steamer NicroVeda beat the 2017 game *Super Mario Odyssey* for the second time that very day. His friends and roommates burst in the room, congratulating and hugging him as tears of joy came down their face, while his Twitch audience was awestruck. For this was not an ordinary playthrough of the game. He had beaten the game in 59 minutes and 59 seconds, making him the first player ever to finish the game in under an hour. After two years of practice and thousands of failed runs, NicroVeda had achieved something that had long been thought impossible (SmallAnt, 2019). While his record would soon be improved and beaten by others, at this moment, he was on top of the world. This is speedrunning, a niche video game community focused on beating games as fast as possible. Speedrunners are passionate players who will use any means necessary to achieve this goal, often exploiting flaws in the game. In doing so, they compromise the vision of the creators but create something new.

The advent of digital spaces throughout the twenty-first century has empowered individuals to take an active role in the design of new products and processes (Galindo Martin et al, 2018), working collaboratively with companies to create value (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). However, in cases where consumers and a company cannot establish positive interactions, the positive processes leading to co-creation are corrupted, instead causing co-destruction of value (Ple and Caceres, 2010). Within this context, consumer misbehaviors are usually seen as negative, undermining the vision of the corporation, hurting corporate image and ruining the product or experience for all consumers (Pera et al, 2021).

However, not all consumer behaviors of resistance, that is to say going against the intentions of the corporations and looking to propose alternate methods of consumption to that expected (Scott, 1994), are co-destructive. Indeed, in particular cases, resistant and transgressive consumer behaviors have been found to create fresh new experiences that elevate the overall value proposition through unexpected metagames and performance (Kozinets, 2004). Consumers find themselves pushing the boundaries of product creators, engaging with a proposed experience in unintended ways that reveal new facets and avenues for entertainment.

While existing literature has studied the topics of co-destruction and co-creation, how consumers create value through transgressive experiences has benefited from less research. I answer this question by examining a subgroup of the video-gaming community: the speedrunning community. This community proposes new ways to experience existing games, focused on beating games as quickly as possible through any means possible. Speedrunners thus ignore the intended experience the games offer to create new challenges, in a celebration of both gaming and transgressive practices.

My findings reveal that speedrunning serves as a novel way to experience games, affecting both how the game is played and how the players interact with the community around them. Through this reinvention of play, speedrunners maintain the relevance of games. This is achieved through four mechanisms that affect play and sociality: *Democratizing rulesets*, by which speedrunners legitimize the atypical ways they play as a community ; *Challenge Endeavours*, through which speedrunners push the boundaries of what is believed possible in their community; *Performing Passionate Artistry* in which speedrunners broadcast the love for gaming in entertaining ways; *Communal Play* in which they add multiplayer experiences to games that are traditionally played alone.

Through these processes, I find that speedrunning creates value by legitimizing atypical styles of play. Speedrunners are free to approach games any way they wish, removed from the expectations of the game producers. In doing so, they customize the experience and extend the ongoing enjoyment they have with games. Additionally, they create value by elevating the gaming community to an active participant in the spectacle of gaming. Players challenge each other to personally improve in a public performance of skill and personality, as the hobby serves as an outlet for each to share their passion with others and forge friendships.

These findings add to our understanding of co-creation by introducing the concept of co-creation of agencies, allowing us to consider the role agency plays in differentiating between co-creative and co-destructive consumer behaviors.

2 Literature review

2.1 Co-Creation and Transgressive Consumption Practices

Value co-creation, defined as the practice through which a product or service is designed collaboratively by producer and consumer at multiple stages of the creation process to create value has reshaped marketing (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). The literature suggests marketing activities are most successful when accomplished through positive interactions between providers and consumers (Gronroos, 2011). In such cases, firms provide consumers with resources to express themselves through creative collaboration (Kale, 2001). At times, consumer communities provide environments of innovation that companies can pull from (Schouten et al, 2013). At other times, co-creation happens more stealthily as companies use consumer actions to gather data and improve products (Cova, Dalli, and Zwick 2011). For example, in the gaming sphere, online live-service models see corporations gather data on their players, allowing them to identify gameplay motivators for players and enhance the experience accordingly (Hussain et al, 2022). As such, research has attributed positive connotations to the sharing of knowledge and viewpoints that feed into creative outcomes (Pera, 2018).

However, the positive processes and outcomes of interactions between actors are not guaranteed (Ple and Caceres, 2010). As such, the concept of value co-destruction has been suggested, focused on the negative value formed during interactions between actors (Echeverri and Skalen, 2011). In these cases, at least one participant's stakes are damaged (Echeverri & Skalen, 2011). Vargo and Lush (2015) argue that value is created by actors integrating tangible/operand and intangible/operant resources with a common goal. Within this context, Ple and Caceres (2010) postulate that value co-destruction stems from the misuse of resources, that is to say "a failure to integrate and/or apply resources in a manner that is appropriate and expected" (Ple and Caceres, 2010), regardless of if the reasons are intended or not (Baker and Kim, 2019). The decline is not a one-sided phenomenon, but can be realized by any of the interacting parties who refuse to collaborate (Daunt and Harris, 2013). On the consumer side, this can entail negative emotions (anger, disappointment and anxiety) and negative behaviours (complaining, negative word of mouth) (Smith, 2013). Consumer misbehaviours are viewed as undesirable acts, violating social norms of consumption to hurt the product/service provider (Pera et al, 2021). They undermine the expected behavior companies impose on them to cause problems to the organization (e.g. stealing, vandalism, fraud...) in a form of resistance (Fullerton & Punj, 2002).

Resistant consumption practices have often been directly associated with anti-consumption behaviors and resistance to consumer culture (Cherrier, 2007), existing in opposition to corporate desires and expectations. Consumers ascertain their agency over marketers by playfully inventing subversive and idiosyncratic methods of consumption (Grayson, 2002). They propose resistant or transgressive alternatives to the rules imposed on them (Scott 1994). As a result, their actions evolve against the goals and objectives of firms.

However, consumer misuse of resources is not inherently detrimental to an organization. Such resistance may be value-creating for firms in specific situations (Grayson, 2002). Kozinets (2004) studied in the context of a sports arena how resistance by consumers created new ways to experience the space. For instance, skeet shooters would shift their scope away from designated targets towards wandering patrons, or virtual motocrossers would purposefully crash into competitors to wreak havoc. Consumers defy societal conventions to control the experience, creating value by transforming individual experiences into audience-related spectacles.

These behaviors are defined as transgressive play by Aarseth (2014). They serve as a necessary counterweight to the monotony of playing a game following the “implied player position,” by introducing unpredictability that symbolically gives each playthrough a unique identity (Aarseth, 2014). Unique events and unpredictable outcomes are celebrated in all forms of gaming, whether it be sports, gambling or video games (Aarseth, 2007), serving as a part of the appeal. Kozinets’s (2004) and Aarseth (2007) demonstrates the relationship between consumer and creators is far more complex than a simple positive/negative dichotomy, stating how the consumer is “both sovereign and manipulated, subject and object, passive and active, individualist and conformist.” (Kozinets, 2004, p669). Refusal to properly use resources is not an inherently destructive movement, but a fundamental aspect of consumer behavior in games that can bring value.

As such, I find that transgressive consumption practices, which I define as mechanisms by which consumers refuse the design of a product and explore other possibilities (Ford, 2018) and exploit unintended oversights for their enjoyment (Aarseth, 2014), can create value. Through the rethinking of structures and rules set by companies that work in opposition to the expected design, consumers can elevate experiences. Prior work has overwhelmingly focused on the negative effects of unintended consumer behaviors, but has failed to study their positives. Tackling the issues of value co-creation/co-destruction, my qualitative work focuses on the value created by consumers through transgressive behaviors.

2.2 Videogames as Striving Games

Video games exist at a crux between entertainment and creative expression (Bartel, 2021). To examine how consumers create value through transgressive experiences, I study video games as a specific form of games: striving games. I conceptualize striving games following Nguyen and Suits’ work (2019b, 1978), which define these games as ‘striving’ because of their arbitrary goal (prelusive goal), which is to be reached using only the means permitted (lusory means) by the rules that prohibit certain actions at the expense of logic (constitutive rules), creating the necessary challenges for the game to exist (lusory attitude). (Suits 1978). Consider a playthrough of the game *Dark Souls*, a notoriously difficult action RPG. The prelusive goal for the player is to complete the game by reaching the end credits, facing against a certain number of key bosses. However, players are required to pursue this goal by using only the lusory means permitted by the game: mastering combat mechanics,

navigating hostile environments and managing resources. They are enforced by constitutive rules that prohibit more straightforward paths to completion. For instance, players cannot skip specific confrontations, must acquire key items to progress and cannot adjust the difficulty. These requirements create meaningful challenges. The player must adopt the lusory attitude, willingly accepting these arbitrary constraints and frustrations following the acknowledgement that they exist to make the game an experience worth playing. Ngyuen (2019) contends that not all players are motivated by victory. Instead, players are drawn to the fun derived from overcoming the challenges offered by a game.

When designing striving games, game producers use goals, means, and rules to sculpt experiences, which creates a specific form of agency. By agency, I mean people's intentional capacity for decision making and action (Nguyen 2019b). Nguyen proposes that games offer a form of *temporary* agency that is fluid and modular: players submerge themselves in the game's experience just as readily as they can elect to ignore and return to it later. Temporary agencies are defined as 1) they drive us to a disposable end; 2) they are confined by the rules of the game ; 3) they are context sensitive to both temporary (inner) and enduring (outer) agential layers (Yorke, 2021). For example, a group of friends may decide to play *Mario Kart*, but the goal of winning a virtual race is not so important that they would hurt their real life competitors to gain an advantage (Yorke, 2021). They can, at any point, remove themselves from the experience and "step back" into reality. If they find their friends are no longer enjoying themselves, the player may decide to stop playing, or choose to play a different way. The players choose a new temporary agency that emphasizes fun over the prelusory goal. As players, we alternate between complete immersion in temporary agencies, and the acknowledgement of our 'real' lives'.

Designers create temporary agencies by offering game worlds bound by rules, shaping possibilities for action of players. Players maintain their commitment to temporary agencies by embracing the lusory means of the game and the prelusory goal to be pursued (Tanenbaum, 2009). However, their commitment to the experience is situational, and often people do not always follow the game's goals and rules. For Nguyen (2019b), this is a problem: When a player does not embrace those, they cannot submerge themselves into the temporary agency of the game. For example, we would qualify somebody playing basketball but refuses to dribble and use a ladder to score baskets as being a frustrating person to play with. Not engaging with the game's rules and goals reflect the dominant perspective in value co-creation, where resisting consumption destroys value. However, my context shows a case in which consumers refuse to engage in the temporary agencies of games but create value in doing so. I now explain the mechanism I use to resolve this unexpected phenomenon.

3 Method

3.1 Speedrunning: Consumers as game designers

To address my research question, I conducted a qualitative study of the speedrunning community, a subset of gamers and streamers united not by the games they play, but by the esoteric way they engage with them. Speedrunners "play through the game in ways that are other than those intended at the design and programming stage" (Franklin, 2009). Rather than engaging with the game on the designers' terms, speedrunners aim to beat games *as fast as possible*. For example, they will exploit glitches in a game's code to shave seconds

off their time. Glitches are malfunctions triggered by a series of events the game developer never considered (Aarseth, 2007), causing the game to act in unpredictable ways, from corrupted visuals displays to altered physics. To the average consumer, a glitch makes a game appear “broken”. However, glitches can be reproduced if the triggers are identified (Barnabe, 2016), giving speedrunners mechanical exploits.

A speedrun does not resemble a normal playthrough of a game, as players push the software and hardware beyond their intended limits (Lafond, 2018). The players interact with the game in an entirely new fashion, removed from the pre-lusory goals and attitudes expected by the game designers. Hence, speedrunners present a form of transgressive practice, ignoring the intended design of the game to impose a completely new method of engagement on them. Authors such as Barnabe (2016) and Koziel (2019) have defined speedrunning as a form of performance art, notably through its transgressive character of repurposing agencies to create new experiences (see also Scully-Blaker & Barnabe 2016).

Despite existing since the 90s, the advent of streaming websites such as Twitch and the Covid-19 pandemic have propelled the community into mainstream popularity (Lafond, 2018). In the first half of 2024, over 124 million hours of speedrun content were watched on Twitch, making it the 17th most popular tag on the platform (Rowland, 2024). Events are organised, gathering various players of the community to take turns on live streams to beat as many games as possible over a set period of time in order to raise funds for charity. Games Done Quick (GDQ), the most popular event, is hosted bi-yearly and has gone from raising \$10,000 for charity during its first event in 2010 (Games Done Quick Event tracker, 2025) to raising over \$2 million each year since 2018 (Games Done Quick, welcome page, 2025). Overall, GDQ has raised \$50 million across 45 marathons, with peak online viewerships at over 200,000 with a combined watch time 22.1 million hours watched at the 2020 session (Games Done Quick Event tracker, 2025), making it a mainstay aspect of gaming culture. NoReset is a similar live event, modeled after GDQ but fully independent and focused on the Quebec speedrunning community (No Reset welcome page, 2025). Set in Montreal, the yearly event takes place over three days and sees hundreds of participants gathered to either perform or view speedruns non-stop for the duration of the weekend, 24 hours a day. When one speedrun ends, another participant takes the stage and starts the next game, in a constant flow of speedruns, races and tech demonstrations. The 2023 event raised over \$13,000 for the Fondation des Gardiens Virtuels (per field notes).

The enthusiasm and passion of this community within the gaming sphere is undeniable, both through the competition that arises, and the creativity put on display. The success of the speedrunning community shows that the artistic intentions of game designers may not be set in stone. Games can instead be in a constant flow, changing their rules and the agencies they offer in reaction to the desires of players.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

I collected data through an ethnography of the speedrunning community. Mainly active online, it relies heavily on Twitch livestreams, as well as on online discussions on platforms such speedrun.com and various discord servers. An initial netnography was conducted, with observations of these online forums beginning in May 2022, by following ongoing online forum discussions for three popular game communities: *Super Mario Odyssey*, *Hollow Knight* and *Elden Ring*. Observations were then further deepened through the direct viewing of speedruns of these games, both individual live streams and pre-recorded VODs uploaded to YouTube. Community-made documentaries on these games’ speedruns were also

studied, alongside the series *Devs React to Speedruns* on the IGN Entertainment Network, in which game makers react to speedruns of the games they have made. Finally, observations of the online speedrunning marathons Awesome Games Done Quick in January 2023 and Summer Games Done Quick in June 2023 were conducted to examine the atmosphere of larger group events. Overall, these observations went over approximately 30 threads and 50 hours of footage and identified sources of entertainment generated by the speedrun community, outlining preliminary questions for potential interviewees.

To complement the netnography, ethnographic data was collected. In August 2023, I attended in person the Quebec-based event NoReset 3 in Montreal. Fourteen pages of field notes recorded the atmosphere at the event, specific moments of interest and notable interactions with other attendees. During the event, four speedruns were watched in full, as well as thirteen others in an incomplete fashion. This gathering allowed me to meet with speedrunners, event organisers and streaming viewers alike to gather first-hand insight through interviews.

I also collected interviews with regular participants of the speedrunning community. Interviewees were recruited by approaching them at the event, and then through snowballing. Participants highlighted different rules of the community (speedrunner, online streamer, viewer, hacker...), and contributed their own intimate knowledge of the scene through the lens of their specific niche. Interviews focused on a consumer's reasons for speedrunning, their relationship to the community, and their hopes for the future of video games. In total, 14 interviews (13M - 1F) were conducted, 3 at the event itself and an additional 11 online. Of those 14, two were with organisers of the event, one was with a casual viewer, two were developers on community projects, and nine were active speedrunners. The interviews amounted to 17 recorded hours and 300 double-spaced transcript pages. This interview data served as a primary source, driven from first-hand experience, and was facilitated by the netnographic and ethnographic immersions that enabled accurate understanding of community lingo and traditions.

To theorize how consumers create value by destroying how games are supposed to be played, I analyzed the 15 interviews and field data. Interviews were conducted both on and off-site, and ranged between one and two hours depending on circumstances. By engaging with the individuals in person and interacting with them in an event made to promote speedrunning, silent observations and unobtrusive inquiries helped further perceive the lived experience of the members of the community. I coded data into two sorts: ones where interviewees reflected on the speedrunning community's impact on them as individuals, and ones where they reflected on its impact on the games themselves. From this analysis, I created a distinction between the notions of sociality and performance. To emphasize the tension between value co-creation and value co-destruction, I further examined how players' actions cohered or transgressed with the game's design, highlighting the varied impacts speedrunning can have on the value of a product. From these codes, I identified core dynamics at the heart of the speedrunning community (eg: self-expression, nostalgia, the need for community...).

The ethnographic study was supported with data recorded on field notes, audio tapes and photographs, further bolstered by the stream recordings of the events publicly available online. All findings are grounded in these multiple encounters, both online and in person.

Table 1: Data Collection Overview

Type of data	Sources	Data set	Role in data analysis
Discussion threads	Community forum archives (2018-2023) (speedrun.com) and live observations of community discussions (2023) (Discord Servers)	30 threads across three communities (Mario Odyssey, Elden Ring, Hollow Knight)	Naturalistic observation of community structure and culture over time ; understanding of governance procedures
Observed speedruns	Live Streams (Twitch) & recorded VODs (Youtube)	Approximately 50 hours of unedited speedruns and edited challenge runs	Understand the community's culture in the online sphere ; determine traditional online etiquette
Observed live events online	Awesome Games Done Quick & Summer Games Done Quick 2023	Approximately 12 hours of live viewing	Understand the community's culture in the physical sphere
In-depth interviews	Community members: speedrunners, viewers, event organizers, community project leaders	15 recorded interviews; 300 pages double spaced transcript	Capture member's personal experiences and feelings on the community and its future
Field Notes	Ethnographic observations during NoReset 3	Fourteen pages written during and after the event in August 2023	Understand the community's culture and dynamics through firsthand observation ; triangulation
Online Documentaries	YouTube documentaries, such as GOD GAMERS – How Hollow Knight Players Beat The "Perfect" Speedrun; World Record History of Mario Odyssey's Weirdest Speedrun; Super Mario Bros: The Human Limit	10 documentaries	Deepen the understanding of the history and variations in culture of the speedrunning communities surrounding three specific popular speedrun games: Mario Odyssey, Hollow Knight and Elden Ring
Game Developer Reaction Videos	Devs React to Speedruns Series on IGN Entertainment Network; Clair Obscur: Expedition 33 Voice-Actors React to Speedrun	20 episodes equalling to approximately 10 hours of footage	Gain insight and opinions of Game Creatives on the speedrun community, and further understand the relationship between artist and consumer

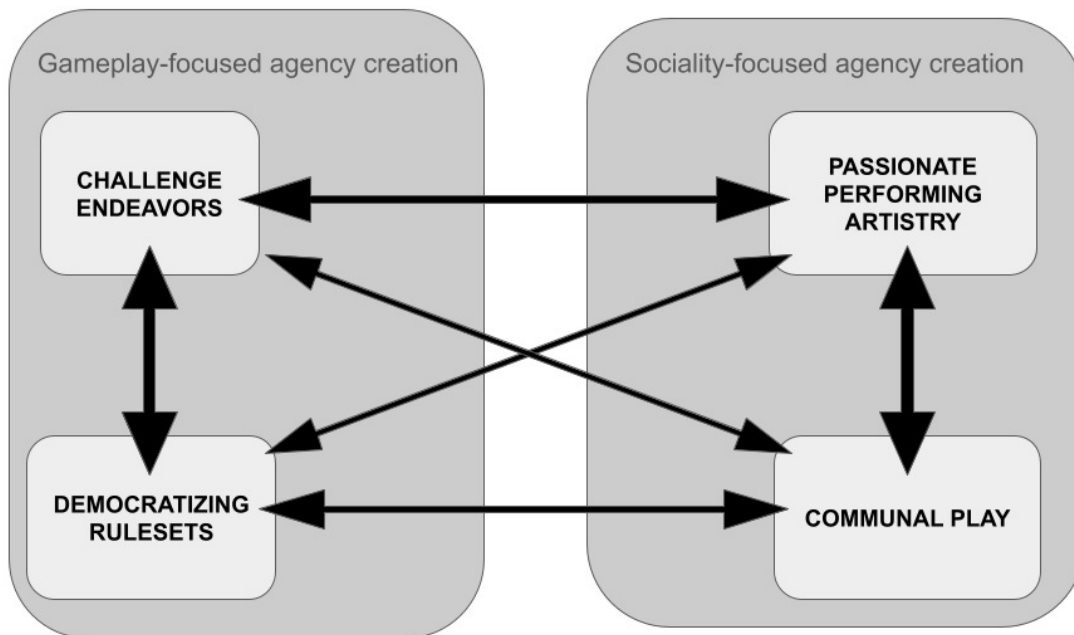
4 Findings

4.1 Brief summary

Speedrunning exists at an intersection between set boundaries imposed by developers and breaking out of the norms through modification of how the game is played—the game’s temporary agency. They find a balance between behaviors of cohesion and transgression, as they deepen their knowledge of the game’s content, but then seek to use that understanding in ways that undermine the creator’s intent. Through this tension, players create a new temporary agency, modifying the experience of playing a game and creating value.

My findings identify four key ways speedrunners create and modify the temporary agency of speedrunning, generating experiences for consumers that create value. These can be separated into two forms of added value: *sociality-focused agency creation*, which sees the experience of playing a game turned into a social activity that enhances the experience, and *gameplay-focused agency creation*, which sees speedrunners expand the ludic offerings of game and adding replay value.

Figure 1: Processes of agency creation through the co-creation of a new temporary agency by way of transgressive behaviors in the speedrunning community



Gameplay-focused agency creation consists of *Democratizing Rulesets* & *Challenge Endeavors*. *Democratizing Rulesets* encompasses how speedrunners legitimize atypical ways of playing games. They agree democratically on new lusory goals that force them to engage with parts of the game they would not under normal circumstances, adding replay value to the game. *Challenge Endeavors* embodies how speedrunners push the experience of games to their limit through heightened challenge. Through their demonstration of skill, they reinvent the game experience to fit their increasingly better skills.

Meanwhile, *sociality-focused agency creation* includes *Performing Passionate Artistry* and *Communal Play*. Through *Performing Passionate Artistry*, speedrunners create a speedrunning culture complete with social norms and rituals that socialize others to the experience of speedrunning. They separate themselves from game corporations to focus solely on their shared passion for speedrunning, creating aesthetic experiences specifically crafted for their group. *Communal Play* embodies how speedrunners add multiplayer experiences to single-player games. They turn the experience of playing a game into a social one, adding both competition and cooperation in a way that expands their social value.

Speedrunning allows players to rejuvenate dated and nostalgic games. The activity engages consumers both individually and collectively to transform the temporary agencies intended by game designers into a new one that offers renewed value. Existing at an intersection of cohesive and transgressive behaviors, the hobby provides players with a means to immortalize their favorite games, sharing them with others, and preserving the sense of discovery they experienced playing the game the first time. By modifying its temporary agency, these players stretch games' longevity far beyond the original creators' intentions.

4.2 How Consumers Co-Create Agencies by Breaking Games

4.2.1 Gameplay-Focused Agency Creation

4.2.1.a Democratizing rulesetting

I define ***democratic rulesets*** as the cohesive ways in which the speedrunning community legitimizes rule-breaking as a fair and competitive playing field. Speedrunning is partly a competition, and the types of rule-breaking that are allowed are agreed upon in advance through the democratic structures of *community oversight*, *speedrun categorization*, and *player self-ruling*. Through this process, speedrunners negotiate the rules of the temporary agency of speedrunning.

Community oversight

I define *Community Oversight* as the means through which the speedrunning community enforces the rules of speedrunning. Speedrunning exists at an intersection between the search for new ways to cheat the game to shorten runs and fair competition. The community must guarantee that each run was obtained legitimately, using the skill and knowledge of the player. As speedrunner Donaze Tello explains:

“Ça vient purement et simplement de l’amour du jeu. Personne n’apprécie un cheater. Si tu sais qu’un de tes adversaires a ouvertement triché, ça brise l’ambiance pour tout le monde. C’est un peu comme un contrat social. C’est une entente pour dire “on fait ça parce que sinon ça va briser le fun à absolument tout le monde”.”

Tello explains that the rule-breaking integral to speedrunning is conditional. The community creates an environment where players have an opportunity to shine equally in a truly competitive environment. To ensure fairness, limitations are enforced. They are only

permitted to run games while conforming to rules. For example, they must complete a run in a single continuous play session, and cannot modify its code unless previously agreed upon.

As the scene grew, formal structures were put in place to maintain a balance between rule-breaking and competitiveness. The website speedrun.com serves as the main hub for all moderation, including records archive and rule sets. Speedrunner Syn explains:

“Originally, each game had a private Excel spreadsheet keeping track of people’s times. It seemed like a very formal system, but now that I realize that it was in its primitive stages. [...] Speedrun.com is a very simple interface, with the community setting the rules structure, making sure the forum has a place for the collaboration news. It looks almost as if it’s like a social media platform that just includes your resume of runs.”

Syn shows that originally, the scene functioned on faith and goodwill between players, trusting each other to abide by the rules. However, with time, systems of moderation were put into place. Forums discuss rule sets. Runners are placed on an online record, and their achievements are available to review. These systems give players a means to coordinate and collaborate, identifying what makes runs fair or unfair.

Rule enforcement creates a sense of accountability, as speedrunners take on both the role of players and moderators. They monitor each other’s work, the community serving as an ever-present watchdog against cheating. In some cases, illicit speedruns have been achieved by using secretly modified versions of the game that give the player an advantage, such as having the game running at a slower speed to help with reaction times (Holt, 2022). In these cases, the responsibility to identify the cheaters lies on the members of the community. The research involved is extensive, and community members cooperate to fact check accusations. They employ the individual skills of each. For instance, computer engineers may observe anomalies in the game’s functioning, while video editors will notice signs of footage altering (Wirtual and Donadigo, 2021 ; Apollo Legend, 2017). Each speedrunner is framed as a moderator, creating a network of arbiters that determine the legitimacy of runs. Speedrunner Morx explains:

“Les modérateurs sont des personnes qui sont là depuis très longtemps, et qui peuvent apporter des justifications justes sur pourquoi une décision a été prise ou non. On prend quelques runners, on teste le glitch sur plein de plateformes différentes pour voir si on a des différences. Ca reste un effort de communauté”

Morx exemplifies the dynamics of moderation in the speedrunning community. Established individuals of the community are called in to bring their expertise, both personal and related to the game, to identify if runs were obtained legitimately. These systems of oversight serve to moderate the speedrunning community. Those most integrated into the community are seen as watchdogs, safeguarding the community against dishonest runs that undermine the sanctity of the leaderboards. The speedrun community presents a form of democratic automoderation, set up to maintain the decorum and competitive legitimacy of the scene.

Last, speedrunning is an evolving community, and speedrunners work in concert to develop variations of the temporary agency. As a result, they must find ways to ensure that these variations are commonly understood. Syn explains further:

“The nice thing about speedrunning is there’s always a category that’s included on the board to say “OK, here’s how the game was fairly intended to play without majorly breaking the game. So there’s always at least that kind of run close to the vanilla game. [...] Let science be science. I’m amazed at the people that task and figure those [glitches] out. But I think it is more enjoyable to go through the game with less brokenness to it.”

Syn highlights the delicate balance between pushing the boundaries of the game and maintaining fun. Speedrunners often find themselves altering the experience until it is unrecognizable. In such moments, it is the community’s role to pull the experience back and impose boundaries. They offer rulesets that conserve the experience without letting the end goal of having the shortest run take over. As such, speedrunners create value by deciding which flaws are worth exploiting and which ones should be viewed as flaws, allowing them to customize the experience to their liking. The subdivision of speedruns allows for players to elect how to interact with a game on their own terms. They can elect to view it as a serious competition, or as a comical spin on games. But in either case, the community guarantees that rules are still set within these esoteric approaches to the game that crystalize the new agencies. Next, I further discuss the expansion of temporary agencies.

Agency expansion

I define *Agency Expansion* as the broadening of players’ capacity for decision making and action from a single game. The community has devised systems of categories that give players variations for how they engage with a game. Speedrunner Ryan provides the context as to the importance of run categories:

“The nostalgia of taking a game casually when you played it thousands of times, can only take you so far. I couldn’t believe that there were people who put so much effort into my favorite childhood games. We’re taking old games and players are looking to play them differently.”

They highlight how nostalgia is critical in electing to speedrun games. Every interviewee emphasised the young age at which they started playing games. Speedrunners are players that have spent hundreds of hours playing their favorite games, and speedrunning is an opportunity to revisit those games, remixing them through the creation of new objectives and agencies that surprise them, extending the time they can be entertained by it.

To legitimize the revisiting of old games through speedrunning, the community has defined numerous subcategories of speedruns, each designed to highlight different forms of agency. Speedrunner Nightzerker explains:

“Chaque jeu va avoir ses différentes catégories, et le choix va varier d’une personne à l’autre. Peut-être que la personne va vouloir

apprendre des jeux sans les glitches dans une run de 45 minutes. Ou quelqu'un qui va faire la run avec les glitches pour réduire le temps investi à 4 minutes. Les options sont offertes par la communauté. Moi, j'aime montrer le raw skill en me rendant du point A au point B de la façon la plus "légale" possible. Mais regarder un jeu complètement détruit par les glitches, c'est tout aussi amusant aussi. C'est la personne qui va décider la catégorie qui leur convient."

Nightzerker highlights how categories are crafted by the speedrunning community to offer an expanded array of gaming experiences from a single game—expanding speedrunning into variations. Each subset of rules presents different lusory means and prelusory goals, challenging the player in different ways. Players can choose from a curated selection of rulesets, each offering an approach to the game that highlights different parts of the experience. In my fieldwork, I witnessed many such categories. For example, players may wish to complete a “100% run”, that is to say find every collectable and complete every quest available. Alternatively, a “Low% run” presents the inverted experience of attempting to beat the game while completing the minimum required to progress, forcing completely different routes of progression. In another instance, “glitchless” runs ban all exploits to force players to truly hone their skill at the game mechanics. The community legitimizes each type of run, grouping runners together so that they may compete following the same lusory means.

The expansion of the temporary agency into different variations opens opportunities for further value creation around games initially devoid of value, at least from the community’s perspective. At NoReset, I observed how the children’s game Adiboo 2 was speedrun. Being made for young infants, the game has no failure state. Looking for challenges, speedrunners imposed a specific set of interactions that they must accomplish to finish a run, adding goals on which they can compete. Rulesets allow players to mould the gameplay experience, introducing challenge and competition even in games originally devoid of it. The community defines the victory conditions of speedruns, offering sufficient options that each player can approach the game in ways they personally find fun. Speedrunning epitomises the ideals of agency of the interactive medium, as players choose what is the funnest way to engage with a game, picking the variation that fit their own personal tastes best.

Player self-ruling

So far, I discussed the many ways games can be speedrun and the role of the community in maintaining cohesion despite the expansion of variations on the temporary agency. The last important piece of the puzzle for democratic rule setting is how players regulate themselves. I define *Player self-ruling* as the ways speedrunners will prioritize the fun of playing a game over the need to beat it faster. They sacrifice tricks and advancements if they make the game less pleasant to play through at the cost of efficiency, through rulings agreed upon by the entire community.

A key example to explain this dynamic is glitches, which present a gray area in terms of competition. Speedrunners go to great lengths to identify the triggers of glitches and exploit them to save time on their runs. For instance, they may try to break a game’s handling of physics to teleport through a door without finding the key necessary to open it. However, glitches can also hamper the communal experience. As Donaze Tello states:

“Les major glitch je trouve ça impressionnant à regarder mais je vois ça comme un cheat. C’est une source facile tandis que certains glitch mineurs peuvent te donner un certain petit avantage sans briser l’intégralité du jeu. Les mineurs demandent un certain input très précis, donc ça l’inclut sur vraiment l’aspect de la performance.”

Donaze highlights a strong distinction between fair and unfair glitches. To be fun, the portion of the game they skip must be limited. Certain glitches can teleport the player immediately to the credits, effectively removing all experience of the game. This is not the lusory goal of speedrunners—despite wanting to finish the game as fast as possible, they want to accomplish this by overcoming most of the challenges that the game offers. They are not looking to skip the game, but rather to find shortcuts that still offer a challenging endeavor. Additionally, Donaze highlights the importance of reproducibility. Speedrunners desire glitches to remain a display of skill. Exploiting glitches should thus require specific inputs to ensure demonstrations of knowledge and technical know-how. It is not enough to find a glitch and break a game; it is essential that it be repeatable by the entire community. Syn expands:

“I do draw a line where the run is completely butchered. It’s not fun for me because at that point I’m just kind of trying to get this one glitch and then nothing beyond that is fun. I’m not actually playing through the game anymore.”

Syn demonstrates that the appeal of speedrunning lies not in the aimless dismantling of games that undermine the experience, but instead in targeted disruptions that enhance it. The exploitation of flaws in the design is not the end goal of speedrunning, but merely a tool employed to appreciate its content more. In order to clarify the competitive gray area of glitches, the community has put into place many democratic systems to determine what can be deemed a “legal” and “illegal” glitch, that is to say, one that positively and negatively impacts the gaming experience and its challenges.

To evaluate the legitimacy of new glitches, the community comes together to establish specific rules, determined democratically. When new exploits are discovered, they will consider a glitch’s impact on a run before voting on its place within the ruleset. As highlighted by Morx:

“On teste le glitch sur plein de plateformes différentes pour voir si on a des différences. On essaie de voir à quel point c’est facilement récréable. Une fois qu’on a fait toutes ces études-là, il y a un vote public dans la communauté. [...] Pour le zip, je compte voter non. Parce que même si j’ai réussi, ça va transformer le jeu en jeu de chance. Et moi, j’aime pas ça. Je veux que la personne puisse être en mesure de pratiquer le truc et de le faire à chaque fois. [...] C’est ce qui différencie pour moi un athlète de quelqu’un qui est juste chanceux”

Morx delves into an occurrence in the Resident Evil 4 speedrunning community, during which a skip glitch was discovered, allowing him to gain a world record. However, the glitch was difficult to reproduce, making the gameplay experience tedious. So, he willingly voted to ban the glitch, giving up his world record to emphasize skill over luck-based

achievements. This presents an inherent contradiction to speedrunning. Speedrunners actively aim to exploit unintended glitches in an attempt to shave seconds off their time, but not at the expense of undermining most of the challenges associated with a speedrun.

These rulings often find themselves being positioned in reaction to the industry itself. Particular versions of games or even controller inputs have been found to provide advantages to speedrunners. The updating of games to remove glitches by game developers has created annoyance and hurdles they must adapt to. A recent example noted in interviews is Mario Odyssey, which had a major skip glitch patched out in its update 1.3. This meant people with patch 1.0 had a competitive advantage compared to players using the patch. However, only players who had a physical copy of the game could access the earlier version. Players with a digital copy were forced to update to 1.3 even if they did not desire to, creating a rift in the community. Ultimately, it was decided by vote that the main run of Mario Odyssey would be held on patch 1.3, with 1.0/unpatched becoming a subcategory. Here, speed was not the decisive factor, but instead the long-term health of the community.

As such, I observe how the speedrun community has organized itself to legitimize certain glitches and variations on the temporary agency, ensuring that all players can compete on an equal footing. Through moderation and supervision, they expand the lusory goal and the means by which players can engage, thereby transforming the play experience and creating value.

4.2.1.b Challenge Endeavours

I define challenge endeavours as the ways speedrunners trailblaze variations in the temporary agency that expand the game experience. This is achieved by *coopetition*, *layering difficulty*, and *celebration of community legends*.

Layering Difficulty

I define *Layering Difficulty* as the way in which speedrunners will repeatedly alter the agency of their games by adding challenges after each victory. Every time they are successful, they will further push themselves by adding additional modifiers and handicaps to their previous run, raising the challenge evermore. Speedrunners test themselves through added layers of difficulty. While time-based challenges serve as a first layer, speedrunners often add additional modifiers that make their games unpredictable. Speedrunners position themselves as the elite of the gaming community, showing off in-depth understanding of the games that generate awe by overcoming impossible challenges. These prove to be entertaining for viewers, as their skill shines in a duel between the game designer and the speedrunner outwitting them. As speedrunner Donaze Tello explains:

“Mais j’ai ce que je trouve intéressant, c’est à quel point on peut pousser les limites d’un jeu. Comment un jeu difficile avec des manœuvres encore plus difficiles vient à faire paraître comme si c’était vraiment du gâteau. C’est ce qui était le plus fascinant: comment des gens peuvent carrément détruire un jeu que ce soit par le glitch ou tout simplement par la pure performance”

The participant highlights a core attraction towards outstanding executions. Speedrunners push games to their limits in terms of skill. As such, as their mastery increases, they impose additional handicaps to maintain the level of challenge. Such speedruns can vary greatly in their form but must offer something that has never been achieved before. Often, they take on the form of endurance tests, such as extended marathons that force runners to beat several games in a row. Notably, speedrunner QueenAnneB mentions the Marihour:

“In the Mari-Hour, you have to do Mario Bros. 1, 2, the Lost Level, 3, N64, and then World within an hour. There’s only 4 or 5 people in the world who did it.[...] I was amazed by the dedication. I’m not a patient person. I would have abandoned it. I couldn’t believe that there were people who put so much effort into my favorite childhood games”

This challenge requires players finish six separate Mario games all within an hour. They transform the games into endurance feats that are both mentally and physically taxing. Despite their skill and knowledge, this requires heightened concentration and investment in the game. Other communities embrace this attitude. Speedrunner BushidoYu marathoned the entire Soulsborne franchise, comprised of seven games, without taking any damage (Nightingale, 2022). This feat took 120 days of repeated attempts before succeeding in a 10-hour run.

By layering difficulty, the games remain challenging to players, even after they have completed it hundreds of times, extending their lifecycle. Online personalities specialize in challenge runs, live streaming their attempts over several days. For instance, Bushy has performed numerous physical runs where he plays through the game with handicaps. He may be blindfolded, or use incompatible controllers, such as a dance pad, performing complex movements to complete actions in the game that were once simple with a regular controller. Rather than typical skills such as fast reaction time and coordination, these runs force the player to appreciate new sides of the game, such as sound cues or overlooked mechanics to overcome the handicaps. These complexify the temporary agency, forcing them to consider new strategies and adding depth to the game.

I also see these efforts to reinvent games through difficulty in community projects such as ROM hacks. Hackers create complex versions of beloved games called “Kaizo” games, pushing their mastery to the limit. As ROM hack runner Xander explains:

“Kaizo’s a very specific design philosophy for game creation. I like the idea of these hard levels, that there’s kind of only one intended way that you’re supposed to do them. And that lends itself very well to speedrunning [...] There’s a lot of short sections, generally, with extremely hard tricks that are kind of puzzling, so you have to figure them out.”

Xander demonstrates the appeal of Kaizo games to the community: they are community built experiences designed to only be played one way. The slightest mistake leads to failure, requiring trial and error that pushes only the most patient and skillful of players to beat them. From this difficulty, ROM hackers create an experience that controls like the base game, but looks and feels completely removed from the original creators’ intentions. Through

this addition of challenge, speedrunners and viewers alike find new ways to appreciate their favorite games.

Coopetition

I define *Coopetition* as speedrunners' desire to aid each other's progress, using competition as a means of encouragement rather than a drive towards victory. Speedrunning is not driven by the desire to beat others. Instead, it is a competition with oneself, driven by an overall sense of communal support. Players encourage each other to reach beyond their limits, focusing on their personal journey rather than the leaderboards. Speedrunners are driven by the hunt for a personal best far more than that of a world record. As QueenAnneB puts it:

"I'm satisfied when I beat my own best. I still sign up for competitions knowing full well that I won't be the winner, but at least I learnt something, and had fun with people. It's also the social aspect that I like. Even if I don't have the world record, there's always people who come to look at me and give advice, and they're happy for me when I succeed. There's the social aspect behind it that's great. I realized that in the end, maybe the goal is not to destroy a game. It's to see how much the community can bring down the time of a game"

Her words demonstrate that while records are attributed to specific runners, they are merely a step in the community's overall journey to beat the game faster. Individual speedrunners are not necessarily attracted to the thought of achieving a perfect run for themselves. They find value in adding to the community's ongoing efforts. Players encourage each other to improve as they know that motivation will push players to uncover new tricks that would help other community members also decrease their time, slowly driving the community towards more and more impressive runs with each finding.

Speedrunners view their hobby as an exercise in pushing their limits. The community encourages all to embrace the challenge in a healthy spirit of self-improvement, with each individual's improvement contributing to the community overall progress. As Morx explains:

"Le speedrunning c'est un très bel art de s'entraîner dans quelque chose sans nécessairement qu'il y ait d'autres aspects extérieurs. Tu veux juste pratiquer pour voir que tu t'améliores [...] Je pense que c'est un peu le même équilibre, aussi, avec les sports, non ? Tout le monde s'encourage à devenir le meilleur de soi-même. Peu importe si quelqu'un t'a dépassé, toi, t'es content. Parce que ça te fait un défi à atteindre."

Morx draws parallels with sports. Each run, mistake and victory contribute to better the runner, supported by a community. In his eyes, speedrunning is not done to celebrate the best and greatest on a leaderboard. It is instead meant to celebrate anyone motivated enough to push themselves to get better at games and brave enough to share that journey with others. The narrative of self-improvement becomes the core ideology at the heart of the medium, overshadowing any competitive aspects of it. Nightzerker develops this idea:

“Je ne regardais pas les leaderboard avant de commencer à speedrunner. Je le faisais vraiment pour moi parce que j’ai toujours un esprit compétitif à la base. Mais c’est sûr que quand tu découvres les leaderboard ça te donne le goût de vouloir pousser un peu plus.”

Nightzerker explains that he speedran games before he even knew of the competitive leaderboards. It was a self-imposed exercise, driven by an innate desire to improve their skill. Yet, once he was introduced to the scene, the community served as an extra incentive to push further. The spirit of speedrunning lies not in comparing your achievements to that of others, but from comparing your own progress over time.

While speedrunners exist within a wider ecosystem of competing players, they actually view other competing players as part of a system of mutual support. Cases of rivalry have occurred between runners who beat each other’s records, but these are seen as motivation (Richman, 2023). These friendly rivalries often take on the form of “partnerships” between runners, who motivate each other. For instance, popular Twitch streamers and collaborators Forsen and XQC have competed since 2020 in the game Minecraft, resulting in them repeatedly stealing the records from each other, as they forced each other to deepen their knowledge of the game (Richman, 2023). As Rock JMT explains, based on his experiences:

“J’ai du fun avec des gens dans la communauté: je partage la même passion que d’autres et on se comprend. Ça me donne le goût de continuer. Il y a un aspect compétitif, mais compétitif amical. On se moque gentiment mais c’est juste pour être drôle et se motiver. Il n’y a rien de méchant. Ça relâche la pression de toujours grinder sérieusement. Même quand on a une mauvaise run, on se rappelle que le but c’est juste d’avoir du fun”

His words emphasize how players may play up the appearance that they are competing seriously when in reality they view it as a friendly rivalry. Players enjoy building partnerships as it provides them with relief from the pressure of performance. They no longer only think of beating others, but instead share experience with others, grounding them in a healthier cooperative mindset focused on pleasure as much as competitions.

Celebration of community legends

Speedrunning is a milieu where players push games beyond their preconceived limits. Speedrunners take on various challenge endeavours that reinvent the temporary agency, becoming celebrated and having lasting impact on the community. I define *Community Legends* as trailblazers that expand a game’s temporary agencies through their creativity, setting challenge benchmarks for others to reach.

Speedrunners commit thousands of hours perfecting speedruns to be remembered for the challenges they overcame. To the community, these trailblazers demonstrate that the impossible is in fact possible. Their experimentation with agencies add new dimensions to games never before considered and alter the status quo of the community by complexifying the temporary agency. Their outside the box thinking and its transformative effect are celebrated by the community. As Morx explains:

“Tu as du monde incroyable. C’est inspirant, parce que ça crée des objectifs à atteindre. Cette run [de F-Zero] m’avait inspirée. C’est la première run qui m’a flabbergastée. J’avais envie d’atteindre ce niveau-là. C’est là que j’ai vu que le speedrun était un art. La beauté [du speedrun] est dans l’interprétation [du jeu] de chacun d’entre nous. Quelqu’un va lancer un nouveau projet, et il y a des personnes qui vont venir les rejoindre là dedans.”

Morx discusses a speedrun challenge in the game *F-Zero* he could not beat, but saw others complete. It demonstrated how much higher the game’s skill ceiling was than he realized. These achievements create awe. By viewing the game through the eyes of players that have different skill sets and approaches, Morx gained a fresh perspective of it. The transformative experience expanded the agential limitations, showing hidden depths to the game that added to his appreciation of it. And for this, he is thankful to these trailblazers and their unique perspective.

With challenge endeavours comes the pride of achieving something never done before. In doing so, speedrunners push the boundaries of what is considered possible in a way that adds to the ongoing history of the community. Several interviewees referred to older runners as “legends”. Speedrunner Frisson states:

“Le PACE est une scène qui c’est passé à Los Angeles [...] J’y suis allé parce que je savais qu’il y avait les grands runners de Mario 64 qui allaient se présenter. Pour moi, c’est mes idoles. Les voir, c’est comme voir son chanteur préféré: je veux un autographe. Les gens qui cherchent tout seul des glitches, je trouve ça incroyable. [...] Parce qu’ils font vivre le jeu, avec les défis, les ROM Hacks. Ils montrent ce qui est possible et poussent le jeu à sa limite.”

Frisson traveled from Quebec to Los Angeles because successful speedrunners are stars to him. They discovered tricks that changed how the game is played, provided new objectives to reach, and in doing so, earned his admiration, highlighting the importance of legacy among speedrunners. The value of legacy is seen in the way unwanted community members are wiped from its history. Field notes demonstrated instances where cheaters or prejudiced players had their names and faces anonymized on leaderboards. The harshest punishment in speedrunning is the denial of legacy. While their records may remain, their being is completely erased by the community.

The sense of individualism derived from achievements is also seen in the way specific glitches are attributed to the player who discovered them. Reverse engineering a glitch is challenging in its own right, and those who contribute to its unravelling are respected by the community. As QueenAnneB explains:

“Sometimes when you find glitches, you get the satisfaction of having them named after you. Everyone calls me Queenie. So, if I were to find a glitch, it could be the Queenie Glitch. And it gives a second life to a game. When there’s a new glitch, you can see people who suddenly want to find their own.”

She shows there is pride in discovering a useful glitch, as individuals are remembered for their contributions. Players will test out new games in the hopes of being the first to contribute discoveries, answering the challenge of an uncharted game where the speedrunning techniques have not yet been standardized. Successful speedrunners who have left their mark on the community inspire newer generations to commit themselves to the hobby in the hopes of being similarly immortalized.

4.2.2 Sociality-Focused Agency Creation

4.2.2.a Performing passionate artistry

Speedrunners are united by their passion for games, which they aim to express through a language, culture and aesthetics they develop together. I define ***Performing Passionate Artistry*** as how individuals participate in traditions that demonstrate their love of speedrunning as a medium. This is achieved through *knowledge as a communal property*, *entertaining broadcast structures*, and *performing salesmanship*. Through these efforts, speedrunners create a welcoming community that helps diffuse speedrunning and welcomes newcomers, while expanding the speedrunning itself.

Knowledge as a Communal Property

I define *knowledge as communal property* as the community-wide efforts to diffuse techniques and discoveries to strengthen both new and old players' understanding of the games they speedrun. Speedrunners diffuse the temporary agency by treating knowledge of how to complete runs rapidly as a communal property. Through this tradition, speedrunners craft a welcoming community where players are given equal opportunities to learn about and appreciate their favorite games on a deeper level. They celebrate their love for gaming together, adding a social aspect to their favorite pastime.

Speedrunning is a temporary agency where players try to beat one another's time. Consequently, we might anticipate that secrecy is a governing norm to encourage competition (e.g., Franke & Shah, 2002) and the withholding of strategies to gain an advantage. Instead, speedrunners openly share both passion and knowledge with each other. As Syn explains

“Runners want other people to succeed as well. It seems like a competitive experience, but at the same time we support one another. Anytime somebody picks up my favorite game, I’m there in their chat. And it’s exciting to see runners learning and going through the same motions that I did. They need that support. A lot of runners feel that they’re not good enough when they start off. But none of us got to this point just on our own. So it compels us to help one another.”

Syn showcases the mutual support integral to speedrunning culture. Established speedrunners will often provide new enthusiasts with support, joining their streams and offering them advice. Online forums and live broadcast chats see players share discoveries and assist struggling newcomers. Meanwhile, community organized events and broadcasts such as GDQ can draw in upwards of 200,000 viewers, where the runners share their knowledge directly to the audience. This sense of duty to other speedrunners is maintained

through a tradition of transparency. The notion of keeping secrets is non-existent in the community, as knowledge is seen as communal. As QueenAnneB explains:

“I found the communities behind speedrunning very welcoming. I didn’t see anyone who thought “Oh, that’s my thing and I don’t show it”. It’s very open. We help each other a lot. When someone finds something, they go up to everyone, they make a video on how to do it.”

The speedrunner demonstrates that secret keeping is not common to speedrunning, and is antithetical to the community’s ethos. Speedrunners contribute to an ever-evolving communal run where knowledge passed down from player to player, contributing to the core spirit of coopetition. This culture of sharing is achieved through video sharing, as public records enable players to analyze each others’ strategies and deepen their understanding of a game as a community. As speedrunning Earthide explains:

“Jamais tu ne vas voir des gens cacher un glitch où ils sont les seuls à savoir comment le faire pour devenir meilleur que les autres. Tu ne peux pas quand tout est public. Le côté collaboration est toujours présent. Si un glitch est trouvé, tout le monde va travailler ensemble pour le comprendre.”

He shows that in this tightly knit community, it is next to impossible for runners to keep tricks to themselves. If a new record is set, other players will gang together and attempt to understand it together. Players are welcomed into an environment where, if they are willing to learn, all the necessary tools to succeed are made publicly available, assisted by the community. This creates a communal approach to play, where speedrunners all employ similar strategies but learn from each other’s unique approaches. Speedrunner Donaze Tello explains:

“Les gens apprécient le jeu de façon différente et c’est ça qui est le plus merveilleux. C’est intéressant de voir ce que je peux apporter à l’autre? Qu’est ce que l’autre peut m’apporter? C’est un échange mutuel. Je trouve ça beaucoup plus enrichissant. Il y a plus de valeur à partager plutôt que de se réserver pour essayer de juste purement compétitionner”

In sum, speedrunning is orchestrated by a norm of sharing, where knowledge exists as communal property. This transparency provides the glue that holds together a consumer-created temporary agency that operates across a variety of games. Interestingly, the mutual exchange between speedrunners may intensify competition: by democratizing access to tricks, the focus is shifted onto execution and innovation. Speedrunners such as Donaze recognize individual runs as cogs in a larger machine, where each run contributes to the community’s relationship with a game, creating “linking value” (Cova 1997) between speedrunners.

Performative Salesmanship

I define *Performative Salesmanship* as the way speedrunners attract new players to the community by presenting their favorite games to run under their best light, highlighting their most interesting qualities and the facets that make it competitive to run. Speedrunning is a niche and communal activity. The value created by sharing knowledge and performing theatrics for and with others can only be realized when the community is active and populated. As a result, speedrunners often use performative methods to gain fans. As Syn explains.

“At the last GDQ I laughed so hard purely because of the commentary. [...] I don’t even know what was going on in the game. I don’t even think the commentators really knew either. They were just having so much fun. And that’s one thing you just can’t get from just somebody going through a game [...] And it now goes down as one of my most memorable runs that I’ve ever watched in an event.”

Syn witnessed a speedrun that he had no personal attachment to, yet the excitement and attitude of runners were infectious, drawing him to the game, making it a memorable experience he wished to be a part of. This excitement then expands into a personal desire to get more involved in these new games’ communities. As he expands:

“When I first started, I just wanted to be an expert in Tetris and that’s it. But I started to realize that after months of playing the same game that you want to play more games. Discovering communities, meeting people really makes it so much more fun and rewarding. You’re running a game, but there’s so much more happening around you. The stream started to become more important than just putting the game in. It evolved into entertainment. It evolved into a hobby that’s a social outlet”

Syn exemplifies the traditional path of most speedrunners. They first focus on a game that fits their personal interests. However, as they integrate the community, they find themselves attracted to personalities and experiences that convince them to try other games. They expand their experiences, as the temporary agency of speedrunning creates new potential for value creation across different games. Through this process of integration in a community, speedrunners find more entertainment and joy out of their passion, even stepping outside of their comfort zone to discover new experiences.

While this process of recruitment can sometimes occur organically, it is also a conscious decision by many players. Many speedrunners choose the games they play out of devout adoration for these childhood favorites, and to see others join the community to maintain their relevance. If new players show interest in playing the game, then the speedrunning community will always be able to create variations that will keep it fresh. Nighzkerker explains the need for player recruitment to maintain the community:

“On veut faire un world record mais si un plateau est atteint, ça peut décourager la communauté et causer la mort du jeu [...] Les gens qui présentent leur jeu non seulement veulent avoir un bon temps mais

aussi veulent faire découvrir des choses aux viewers. D'où la raison qu'il y a souvent des gens qui sont avec les runners comme un "couch" pour expliquer comment ils font les glitches [...] J'aime découvrir des jeux que les gens aiment et font découvrir au monde. Trouver une autre personne avec qui tu vas pouvoir apprendre. Et vice-versa."

Nightzerker exemplifies how speedrunners find excitement in seeing another player's passion. Players showcase their love for specific games, and their enthusiasm attracts others to try them out, feeding into the community's player base. To him, this mentor-trainee type relationship typifies relationships between speedrunners of different games. Additionally, Nightzerker emphasizes the importance the "couch" plays in promoting the speedrun community. Indeed, events such as NoReset sees commentators sitting next to a speedrunner discussing their runs as they happen. They take time to explain the most unique facets of their games and the systems they exploit. In essence, they emphasize the quirks that differentiate their game of choice from others. The couch serves as a form of salesmanship, presenting the game to audiences under its best light, in an attempt to attract and foster a more active community. This process is critical in discovering new games that fall outside of one's comfort zone. As speedrunner and NoReset organizer DDG discusses:

"Au début, je regardais plus des jeux que moi je connaissais. Puis à force d'en regarder, j'ai commencé à regarder plus le runners que le jeu. Si le Runner est intéressant, même si le jeu l'était moins, et s'il était capable de bien expliquer, autant je pouvais regarder et être attiré vers le jeu"

Like many, DDG's initial interest in the scene lay in rediscovering games he already loved. However, with time, streamers' personalities took precedence in driving his interests in games. DDG went from feeling connections with the games to the players themselves. And through this change, he joined new communities, showing that streamers serve a critical role in recruiting new players to foster a competitive community.

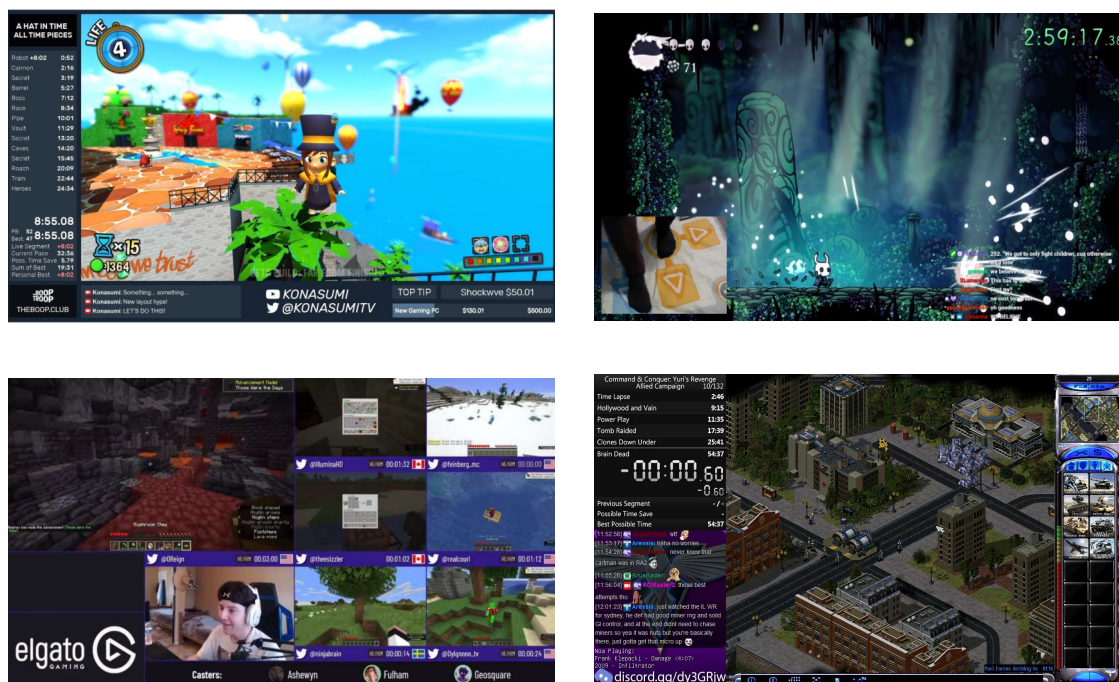
Broadcast Entertaining Speedruns

I define *Broadcast Entertainment* as the theatrical attitudes speedrunners take when playing their games to create fun viewing experiences that can be viewed over long periods of time. Speedrunners show their love for gaming through theatrical performances that are either recorded or live-streamed. While each player shares similar strategies, speedrunners find other ways to distinguish their styles of play, creating an exciting performance that relies just as much on personality as on skill. This creates a form of entertainment that adds value to both the gameplay experience and for viewers, helping with speedrunning's popularity. QueenAnneB explains:

"When I stream, I try to put on more of a show because I know that I'm not the best. Some players that are great are boring to watch. They don't speak, show no emotion. I like to live the emotions of people with them. [...] So when I do commentary, I give a show. I make jokes and puns. I dress up as characters from the game."

QueenAnne recognizes that she is not in the running for a world record, so she instead stands out through an online persona. She views speedrunning as a form of amusing spectacle, more akin to comedy than a sports competition. The appeal of speedrunning becomes centered around the personalities and stories of the players more than the games themselves. When speedruns are broadcast live, each streamer's screen takes on a different appearance as they customize their on-screen overlays to reflect their brand of entertainment (see Figure 1 below). Their streams are defined by chaotic screens covered in webcam videos, icons, scrolling live chat, timers, and collections of random images that reflect the player's personality.

Figure 2: Example of Speedrun Stream Displays of Break the Record Live ; Mossbag, and Konasumi and ROMaster2



Narratives between players also develop, creating an ongoing “soap opera” that blends the true personalities of the players, their relationships and the performative personas they put forward. At No Reset, I witnessed one race during which such a narrative unfolded: one runner was presented as the “hero,” with a full musical number setting up his introduction, and the other as the villain, as he jeered and mocked the crowd booing him. I interpret such theatrics as taking inspiration from wrestling, down to the winner of the race eventually winning a title belt (Granelli, 2017).

These elements of speedrunning transform the experience of the game: when embedded in the new temporary agency, games become a theatre. Streamers are expected to entertain, while viewers are expected to interact with the runners in the form of heckling or use of widespread in-jokes. These transformations bring viewers in, encouraging the development of a communal atmosphere and the creation of new forms of value associated with viewership. For instance, Super Mario games see the crowd yelling “orb” whenever a round object appears. I also see this form of comedic self-deprecation in “meme” runs, as

humorous systems of behavior are shared across the community. For instance, “Where is Waldo”, a children’s game with very little input required from the player, that still manages to bring together a small speedrunning community of players who play it not for the serious competition, but for the laughs it brings them. Syn discusses:

“I think “Where is Waldo” for NES was perfect. I never played it growing up and people were just thinking “it’s a meme run” because it’s like 3 minutes. But it just seemed like so much fun. Every October, a bunch of people just start playing it dressed as Waldo. It started from seeing how people enjoy this game, and had fun with it. So it became a speed run. But it became so much more”

Syn demonstrates the light-hearted performance at the core of speedrunning. Players will put on silly costumes while they play even sillier games, transforming traditional gameplay into theatrical performances built around comedy, aiming to enhance the entertainment value. The gameplay underlies other forms of performative value creation that alter the experience of playing the game through new social agencies. The self-mockery inherent to speedrunning is unsurprising when one considers the ludicrous hoops many players find themselves jumping through, all in an attempt to provoke outcomes that outside of the context seem ridiculous. It is harder to take a game seriously when characters are teleporting through walls and visuals are altered into caricatures of what should be displayed. I conclude with Morx, who explains the value-adding aspect of this characteristic of speedrunning:

“Peu importe si tu connais la personne qui est à côté de toi ou non, tout le monde va capoter. Ça va être comme un concert. C’est vraiment de la performance. Super Metroid, je n’ai jamais joué. Mais c’est un de mes speedruns préférés, et c’était pas par rapport au jeu. C’était par rapport à ce qui est autour de moi.”

Morx likens the experience of witnessing a speedrun to yet another form of broadcast entertainment, this time a concert. In doing so, he highlights the sense of collective euphoria that can come from speedruns. Any game can trigger such reactions so long as the personalities match, enhancing the excitement that comes from the game, often driven by a strong sense of comedy derived from the absurd nature of the agencies speedrunners create.

4.2.2.b Communal Play

I define **Communal Play** as the way speedrunners emphasize cooperative experience and social interaction, redefining the gameplay experience from a solitary one into one that can be shared with others, helping forge friendships. This is achieved through *multiplayer agency, audience participation and communal creative projects*.

Addition of Multiplayer Agency

I define *the addition of multiplayer agency* as the methods through which speedrunners turn single-player experiences into competitive or cooperative ones, transforming games meant to be played alone into social experiences. Races between players are commonplace, where individuals play the game at the same time, trying to outpace their

opponents. Yet despite a structure that seemingly encourages competition, in practice, these races serve as an excuse for community members to spend time together. As Donaze Tello explains:

“Le bonheur se partage. L’aspect communauté est un de mes grands moteurs principaux. C’est un plaisir qui n’a jamais été possible avec ces vieux jeux. Par exemple Zelda, normalement tu ne peux que jouer seul. Maintenant j’ai l’opportunité de jouer avec d’autres gens. C’était quelque chose qui n’était qu’une simple rêverie de gamins. Les amis, c’est un collatéral qui est devenu l’objet principal”

For him, speedrunning transforms single-player games such as the Legend of Zelda into social activities. In the past, only one player could hold the controller and play at a time while others were relegated to viewers. Through speedrunning, no such limitations exist anymore. Players can play simultaneously, each experiencing the pleasure of submerging in the game’s temporary agency. Through this addition of a communal aspect to the games, speedrunners find new value in their games, which now serve as a social tool.

This communal aspect afforded by the temporary agency fosters a positive atmosphere within the community. As speedrunner RockJMT explains:

“Dans la communauté, tout le monde est juste friendly. C’est tellement amical que ce n’est plus une compétition. [...] On se fait des soirées course. On a du fun à être ensemble plutôt que seul avec Twitch. On compétitionne, mais on se dit des petites blagues pour niaiser.”

RockJMT highlights that speedrunners take solitary games and turn them into social events around which players can gather and interact as friends. Setting up simultaneous games serves as an alternative for games that do not offer multiplayer options. Speedruns are no longer performed alone, and players no longer feel their hobby isolates them, and instead it offers them an actively social experience. At NoReset, visitors were welcomed by a slew of arcade machines from retro pinballs to newer machines, all set to free play. CRT monitors were installed, fitted with various retro games. People gathered around machines, watching extremely talented players practice their speedruns, exchanging thoughts and knowledge, sharing controllers so that they may play together. This attitude can be seen in games such as Trackmania, where clans such as FastestWayOnly specialize in hunting difficult-to-achieve glitches. These communities organize hour-long sessions in which players all attempt the glitch simultaneously, waiting to see who can succeed first while spending time together chatting to fend off the repetitiveness of the endeavor (FastestWayOnly, 2025).

These dynamics are heightened by the bonds that emphasize fun over serious competition, even when competing appears to be the main goal. As Frisson explains, talking about a race at NoReset he participated in:

“Ce n’était pas une compétition. C’était vraiment juste des potes qui faisaient une petite course tranquille. On s’était tous dit qu’on partait pas pour se battre, mais plutôt pour montrer ce qu’on était

capable de faire. Ton but est de gagner, oui. Mais ton but n'est pas d'écraser la personne non plus. T'as quand même le goût que la personne a un bon résultat. On est tous des passionnés, on est tous des amis. On est vraiment tous là pour s'aider et apprendre des trucs, même pendant une course."

Frisson highlights how races are more community-oriented performances than competition between individuals. While they are framed around the idea of winning a challenge, this merely serves as an excuse to be in the company of others. As with many other consumption activities (e.g., Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Seregina and Weijo 2016), speedrunners use their hobby as a social gathering hub. They are not hellbent on proving their superior skill, just sharing in a moment with others. From these direct interactions, they can more directly share knowledge and assist each other, creating ever stronger bonds.

These added dynamics of multiplayer to games can also take on cooperative aspects. At No Reset, couples and families, including parents and children, would often share a stage, playing together and coordinating their actions, turning their runs into displays of teamwork. As Syn explains

"These two runners are so synchronized like they just can read each other's minds. Their movement is almost mirrored, synchronized. But seeing that type of run with the races going back and forth when they're so close, I think that really adds a lot of entertainment, like an air show."

Syn compares the experience of watching speedrunners cooperate to an air show. He highlights how these new approaches to games alter our understanding of speedrunning as a whole. The focus no longer resides in beating the game fast, but instead in the understanding of one's teammate. The experience of play is turned into a communal endeavor, where no single individual is left alone, and instead one will always find someone to interact and share the experience with, creating social value.

Audience Engagement

I define *Audience Engagement* as the manner in which speedrunners blur the borders between viewer and performer, creating a theatrical environment where everyone is active in some way. The community embraces audience interactions, as player and viewer engage in a form of interactive play that benefits the gameplay experience. Viewers are not passive observers, but instead active participants that breed chaos and unpredictability, creating new challenges for the player to overcome, and dynamic entertainment for the viewer to enjoy. Morx describes a charity event he participated in that saw audience and speedrunner interact:

"Le public pouvait donner de l'argent pour me mettre des bâtons dans les roues. Et je pense que les deux premières minutes, j'ai calé 16 shooters. Après ça ils m'ont donné une manette dégueulasse avec laquelle je devais faire le reste de l'événement C'était drôle, un bel événement de crowd."

Morx describes how crowds contribute to runs. Rather than allowing the runners to determine their own challenges, audiences were incited to participate in the process and be as devious as possible. The runner was given dysfunctional equipment, encouraged to drink, forced to make suboptimal decisions. This aspect of audience participation is very standard in broadcast events such as NoReset or GDQ. By sending donations, audiences can add additional modifiers or objectives the player must adapt to on the fly. For instance, in the game Super Metroid, the crowd can donate money so the runners aim for a secret ending where “they save the animals”, adding a few seconds to the run (per field notes). Competitive sanctity and best-of speedrun times are sacrificed for the entertainment of the crowd, blurring the line between performance and social interactions. The player challenges the audience to handicap them as much as possible, adding to the skill displayed by the runners and improving the viewing experience.

These attitudes can also be seen in the online streaming sphere. Implementations of Twitch chat into challenge runs have become commonplace. Using user-created modifications of the game, players will alter the game’s code to introduce even more challenges that test their knowledge and prowess, which the chat can then impact. As Frisson explains:

“Dark Viper fait ça avec Grand Theft Auto 5. Twitch vote sur ce qui va se passer à l’écran, et sabote le speedrunner. J’adore ce type de run où on met des bâtons dans les roues. Vraiment tu commences à pousser le jeu à plus que sa limite. A ce moment-là, on dépasse ce que les créateurs avaient conçu.”

Using streamer Dark Viper as an example, Frisson showcases the fun that can be drawn by having viewers sabotage a speedrunner’s efforts. Grand Theft Auto 5 runs take between five and ten hours, even among world record holders. Yet, audiences are encouraged to make this already grueling speedrun even more difficult for the runner by controlling a chaos modification, which generates unpredictability in hundreds of ways. These can be handicaps and advantages to the player, such as giving them powerful weapons or making their character harder to control, which in turn generates moments of comedy. While the streamers still record their time, the focus is no longer on speed, but on reaching the end, proving to their audience that the challenge was possible in a communal push-pull effort that tests the speedrunner’s skill.

These types of audience-driven runs are extremely popular. Bushy and LilAggy organize “bingo races,” where arbitrary goals chosen by their fans are placed on a bingo sheet, and the two must race to complete the objectives and fill a line before the other. This forces the speedrunner to react to their audience, mentally pathing out an optimal route on the fly. Meanwhile, “Twitch Plays” is a social experiment that allows Twitch Chat to play a game themselves: The game plays for a few seconds before pausing, at which point the audience can vote upon the next move through chat. This turns the process of beating the game into a turn-based affair, as the audience is split between trolls sabotaging the run with non-optimal moves and others attempting to succeed through teamwork. Games beaten through this democratic voting system have included Pokémon Red, which took a total of 1.16 million participants across 16 days of straight gameplay, as well as Dark Souls, Halo and Fallout (Kain, 2015). As such, the community builds systems of communal play through which the

borders between viewer and player are blurred. Viewers are encouraged to share the spotlight with speedrunners, granting them new forms of agency and altering how they interact with games. From this reconfiguration, new unpredictable outcomes are drawn that increase the fun they experience playing and watching the game.

Communal Creative Projects

I define *Communal Creative Projects* as efforts to directly alter the code of a game, and from such modifications, create new experiences the community can enjoy. The speedrunning community engage in communal projects to transform existing games, creating radically new experiences that speedrunners can appreciate. They share together the pleasure of creating fresh game experiences, before sharing them and enjoying the fruits of their labor together as a community.

For example, the speedrun community has played a critical role in the development of ROM (Read Only Memory) Hacks, fan-made creations that dramatically alter the contents of a game. Players break into the game's firmware, modify code and create new content from scratch, allowing for the game to display new visuals, music or mechanics. Yet, despite these modifications, the underlying code and systems are untampered, and the original "feel" of the game remains the same. As ROM hacker Ryan explains:

"One of the problems when you play Super Mario World a lot is you get so used to how the physics should be that everything else just feels bad [...] I think ROM Hacks allow you to push the limits of the game engine. For people who love these old games, it gives it a new facelift [...] People make hacks for each other, right? If somebody makes a hack and your name is on it, you just really want to play it, because you want to support your friends the way they're supporting you, and the community kind of feeds itself"

Ryan highlights the symbiotic relationship between speedrunners and hackers. Speedrunners seek to push the games to their very limits through arbitrary rules they impose upon themselves. Hackers answer their efforts by directly modifying the game rules. The two depend upon each other, with hackers reacting to advancements made by speedrunners while speedrunners take on the challenges the hackers offer them. As a result, community developers will often include callouts to speedrunners in an attempt to gain attention. For instance, one of Mario World's most infamous ROM hacks is named Grand Poo World, a direct reference to GrandPooBear, a notorious streamer. This association brought attention to the hack, driving its popularity. The programmers offer challenges to speedrunners tailor-made for them, transforming game design into a communal effort. Together, they co-create the new agencies, altering how the game is played in a tangible way that can be shared with anyone.

Other such prevalent community modifications are randomizers that introduce elements of randomness into games, determined not by audiences, but by a random number generator. These change the placement of rooms and objects to create an experience that is familiar, yet entirely fresh every time. Luck and creativity become as important as skill and knowledge. A subset of these, the multi-world randomizers, is the most recent innovation provided by the speedrunning community. For example, two players can play Legend of

Zelda: A Link to the Past on separate screens, each progressing independently. Yet, player 1 may find in their game an item required for player 2's progression. This allows players to enjoy single-player games together without the competitiveness found in more standard races. Instead, the players rely on each other to progress and eventually complete the speed run together. These further enhance the communal aspect of speedrunning by allowing multiple players to share the experience together in a tangible way. As Syn states:

“With multiworlds, you can play games while other people are playing different games, but your items are mixed in between them. The community aspect of it opened my mind. There are more people playing randomizers than the vanilla games. I have something to do every week. I have a way to compete in Soul Blazer with both top runners and new runners.”

Syn highlights how these community-driven game modifications are among the community's most popular, serving as a regular activity people can gather around without monotony ever settling in. The freshness also makes modifications more welcoming to new players, as they do not start with as big a knowledge gap as established runners. Established and new players experience the thrill of a community cooperating to perfect a run.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Value co-creation through transgressive practices

My research identifies ways in which consumers co-create value by going against the intentions of producers. Through qualitative data gathered on the speedrunning community and informed by Nguyen's (2019b) concept of temporary agency, I identified four key ways through which speedrunners create the temporary agency of speedrunning and variations around it. These findings challenge the prevailing notion of resistant and transgressive consumption practices as an inherently undesirable form of consumer behavior (Grayson, 2002 ; Kjeldgaard and Bode, 2016) to instead demonstrate ways the rejection of a product's intended design may create new value.

First, speedrunning offers a means through which players extend the relevance of their favorite games. By ignoring the rules set by the designers and setting their own communal form of temporary agency, they restore the sense of exploration and discovery integral to the medium. My findings build on Kozinet (2004), providing insight into the motivations behind transgressive consumption practices. They are not born of malicious intent (Fullerton & Punj, 2002), but instead come from a desire to fend off tedium. Speedrunners embrace the medium of agency to draw out longevity from their games. They dismantle the vision of the author as a means to preserve their attachment to these experiences without giving way to monotony.

Second, the transgressive approach of speedrunners to games helps them engage with the aspects of the game that they love most. Players are not bound to the agency offerings of game designers (Tanenbaum et al, 2009). Instead, the co-creation of a temporary agency allows the games to evolve through consumer-to-consumer interactions. When players expand on games' temporary agencies, they make a choice on which form of play they wish to engage with. Speedrunners serve as editors, emphasizing aspects of the game at the expense of others. They reproduce glitches and “against-all-odds events” that designers

attempt to obfuscate (Aarseth, 2007). Through this, speedrunners craft experiences that are ever evolving and uniquely their own, based on their in-depth knowledge and understanding of the game. Communities focused on modifying game code to expand their offering often struggle without support from game developers (Pera et al, 2021). For example, without consistent tools, modders often find themselves unmotivated, leading to co-destruction of value (Pera et al, 2021). In contrast, speedrunning demonstrates a situation where the lack of support from game creators is an advantage. Here, it is viewed as additional challenges to overcome, and the community comes together to find solutions. By creating new agency variations around the constraints game developers impose, speedrunners embrace misalignments between producer and consumer not as hardships, but as additional incentives to band together and reshape the experience their way. Speedrunning highlights the importance of consumer-to-consumer interactions in creating value through the reframing of temporary agency.

Third, players draw value from the social aspects of speedrunning. The community promotes exchange between individuals. Through their creation of a temporary agency, speedrunners reconfigure games designed for solo play into shared social activities and spectacles (Kozinets, 2004). Players awe each other through their skill and draw entertainment from community narratives and personalities. Designed entirely independently from game designers, this serves as an example of a community-driven spectacular environment. However, unlike Kozinets's (2004) corporate example of the ESPN zone, speedrunning is not gathered around a brand or a specific game, but instead gaming as a whole. All games, regardless of their developer, genre or target demographic, are treated equally. Together they form a part of a wider, shared gaming history. Each community member plays a part in it, giving each a sense of belonging to draw value from. Speedrunners find meaning in the caring community, from which many draw long-lasting friendships or even discover a significant other. This elevates the gameplay experience beyond the original intentions of the author, to make it a part of a greater whole.

Finally, these experiences provide players with a sense of ownership of games that increase their value in their eyes. In the era of digital storefronts, ownership of entertainment media has become intangible (Merges, 2008). Consumers pay for a license, installing software on game consoles without owning physical media (Sotamaa, 2010). Through freemium business models, corporations offer online support that may enable corporate-driven co-creation, but that also restrains individual ownership of their intellectual property (Hussain et al, 2022). Speedrunning challenges this form of consumerism, restoring a nostalgic understanding of ownership. In the same way that a child breaks open a watch to discover the clockwork inside, speedrunning lays bare the inner workings of the games. Speedrunners analyze and reverse engineer game designs, obtaining an all-encompassing understanding of their mechanics despite the intended plans of corporations. They look to understand not what the game is made to look like, but what the game truly is. To do so, speedrunners harness the medium of agency. They become artists in their own right, celebrating the game's true face, expressing themselves in a form of co-creation of artistic value by fostering a new way to engage in the world (Nguyen, 2019b). They mold the experiences into ones that are consistently fresh and enticing over long periods of time, free from the control of companies.

Within this context, we must consider how companies may apply these findings. The relationship between speedrunners and game makers can often find itself tenuous, as creatives and gamers can be in opposition with one another. Yet speedrunning is embedded in streaming culture, and streaming has proven to be an extremely proficient marketing tool. Many gamers view user-generated playthroughs as credible sources of information (Foster,

2016). As such, strong relationships with the speedrunning culture is serving as a powerful tool in spreading awareness about a game. A game with the approval of the speedrunning community benefits from exposure on streaming websites that serve as free publicity for gaming companies. Perhaps for this reason, game developers have increasingly accommodated speedrunners. Popular indie games such as SuperGiantGames' *Hades* and Thomas Happ's *Axiom Verge* include integrated timers or speedrun specific game modes into their games, encouraging speedrunners to try their game. Meanwhile, other games are marketed from the ground up to appeal to speedrunners. Gears for Breakfast's *Hat in Time* openly embraced its inspirations and positioned itself as a spiritual successor to the popular speedrun game *Mario 64*, piggy-backing off its preestablished fanbase. Maddy Thorson started developing as a ROM hacker for the speedrunning community before developing *Celeste*, with the support of the speedrunning community supporting her entry into mainstream popularity. Each of these games found great success despite lacking the backing of larger corporations for marketing. Future research could examine how much games' successes is supported by the speedrunning community.

Finally we can also acknowledge the positive word of mouth that comes from engaging with the charity events the speedrunning community spearheads. As stated prior, speedrunning marathons are often organized for selfless reasons, raising money for humanitarian organizations. As such, participation by companies brings positive attention, showcasing themselves as considerate not only of their fans, but of ongoing social issues. During an AGDQ 2019 run of *Hollow Knight*, the developers of the game Team Cherry donated \$10,000 for the Prevent Cancer Foundation, to the cheers and applause of the audience. Meanwhile, other studios such as Konami, Humble Bundle, Super Meat Boy and Annapurna Interactive have all at various times been sponsors of GDQ events. Through these actions, studios build brand loyalty, presenting themselves as personable and altruistic. Speedrunners are more likely to play the studio's next game when they feel recognized by developers who view gamers as more than potential consumers. As such, further research could examine the philanthropic underpinnings of the speedrunning community, and how companies can harness this in a way that builds audience trust.

5.2 Boundary conditions of agency co-creation & avenues for future research

My findings offer insights for corporations seeking to further their understanding of transgressive consumption and its impact on value co-creation that appear transferable to other contexts. We find many similarities to "IKEA hackers", a community of homegrown designers that repurpose IKEA products and rebuild them in unintended ways to create personalised furniture (Rosner & Bean 2009). Similar to speedrunners, IKEA hackers reject the design of a product to create something that better answers their personal needs and preferences, before sharing their findings with a community of like-minded individuals. In both cases, we see passionate individuals express their love and passion for a product through transgressive means in ways that create value for both themselves and the companies. Yet this transferability of my findings has limitations and may be applicable only under specific conditions. I identify two categories of boundary conditions: *Emotional investment* and *community independence*.

First, the mechanisms described in my research require emotional attachment to the object. Environments where participants willingly dismantle and reconfigure existing experiences require a thorough pre-existing understanding of said medium around which a

community can form. Speedrunning bears similarities to the ways film fans have elevated movies to cult status through the repetition of community rituals (Jerslev, 2016). For instance, Tommy Wiseau's *The Room*, a movie widely hailed as the worst of all time, has seen its fanbase embrace over-the-top traditions during screenings, such as throwing spoons at the screen, creating an atmosphere of jubilation (Foy, 2012). In both speedrunning and the cult communal filmgoing experience, participants challenge the traditional ideas of consumption, undermining the expected experiences in a demonstration of their knowledge and adoration (Foy 2017). The clash between audience and media creates value by changing how consumers enjoy the experience, adding facets of sociality. Participants are privy to a private joke that they get to share together, legitimizing their passion as a worthwhile endeavor. Communally viewing cult films demonstrates that quality is not a requirement for emotional investment. The existence of "so bad it's good" films demonstrate the possibility of ironic appreciation of art, which has been observed in the speedrun community: Awful Games Done Quick is a sub-section of AGDQ where speedrunners showcase the poor craftsmanship of bad games for laughs (per field notes). This proposes an alternative approach to the co-creation of agencies born not of adoration, but of ironic appreciation, which could be studied in future research.

Second, agency co-creation happens away from corporations. Direct attempts to control the co-creation of agencies and limit the transgressional behaviors will only dissuade consumers from engaging, limiting the benefits or worse causing co-destruction (Pera et al, 2021). Away from firms, communities are free to organize themselves and forge unpredictable new experiences that speak to their deeper needs. Here, I find similarities between speedrunning and online fan-fiction communities. These communities create new stories based on characters created by corporations, often combining characters from multiple franchises (Black, 2008). Both hobbies work outside the confines of corporate oversight to bend the laws of intellectual property (DeKoznik, 2009). New stories and characters expand these worlds, ignoring the original creators' intentions to satisfy the unanswered wishes of the fans (Black, 2009), in a manner similar to the communal creation of agencies found in speedrunning designed to reappropriate an experience as their own. Self-insert fanfics, that is to say fanfics in which authors write themselves directly into the fictional worlds they are pulling from, (Sapruidis, 2022), showcase the way writers wish to solidify themselves in the history of their favorite media just like speedrunners do. And on certain occasions, fan-canon has become so prevalent it has become accepted canon by both community and creatives (Leavenworth, 2014). Like in speedrunning, there exists a dialogue between consumers that happens removed from the creators, producing an interaction that may appear transgressive, but in practice customizes and enhances the experience for all. Despite the medium of fan-fiction being written, I notice similar behaviors to the medium of agency with communal transgressions that create value through chaos and unpredictability, providing avenues for future research of co-creation through transgressive means in other mediums.

5.3 Concluding Comments

American author Ray Bradbury stated in 2001 "Video games are a waste of time for men with nothing else to do. Real brains don't do that. On occasion? Sure. As relaxation? Great. But not full time— And a lot of people are doing that. And while they're doing that, I'll go ahead and write another novel." (Hibberd, 2011) His words reflect a belief that video games provide no value for creation or expression. The evidence of co-creation of agencies in my research demonstrates that the interactive medium has evolved past its humble beginnings. It has become a medium through which consumers can gain value in numerous

facets of their lives, whether they be social, creative or personal. Through the medium of agency, speedrunners reflect on facets of who they are, using entertainment as a conduit for far greater forms of self-expression, one that the still young industry has only begun to scratch the surface of. It is foolish to assume video games work in similar ways as other forms of art such as film. Doing so requires that we ignore its most impactful quality: agency. I hope the findings of this study will provide perspective on how much untapped potential remains there to be uncovered and help the medium reach new artistic heights.

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Interview Protocol

- 1) What is your relationship to gaming, and its community? How has it evolved over the years ?
- 2) How did you first get interested in speedrunning? What drew you to it, and what keeps you invested?
- 3) What makes for an entertaining speedrun?
- 4) Have you ever attempted to do any speedrun yourself? How does the experience differ from when you are a spectator?
- 5) What specific speedruns have stuck in your mind? What is it about them that sticks out? Are there certain speedruns you consider less interesting? What are their characteristics?
- 6) How has watching speedruns affected the way you enjoy games, or the types of games you enjoy?
- 7) What are your thoughts on the speedrunning community in general? Can you think of particular events in the community that attracted you or turned you away from speedrunning?
- 8) How important is competition to the speedrunning community? How important is cooperation?
- 9) As games today are often evolving through patches and updates, how have you found that to affect speedrunning? What are your thoughts on the relationship between game designer and speedrunner?
- 10) How would you like the future of gaming and speedrunning to evolve?

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