Re-curating the Accident:
Speedrunning as Community and Practice

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Abstract

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This thesis is concerned with speedrunning, the practice of completing a video game as quickly as possible without the use of cheats or cheat devices as well as the community of players that unite around this sort of play. As video games become increasingly ubiquitous in popular media and culture, the project of accounting for and analysing how people interact with these pieces of software becomes more relevant than ever before. As such, this thesis emerges as an initiatory treatment of a relatively niche segment of game culture that has gone underrepresented in extant game and media scholarship. The text begins by discussing speedrunning as a community. By chronicling the community's beginnings on SpeedDemosArchive.com and examining its growth with the emergence of contemporary content hosting sites like YouTube and Twitch, this thesis presents speedrunning as a collaborative and fast-growing community of practice made up of players who revel in playing games quickly. From there, an analysis of space and speed, both natural and virtual, is undertaken with a view to understanding how speedrunning as a practice relates to games as narrative spaces. Discussions of rule systems in games and within the speedrunning community itself follow. It is ultimately argued that speedrunning is a museum of accidents, a re-curating of a game according to what this thesis calls its explicit rules. This claim is expanded upon through the coining of a concept dubbed curatorial play as well as several case studies of developer responses to various games being speedrun.

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Introduction

A Study in Speedrunning

A roomful of people is huddled around a couch and television. One of them is holding a cumbersome-looking controller for the iQue player, a relatively unknown Chinese game console from the early 2000's that apparently plays older Nintendo 64 games lag-free, meaning that there is less delay between animation frames. Though most people would not go out of their way to import such an obscure console, for this player, every second counts. "I guess I'll start off by saying something here," the player holding the controller says. "A lot of people probably remember the AGDQ run earlier this year in January I did of this." The individual is referring to the last time the members of this player community gathered. 50,000 people saw the run in question live both in-person and through the online livestreaming website Twitch, where individuals can broadcast their gameplay to an audience in real-time. "And that run, I was kind of talking about how after years and years we finally solved the category." At this statement the group laughs. "Well," the player concludes, "it turns out this game never ends." The game in question is *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 1998), one of the most critically acclaimed adventure games of all time replete with environments to explore, monsters to defeat, and dozens of hours of gameplay. He plans to beat it in less than 30 minutes.

Speedrunning is the practice of completing a videogame as quickly as possible without the use of cheats or cheat devices. This can be achieved through extremely efficient play, the use of game-breaking glitches, or, most often, a combination of both. Playing games in this way has accrued a large following and in the time that I have been conducting my research and writing this thesis the speedrunning community, which began as a small group of players, has come to occupy a significant place within game culture. The two annual gatherings of the community in North America, Awesome Games Done Quick and Summer Games Done Quick (AGDQ and SGDQ) have become fixtures in the calendar of gaming events and even non-runners have begun to tune in.

Over the course of my research, I have observed this community's rise to relative prominence and devoted much of my time to thinking about how such gameplay alters broader notions of virtual space and speed. Furthermore, I have kept myself abreast of as much of the academic output relating to speedrunning as possible. Historically, speedrunning has been a footnote or an example raised in a broader discussion of play and performativity. As a result of speedrunning's recent growth, scholars have begun to write about the practice in and of itself, but these efforts are still relatively uncommon. To my knowledge, at the time of writing, this thesis stands as the most complete account of speedrunning as both community and practice to date. Even so, there are of course other game scholars who discuss speedrunning with varying depth whose work must be addressed.

A 'Quick' Review of Speedrunning Literature

One of the earliest and most thorough academic treatments of speedrunning I have come across can be found in James Newman's *Playing with Videogames* (2008). In the book's sixth chapter, Newman discusses both speedrunning as community and as practice as an example of "superplay", or any gaming practice that seeks to "demonstrate mastery of a game through performance" (Newman 121). The author touches on several key elements of the speedrunning community that will be brought up in this thesis, including the characterization of speedrunners as a group of "competitive and yet supportive players" who "share strategy and learn from one another" (129). Furthermore, Newman does well to contextualize speedruns within play and games, arguing that a runner's knowledge of a particular "game engine is earned through informed and well-observed play" (135). Other issues that will be addressed in this thesis, such as the relation between runner and developer are alluded to, but not engaged with.

The greatest weakness of the text is its age. Given that the book was written in 2008, several years before the emergence of livestreaming and Twitch, there have been many changes to speedrunning as both practice and community that Newman was simply incapable of discussing. As such, while his work has proven invaluable as a sounding board for some of my own observations, even the most extensive academic discussion of speedrunning I have found is in need of an update. Before

doing so, however, there are still other works that engage with speedrunning, albeit less extensively, that ought to be discussed.

For instance, one of the earliest mentions of speedrunning in game studies is as an early form of machinima, or movies made from games. In "High-performance play: The making of Machinima", Henry Lowood (2006) refers to the first series of speedrun videos, *Quake Done Quick*, as "a single-player show that combines virtual gymnastics, game engine analysis, trickery and expert gameplay" (Lowood 35). Lowood's discussion of Quake speedrunning as dashing "through game levels by all means available" is accurate, but the paper was written in the early stages of game studies (34). As such, his focus is moreso on showing that computer games ought to be "taken seriously" rather than interrogating exactly what the significance of playing games in this way might be beyond acting as an example of 'high-performance play' (25). Lowood brings up speedrunning with reference to machinima in other texts (Nitsche & Lowood 2011, Lowood 2013), but not much new information is given.

In his paper "The Significance of Jeep Tag: On Player-Imposed Rules in Video Games", Felan Parker cites speedrunning as an example of what he calls "expansive gameplay", or the process by which players "impose additional or alternative rules on video games, in order to refine or expand game play and to create new gaming experiences" (Parker 2008 1). Parker distinguishes between "fixed rules", or "rules that the player cannot refuse" as dictated by a game's code and "implied rules", or "all that which is assumed but not necessarily enforced about how a game should be played" (3, 4). Within this schema, he argues that speedruns necessarily follow a game's fixed rules while adding "a new quantitative rule (the goal of rapid completion) as well as [excluding] certain implied rules" (4). As I will show, this paper was central to some of my early thoughts on speedrunning, but as was the case with Lowood, Parker, both here and in some later texts (2010, 2011), is only interested in speedruns as they figure into a specific discussion, in this case the notion of player-imposed rules in games.

As one final example of a text to engage with speedrunning in this tangential way, Seb Franklin (2009) discusses speedrunning as it relates to a game's code. He

argues that speedrunning represents a "nonexistence in relation to software", citing in particular the fact that speedrunners "pass through walls that are coded to be impassable, harmlessly touch enemies that are coded to do a particular amount of damage [...] and […] assuredly collect items that are coded to be random" (Franklin 176). As I will show, this argument suffers from its attachment to the theoretical underpinnings of what makes up a 'contemporary minor practice' for Franklin. To wit, I argue that speedrunning involves a hyper-awareness of a game as a piece of software with an underlying code that works in very specific ways. Though it may seem like splitting hairs at the moment, speedrunners do not pass through walls that are coded to be impassible. By my definition (which we can see the beginnings of in Parker), a wall that is passible is coded as such even if this is an immersion-ruining mistake on the part of the game developer.

As regards 'my definition', some of the work of this thesis germinated out of a paper of my own entitled "A Practiced Practice: Speedrunning Through Space With De Certeau and Virilio" (Scully-Blaker 2014 Web). In it, I offer up two pairs of concepts to help frame speedrunning within the works of Michel De Certeau and Paul Virilio (both of whom will be discussed in this thesis as well): finesse and deconstructing speedruns as well as implicit and explicit rules. And while the discussion of rules will be returned to in the second chapter of this thesis, it is worth taking the time now to set out what is meant by finesse and deconstructing runs as a means of understanding how my thought has developed over the last two years.

The distinction between finesse and deconstructing speedruns relates to the assumption that games are narrative spaces, something that simply means that games deliver stories of varying depth through their virtual worlds. In this context, finesse runs are "those in which the narrative architecture of the gamespace is largely left intact" – a finesse run 'looks' like a very efficient version of a normal playthrough of a game (Scully-Blaker). A deconstructing run, on the other hand is one in which "narrative boundaries are torn down by the player" through the use of glitches and other programming oversights. These runs are the ones that Franklin refers to as passing through impassable walls and so on. The distinction between finesse and deconstructing runs is worth making for many reasons, not the least of

which is that it allows for one to see how both Lowoods 'high-performance play' and Franklin's 'passing through walls' figure into the practice. With all relevant speedrunning literature accounted for, I will now describe exactly what the reader will find throughout the rest of this work.

Plan of the Present Work

In its broadest sense, this thesis accounts for speedrunning as both community and practice and how the two relate to games and game culture. The text is divided into three chapters that reflect this purpose. Because relatively little has been written on speedrunning thusfar, each chapter of this thesis seeks to do more than put forth a single argument. In my mind, this is what separates my work as a *thesis* from a collection of three chapter-length papers – beyond defending a series of theses, the following text represents the formation of a knowledge base. In the following chapter summaries, then, I highlight not only the core argument of the given chapter, but also highlight the groundwork each chapter lays for future academic work.

Chapter 1 – *Speedrunning as Community* offers the first in-depth investigation into the community of players that play games quickly. After situating myself within a tradition of other ethnographic work done on communities with both online and offline components (Taylor 2006, 2008, Coleman 2012, 2014, etc), I delve into my own findings collected from participant observation of speedrunning livestreams on Twitch as well as interviews conducted with members of the speedrunning community at an annual meet-up – Summer Games Done Quick 2015. In tandem with this, a history of the speedrunning community is put forth that moves beyond Quake Done Quick. Framed by the emergence of YouTube and Twitch as platforms for hosting speedrunning content, the community's collaborative nature and its unprecedented growth in recent years are presented as a way of accounting for the years that have passed since James Newman's initiatory investigations into speedrunning.

It is ultimately argued that speedrunning's unprecedented growth can be attributed to both the emergence of Twitch and the community's collaborative nature. The laughter that followed the speedrunner in the above narrative's

assertion that a particular speedrun was 'solved' is understood through this chapter's presentation of the speedrunning community as one that will only continue to grow and the following chapter's discussion of the speedrunning practice as one that will only continue to develop.

Chapter 2 – *Speedrunning as Practice* presents my full theoretical understanding of speedrunning as it relates to the concepts of virtual space and speed. To do so, theories of natural space and speed, from Michel de Certeau (1980) and Paul Virilio (1977, 1980, 1986) respectively, are outlined and put into conversation with later work on virtual space done by Michael Nitsche (2011) as well as my own understanding of virtual speed as informed by how speed is represented in games and game culture. From there, I discuss speedrunning as it relates to rules since, in effect, virtual space and speed are just that - affordances made by a game's code. This discussion is essential to any theoretical treatment of speedrunning because one of the most common critiques levied against the practice by non-speedrunners is that such gameplay is tantamount to cheating. To rebut this, a distinction between what I call implicit and explicit rules is made clear. Finally, I conclude the chapter by discussing the speedrunning community's internal rules of operation as a way of suggesting that the speedrunning practice is a form of curation through play, something that is taken up in the following chapter.

Overall, Chapter 2 argues that, while Virilio's notion of the violence of speed may be attributed to the practice, speedrunning is not a form of cheating because it does not trespass against a game's explicit rules, or the rules that actually apply as dictated by a game's code.

Chapter 3 – *Speedrunning as Museum of Accidents* is an application of my understanding of speedrunning as both community and practice with a view to presenting a new perspective on play. The chapter begins with a return to the notion of speedrunning as curation by suggesting that speedrunning is an example of what Paul Virilio calls a museum of accidents, an exhibiting of the accidents that necessarily come with any technology, or substance. I suggest that speedrunning represents a re-curation of a game (substance) through its glitches and other programming oversights (accidents). In order to understand how speedrun play can

be re-curation, it becomes necessary to discuss exactly how play can be considered curatorial at all. As such, the concept of curatorial play is put forth to describe the relationship between developers as the original curators of a game and players who carve out their own narratives within these virtual spaces to varying degrees. The consideration of speedrunning as a re-curation of a game is then used to make sense of the various ways that game developers have responded to their games being speedrun. Based on my observations of the speedrunning community and the impact it has had on game culture more broadly, several case studies are presented to discuss how developers variously hinder, compromise with, or directly appeal to speedrunners who interact with their games in this way.

This concluding chapter uses the museum of accidents and my observed developer reactions to speedruns to make the case that certain types of play can be curatorial in nature and that speedrunning play in particular is a re-curation of a game through play.

Overall, as has been said, this thesis is a presentation and characterization of a notably underrepresented facet of game culture. By offering an in-depth understanding of speedrunning as both community and practice, this thesis makes a marked contribution to existing game and new media scholarship. The work presented in chapters 1 and 2 in particular serves as a base from which other work may be done, and chapter 3 demonstrates this by using everything that precedes it to make the case for (re)curatorial play. Before any of this can be discussed, however, it is necessary to outline the methods that brought me to my conclusions.

Methods

My first encounter with speedrunning was in 2008. It was my last year of high school and a group of us were in my friend Owen's basement when someone put on a YouTube video of a 16-star run of Nintendo's *Super Mario 64* (1996).[1] The game was arguably the best of the early 3-D platformers, a genre that was defined by players running and jumping from 'platform to platform' in an environment, defeating enemies and collecting items. In the case of *Mario 64*, the goal was to collect at least 70 of the 120 stars scattered around various levels and rescue Princess Peach from Bowser's evil clutches. It should come as no surprise, then, that when we came across a playthrough of the game that claimed to only collect 16 stars, we were both fascinated and incredulous.

As we watched Mario vault from platform to platform at alarming speed and clip through doors and walls that we knew were supposed to be impassable, our incredulity quickly evaporated and when Bowser was actually defeated after only 16 stars had been collected, our fascination turned to shock and adulation. Where some may have seen a montage of cheating and trespassing against the spirit of the game, my friend and I saw a level of virtual precision and dexterity present in the *SM64* run that we had never seen elsewhere. Though it was awhile before I rediscovered speedrunning videos, one could argue that it was at this moment that my research began.

Indeed, a large part of my investigation into speedrunning as both practice and community for this thesis began with informally watching hundreds of hours of gameplay footage, both live on Twitch and recorded and uploaded to YouTube. I began by watching streamers based on how many viewers they had and the games they were playing and would branch out to other channels based on the recommendations of these individuals. I was fascinated by how the community was structured and how this informed the interactions between different actors within the group.

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[1] While I cannot be sure of exactly which video it was, at the time of writing, one can find the current world record for the 16-star run by a Japanese player who goes by Xiah here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0jG8V5W3PQ

I slowly developed a sense not only of which members of the speedrunning community were friends, but also how some were part of what I took to calling the 'sub-communities' that gathered around particular games. For example, while Narcissa Wright and Siglemic, two prominent runners of multiple *Legend of Zelda* and *Castlevania* titles and *Super Mario 64* respectively, shared a friendship that would refer viewers to each other's streams, Narcissa's viewers would also be drawn to other *Zelda* runners as they challenged her best times or she challenged theirs.

My list of speedrunners to watch only grew as I began following the annual speedrunning marathon events Awesome Games Done Quick (AGDQ) and Summer Games Done Quick (SGDQ). From AGDQ 2012 and on, I was introduced to new games that could be speedrun, new runners to subscribe to on Twitch, and new routes that had been discovered for beating games faster than ever. These GDQ events would turn out to be a major reason why the speedrunning community grew so rapidly in the years that followed.

It was not long before I found myself trying to speedrun games that I had liked as a child[2], which in turn prompted me to make a Twitch account of my own to watch speedrunners who were chasing world record times for these titles and ask them questions via the chat window about tricks or glitches. I became increasingly aware of the affordances of Twitch as a platform and of my own status as a 'member' of the speedrunning community, something that had never struck me as relevant until I finally began writing about speedruns in an academic context.[3]

When I decided to undertake this thesis, then, I had a great deal of insider knowledge of the speedrunning community from hours of what might be called informal participant observation. Still, I did not want to produce a piece of writing about the community, familiar though it may have been, without consulting other speedrunners as well. It was for this reason that, in addition to continuing to watch

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[2] The games that I have done dedicated speedruns of are *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 1998), *Snowboard Kids 2* (Atlus 1999), and *Sonic Adventure 2: Battle* (Sega 2001).

[3] For a more in-depth discussion of my earlier academic work on speedrunning (Scully-Blaker 2014), refer to the following section.

Twitch streams and read through speedrun forums, I began conducting email interviews and ultimately decided to attend Summer Games Done Quick 2015, which was held from July 26th -August 2nd, and speak with some of the 1200 community members in attendance.

Beyond simply wanting perspectives on the speedrunning community other than my own, the decision to conduct interviews stemmed in part from the recommendation of Richard Kozinets' *Netnography* (2010), where he writes that interviews "allow netnographic researchers to broaden their understanding of what they observe online" (Kozinets 47). The particular benefits he cites include honing "a detailed subjective understanding of the lived of online community participants" and developing "a detailed, grounded, subjective sense of an online community member's perspective and sense of meaning", among other things. Were I to do further work on the speedrunning community, I would be interested in conducting focus groups with members of the community that all play the same game in an effort to get a more multifaceted sense of the dynamics between individual speedrunners, but the interview has proven to be a helpful method for this initiatory investigation.

For this thesis, members of the speedrunning community were solicited for interviews across two major channels. A post[4] was made on the speedrunning community's Reddit page asking for participants who would be interested in answering my questions either via email or in-person at SGDQ 2015. With over 52,000 subscribers and at least twenty new posts per day, I had determined that this was one of the community's most-frequented discussion hubs, meaning that it was the best place to start recruiting interested runners.

As well, I sent Twitch messages to the accounts of specific, high profile members of the community, the idea being that I wanted to speak with at least one or two runners that I knew had a large following. This method proved to yield fewer volunteers, but still introduced me to several willing individuals who may not have

[4] Although the post has been archived, it can still be found here: https://www.reddit.com/r/speedrun/comments/3bnaen/sgdq_game_scholar_here_going_to_be_attending_sgdq/

seen my Reddit post. Ultimately, I believe this balance between an open call for participants as well as targeted solicitations was a good choice as it offered a broad range of community perspectives.

As a result of these efforts, 12 in-person, semistandardized interviews were conducted at SGDQ 2015 along with three more email questionnaires that were sent out while I was at the event, meaning that in total I have spoken to 15 members of the speedrunning community, 14 men and 1 woman ranging from the ages of 20-27. Those interviewed came from many different spaces within the speedrunning community, both in terms of which games they play and whether speedrunning was a new discovery, a longtime hobby, or a means of earning a living for them.

This distribution of participants differs slightly from what I would estimate to be the actual age and gender ratios of the speedrunning community, however this was, in part, unavoidable. For instance, there is a significant number of runners that I could not speak to since they are under 18 years of age and my ethics clearance for this project did not include the involvement of minors. And although I was surprised to find many more women in attendance at SGDQ than the handful of female streamers I have come into contact with, the nature of my call for participants meant that I felt uncomfortable simply approaching people with whom I had had no prior contact.[5]

An unfortunate side effect of my particular sample of participants, then, is that I feel incapable of accurately addressing the issues faced by non-white, male, heterosexual speedrunners as they correspond to those faced by marginalized people in other player communities. Although my one female participant and I had an in-depth discussion about her experiences, to present her account as somehow representative of all non-male speedrunners would be irresponsible and inaccurate.

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[5] The discrepancy between my sense of the number of female speedrunners and the number in attendance at SGDQ is likely due to two factors: the toxicity that exists towards women and other marginalized groups online and my own ignorance of more recent streamers. Some women who consider themselves members of the community likely do not stream due to the amount of harassment that takes place on Twitch. As well, since Twitch promotes streamers based on their viewer counts, and the community has grown rapidly in recent years means that I am definitely unaware of many of the newer streamers who are still developing a following.

It is an avenue of inquiry of great importance, but not one that can be adequately addressed in this thesis.

Regardless, I opted to undertake both online and in-person interviews for a number of reasons. Since the speedrunning community began and has only continued to grow online, there are very few opportunities for securing in-person interviews with multiple members of the community at once, with GDQ events being the notable exception. For practical reasons, then, my research began with online solicitations to ensure the greatest number of participants could be contacted, however I was ultimately fortunate in that many of the interested runners were also attending SGDQ 2015. Beyond geographic concerns, however, there are other affordances and limitations posed by both online and in-person interviews and so it was decided that a combination of both might offset potential negatives while maintaining the positives.

It is certain, for example, that the online interview format is generally better for receiving more carefully thought out answers to questions than an in-person interview. I was clear in the instructions attached to my electronic questionnaires that participants were free to take as long as they needed with their answers and while some replied within 24 hours of receiving the form, others took upwards of a week. Some email questionnaires were filled out with lamentably brief responses, but the need for follow-up questions to clarify what interviewees meant was never necessary.

On the other hand, by giving participants the chance to take their time with answers, the potential that information was withheld or skewed is larger than it might have been had they been put on the spot in an in-person interview. Still, I believe that the general nature of the questions posed in these interviews (See Appendix 1) was not likely to elicit the withholding of relevant information. The purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain multiple perspectives on the nature of speedrunning as both community and practice to read against my own understanding of them, thereby refining my treatment of both in this thesis. As a result, much of what I learned from my participants dealt with personal accounts of their relationship with speedrunning and nothing more. In short, participants were

arguably not asked anything that would likely prompt them to be vague or misleading and so, in most cases, this thesis opts to treat them as community voices that enrich my argument.

The in-person interviews conducted at SGDQ 2015 were helpful in different ways. Since the questionnaire was divided into four clear sections, it was easy to pace the discussion and give participants the opportunity to say as much as they wanted about a given topic before moving on to the following step. Not only were almost all in-person participants spoken to over the course of more than an hour, but they were also informed that the interview was semistandardized, allowing them the "freedom to digress" so that they might "probe far beyond" the answers initially given (Berg 80). This ensured that any deficiencies in my drafting of the questionnaire could be overcome since participants felt comfortable straying from the script. At the same time, I, as the interviewer, also reserved the right to pose follow-up questions based on their responses, making for a more natural flow to the conversation. My insider knowledge of the community was invaluable in this regard.

Speaking with participants in person also allowed for me to add in or remove questions based on the specific individual I was speaking with, such as asking people who were playing a game live on stage at the event particular questions about that experience. Unlike the online interviews, however, it is possible that these interviewees offered less fleshed-out answers either due to fatigue, the desire to end the interview and resume socializing with friends, or simply because a particular thought did not occur to them in the moment.

For all their pros and cons, these two interview formats were both beneficial for my research. They served to both confirm and correct the findings of my participant observation while simultaneously revealing things that could only be explained by someone who had been an insider member of the community for much longer than I had. The following discussion of the evolution and the unique nature of the speedrunning community would not have been possible to undertake without these conversations. However, before proceeding, there is one final reflection on method that must be made with reference to my insider-outsider status.

In any ethnographic work, the question of the researcher's relationship to the community they are investigating must be addressed. One early example of an ethnographic investigation of play and players is Gary Alan Fine's *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds* (1983). In order to study role-playing groups, Fine opted to implicate himself as a member of the community (or a "participant-as-observer" rather than an "observer as participant") (Fine 248, 243). This decision was made in part to combat a weakness in standard participant observation that Fine had perceived, namely that "frequently participant observation studies read like studies based on in-depth interviews, with a few observations of behaviour thrown in (243). My research methodology operated under the assumption (shared by Fine) that "one can understand more" about a community of practice "by confronting the same problems that participants do" (249).

My work began with an awareness of the risks that were posed by studying a community of practice that I considered myself to be a part of, even if my membership was fairly peripheral. Fine speaks to this problem, writing, "One problem […] that eventually induced me to cease attending was that […] I was becoming a more and more central and powerful person within the gaming culture" (Fine 252). He ultimately became so involved in the welcoming of new members that he "couldn't observe their socialization" (Ibid). However my situation was not Fine's.

In discussing the supposed binary between insider and outsider status within the a community, Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argue instead for a "space between", stating, "Holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference " (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 60). Because I was investigating a community of practice that I had already been acquainted with in a non-academic context, I could not frame myself as an 'outsider', nor did I want to. But the amount of hours required to become proficient at the practice and the online component of the speedrunning community meant that it would have been very difficult to become as fully integrated a member in my community of practice as Fine did in his before discontinuing his attendance of that particular play group.

As such, I opted for the 'space between', the hyphen in the insider-outsider dichotomy. By watching livestreamers, asking questions in their chat windows, and taking up speedrunning as a hobby like so many of my interviewees had before beginning to chase world records and Twitch subscribers, I became familiar with the general narrative of my subjects before having met them and as I spoke with them, their individual experiences reshaped and undercut my understanding of the speedrunner in ways that were both insightful and sometimes unexpected. And yet, for all my insider knowledge, I was still a researcher, more familiar with the community than some of the journalists who were at SGDQ 2015, perhaps, but an outsider nonetheless.

While eliminating much of the distinction between community researcher and community participant does have potential consequences, it helped me access information that I would not have been able to inquire after otherwise. On several occasions during my interviews, participants expressed some surprise with my level of insider knowledge and noticeably relaxed, approaching the interview like a conversation rather than an interrogation and, perhaps most importantly, like Fine, I could formulate pertinent questions "using my own experiences as a basis for comparison" (Fine 250).

As Corbin Dwyer and Buckle assert, "The intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows us to remain true outsiders to the experience under study and, because of our role as researchers, it does not qualify us as complete insiders" (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 61). This is the attitude with which I approached my conversations with speedrunners at SGDQ 2015 and while I could see future scholarship benefitting from either a more distanced or a more engaged approach, this was the only way I could conceive of conducting this preliminary investigation of the community. With that said, let us now move to the results of this investigation to see what this methodology has yielded.

Chapter 1: Speedrunning as Community

Introduction

As was explained in the introduction, this thesis begins with a discussion of speedrunning as a community, the reason being that I cannot proceed with a discussion of speedrunning as a practice or what this means for our broader notions of play and games without first understanding the group of people that partake in playing games quickly. The purpose of this section is twofold: in the first place, it will provide a basic history of speedruns, from 'Quake Done Quick' to the present, something that has yet to be formally written down in an academic context. To do so, this section draws on academic mentions of speedrunning's role in the early days of machinima, or movies made from games (Lowood 2006, 2013), information collected from various speedrunning forums, my time spent conducting participant observation of various speedrunning livestreams, and interviews I conducted during the annual speedrunning event, Summer Games Done Quick 2015 (SGDQ 2015).

While discussing speedrunning history, this section will also begin the process of situating speedrunning with reference to other communities of practice. It will be shown that the speedrunning community is both akin to and distinct from such communities, whether they are concerned with games or not. Rather than simply painting a portrait of speedrunners wholesale, this section will take the approach of exploring these similarities and differences as well as discussing the role of livestreaming platforms like Twitch for the community as well as gaming at large, something that game scholars are only beginning to understand.

Ultimately, this section will set the groundwork for what follows by presenting the speedrunning community as a collaborative and growing group of players, spectators, and theorycrafters. From what follows, it will become possible for the theorization of speedrunning as a practice, as well as its broader implications for game culture, to take place in the following sections. Before proceeding further, however, I must first lay out the academic traditions that inform the discussion to come.

Review of Literature

I identify speedrunning as a 'community of practice', a term that originates in Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (1991). They define community of practice as "a set of relations among persons, activity, and world […] an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge…" - it is above all a model of how knowledge is produced and spread and how this cycle perpetuates itself (Lave & Wenger 98). Individuals with a common interest either organically or deliberately become associated with one another through the circulation of knowledge and experiences. From there, newcomers are able to learn the practice from this established community, ultimately earning membership and the opportunity to teach the practice themselves. This is why Lave and Wenger write that "the community of practice of midwifery or tailoring involves much more than the technical knowledgeable skill involved in delivering babies or producing clothes" (Ibid).

Of course, the same can be said of any gaming community, including speedrunning, however, as I will discuss, this specific model of development is particularly useful for thinking through how the speedrunning community began and how it has grown at an unprecedentedly high rate since the emergence of Twitch. Early runners gathered formed a community around the practice to create montages of their skill and, to this day, speedrunning forums are a collaborative space for theorycrafting and the circulation of knowledge. During my fieldwork, I was marked by how many of my participants traced the community of practice cycle in their own narratives of how they became speedrunners. Beyond this tie to the community of practice model, the following chapter also engages with the notion of community as it appears in Internet studies.

Scholars have become increasingly interested in the Internet as a virtual space in which communities form, gather, and grow. As such, there are many extant studies of online communities that have both informed my methods and my updated understanding of what a virtual community of practice is. In particular, the works of Vivek Venkatesh (2013), Gabriella Coleman (2013, 2014), and T.L. Taylor (2006,

2012) have been relevant for the communities they investigate. But for a broader notion of community as it relates to the online sphere, I turned to Lori Kendall.

In a chapter discussing community and the Internet, Kendall outlines the various ways that thinkers have considered the issue, from arguing that the Internet has fundamentally shifted our definition of what a community can be (Borgmann 2004, Etzioni 2004) to suggesting that online communities should not be considered as communities, but rather referred to as something else, like 'lifestyle enclaves' (Bellah et al 1985). While such considerations of 'community' as it manifests itself online are good ways of thinking through the virtual sphere, such definitional debates are not necessarily useful to the present work. As Kendall writes, the issues surrounding the unstable nature of community as a working concept

> result in a tendency […] to focus on the question of whether or not online communities are 'real' communities. Much of this research is valuable […] However it has led to a certain degree of wheel spinning as researchers over and over feel it necessary to assert that online communities are indeed possible.
>
> (Kendall 314)

And so while it has been helpful for me to look through the extant academic work on communities both virtual and real in and of themselves, I do not believe that it is relevant to the present investigation to debate the matter more than has already been done. For the purposes of this thesis, speedrunning is a community insofar as it is a gathering of individuals with a shared interest in a particular play practice. With that said, let us now turn to the literature that has informed this section's characterization of the speedrunning community with reference to other online communities.

Vivek Venkatesh writes, "the more society in general and people's lifeworlds in particular collapse into media, the more media as a set of social practices allows for [an…] understanding of our contemporary environment" (Venkatesh et al xxi). It is for this reason that he endeavours to lay out a discussion of how communities operate online. Indeed, "online communities can be seen as an expression of […] an emerging form of sociality that allows us to see society as a whole more clearly" (Ibid).

For Venkatesh et al, these communities are important means for understanding "what the Internet *is* and how it has *become* pedagogical for specific group-subjects." (xxxiv). As more people access the Internet, it becomes a forum for the creation and cultivation of "compelling new ways of interaction where individuals can teach and learn from each other around their specific interests" (xxiv). Though speedrunning, as one such community, continues to grow, it is still at a phase in its development that prompts me to examine it through the lens of Venkatesh et al's notion of the niche.

For a more focused study of a large online and offline community, I turned to Gabriella Coleman's work on Anonymous (2014)[6]. Coleman's account of the development of her methodology, from "lowkey" research, attending "protests" and following "discussions on web forums" to spending "a minimum of five hours a day" online, "struggling keep abreast of all the simultaneous operations" of the community was vital for giving me a sense of how to research a group that operated largely in an online space (Coleman 2014 9). Also of relevance to me was her negotiation of insider-outsider status within the group that she was studying. As Coleman herself notes, "The anthropological imperative requires a certain degree of distance, while at the same time compelling one to delve deep. The trick is to integrate and go beyond simply relying on participants' explanations of events" (Ibid). This 'trick' was something I kept in mind while conducting my fieldwork at Summer Games Done Quick (SGDQ) 2015. But what of ethnographic work that specifically involved player communities?

Although speedrunning as both practice and community has been relatively underexplored within game studies, the study of gaming communities is clearly not new. T.L. Taylor's 2006 work, *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture* stands as one of the notable early investigations into a gaming community – in this case, players of Sony's 1999 massively-multiplayer online game (MMOG), *EverQuest*. In her book, Taylor discusses "instrumental play", or a manner of interacting with a

[6] While I did consult *Coding Freedom: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Hacking* (2013), I was more informed by Coleman's later work.

game that is characterized as "efficient, almost quantitative" in its approach (Taylor 2006 74). It is a mode of play that is quite familiar to speedrunners.

Instrumental play can manifest itself in many ways depending on the game, but put generally, instrumental players approach a game as a system to master rather than as a way to relax or pass the time. Although this may strike one as "a model of play that at times looks and sounds quite unlike how we usually speak of gaming" in that it substitutes "fun" for "efficiency" and "intensity of focus", Taylor argues that the concept of 'fun' is limiting in this instance (88). Instead, she employs terms like "pleasure" or "enjoyment" to refer to "what engagement in games brings for players" (88, 89). Indeed, the *EverQuest* players that she interviews describe their play style as "learning a skill and getting better at a skill. Even if they are pixels, it's rewarding" (89).

The discussion of instrumental play is a thread that carries over into one of Taylor's later (2012) works, *Raising the Stakes: E-sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming*. Although she coins the term in *Play Between Worlds*, Taylor here elaborates on her notion of the "power gamer", or one whose play is "grounded in intense focus and instrumental orientation" (Taylor 2012 10). When she writes that her subjects can "help us understand something about the nature of leisure, the different orientations people can take to the same ludic object, the creative emergent qualities of play, and the social embeddedness of even the most instrumental player", I cannot help but think of the speedrunning community as well (Ibid). Beyond instrumentality and power gaming, speedrunners and e-athletes also share a common broadcast platform. Most major e-sports and speedrunning content can be viewed on the livestreaming website Twitch.tv, a way of sharing one's gameplay that scholars[7] are only beginning to examine.

Moving away from the realm of predominantly online games, Todd Harper's dissertation, *The Art of War: Fighting Games, Performativity, and Social Game Play*, is an in-depth study of the fighting game community (FGC) as well as fighting games more broadly. His work, like mine, shares the conviction that "digital game play –

[7] Georgen et al (2015), Hamilton et al (2014), Kaytoue et al (2012), Smith et al (2013), and Walker (2014) are the major examples I have come across.

particularly social play – is a fundamentally experiential thing. To examine it, simply looking at the text itself isn't sufficient" (Harper 61). In this regard, Harper's investigation into the FGC consisted of "observations at the EVO 2009 tournament, interviews with fighting game fans, and local observation of social play" (Ibid). EVO is a large-scale event for the community, the speedrunning equivalent of which would be a gathering like SGDQ 2015. While there are some fundamental differences between eSports, the FGC, and speedrunners, the ethnographic methods employed both by Taylor and Harper were ultimately those that I made use of as well. While writing this thesis, I have encountered other academic works on communities of practice/play and how to study them[8], but the above texts were the most influential for my argument and my methodology. With these linkages established, let us finally discuss speedrunning as community.

Quake Done Quick and the Early Days of Collaboration

The speedrunning community as it is today began in the early 90's during the era of fast-paced first-person shooters like id Software's *Doom* (1993) and *Quake* (1996), with the most notable production from this period being *Quake Done Quick*, "a project to record runs of multi-level sequences from Quake and its friends in the fastest times possible" (Lowood 34). *Quake* was an ideal candidate for speedrunning at the time because of the possibility to abuse the game's physics engine through 'rocket jumping' (See Figs. 1 and 2), but it was not always easy to understand what was happening in a *Quake* speedrun with its first-person perspective.

[8] Nardi (2010) Boellstorff et al (2012), and Horst & Miller (2012), for example.

Figs. 1 and 2 – On the left, a first-person perspective of a rocket jump in progress with a third person perspective of a different jump on the right. The player is propelled through the game world with the momentum caused by shooting a rocket at the ground beneath the player's avatar.

By modifying the programming of *Quake* and adding in a feature called "Remaic" which allowed one to "revise the camera view on portions of a speedrun recorded in realtime without re-recording the run", runners now had the ability to become directors, going back over their gameplay footage and re-orienting the camera into a montage of third person perspectives that made the action much clearer (35).

From the very outset, this phase of speedrunning history offers us the opportunity to discuss some key features of the community. Altering the recording of a speedrun to make it more watchable and entertaining may not be as common in contemporary speedrunning[9], but the very roots of the speedrunning practice can still be found here in two particular ways – *Quake Done Quick* is not only a production created for sharing with members of the community and indeed gamers at large, but producing it was also a collaborative effort.

[9] With the exception of the Tool-Assisted Speedrunning (TAS) community, who in fact only produce runs to be entertaining shows of games pushed to their furthest limits by running a game one frame at a time in an emulator and entering optimal, oftentimes superhuman button inputs. TASes are a related but distinct practice from speedrunning proper and are thusly not the object of this thesis.

As one veteran runner I spoke to explained when we were discussing why he livestreams his play, "I wouldn't really say that there's any point to speedrunning if you can't share it with anyone else". While I will focus more on runners' motivations for speedrunning in the following section, when asked about their livestreaming practice or what it meant to be playing a game on stream at SGDQ 2015, participants were in general agreement – speedruns are things to be shared.

Even those individuals who took up speedrunning as a different way to play games before realizing that it was something that other people did recalled being elated once they realized there was an entire community to learn from and participate in. One runner who had been in the community for a few years recalled, "playing games quickly in general was something that I really liked as a kid […] I didn't own a memory card[10] […] so you know, you had to beat it in that one sitting". Once he finally "noticed that other people did it" by finding the broadcast of AGDQ 2013, he "got into streaming" his gameplay to whoever was interested in watching almost immediately.

The other thing that *Quake Done Quick* shows us is that, from the outset, the speedrunning community was one built on collaboration. Not only did members of the community work on making specific programs to allow for speedrun demos to be watchable and entertaining for spectators less acquainted with the practice, but even the demo itself was a collection of the community's best runners completing different levels. Whereas the practice of linking together speedruns of individual levels into a heavily optimized full-game run (known as a segmented run) has fallen out of fashion[11] and, as a result, most contemporary speedruns are footage of one individual's gameplay, collaboration is still something that is present in the speedrunning community. For many of the people I spoke to, this is something that

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[10] Memory cards were a feature of some console generations in the 90's and 2000's. Consoles did not have built in storage for saved games, so a separate peripheral, the memory card, was necessary or else all data would be lost at the end of every play session.

[11] Segmented runs are seen as less skill-based since one can effectively retry the same part of a run over and over until they have it perfectly. As speedrunning has moved to livestreaming platforms like Twitch, the uninterrupted, single-segment speedrun has become the standard.

distinguishes the speedrunning from many other gaming communities, particularly those that engage in instrumental play.

One question I asked participants was in what ways they saw the speedrunning community as similar to or differing from other gaming communities. The question also invited those participants who considered themselves a member or former member of such a community to draw on these experiences if they found it relevant. Participants' views on the particularly collaborative nature of the speedrunning community were virtually unanimous. As one runner explained, "speedrunning is very unique because it is both competitive and collaborative […] in speedrunning all the competition is friendly". He went on to explain:

> If somebody else is grinding for a record you already have, you almost always are going to support them and if you just join a speedrunning community […] you just become instant friends with everybody that runs that game because you together are like the dozen people in the entire world who know how to do that.

Even now, as the speedrunning community grows at unprecedented rates[12], not the least of which because of how open and collaborative the community is, one can find a niche for themselves within the communities of runners that gather around particular games and feel a strong sense of belonging from very early on in their speedrunning practice.

To give a better sense of how this openness allows for a level of collaboration between runners and distinguishes speedrunning from other gaming communities, one participant who had been a part of both the competitive *Team Fortress 2* (Valve 2007) and *Minecraft* (Mojang 2011) communities explained:

> What makes speedrunning different is that, in a lot of communities for competitive gaming, there's a tendency

[12] While I have been unable to come by metrics that show the exact population growth of the community, I believe the expansion of the speedrunning community can be seen in the viewership and money raised during Games Done Quick events. In 2010, Classic Games Done Quick raised 10,000$ and AGDQ 2014 through 2016 have all raised over 1,000,000$ (Wikipedia). And while I do not have viewership details from 2010, I observed that AGDQ 2012 had approximately 20,000 viewers during peak moments while more recent events all easily surpass 100,000 for multiple runs.

> where if you come up with an interesting new strategy or you find an exploit, there's this tendency to want to keep your competitive edge by keeping it as secret as possible and only really unveiling it in a case where it helps you. I've always thought that it was really interesting how different speedrunning is to that because there have been cases where something like that has happened in speedrunning and those sort of people get booed to death. That's considered the cardinal sin of speedrunning – to discover something and keep it hidden.

Despite the fact that speedrunning is ostensibly a 'competitive' practice – one can hold a 'world record' time, after all – the community's collaborative beginnings have carried into the present. This is likely due to a number of factors, including speedrunning's initial slow growth and its continued niche status. This difference is perhaps best illustrated by comparing episodes of players discovering exploits in the eSports community as opposed to the speedrunning community.

On November 28, 2014, at the *DreamHack Winter 2014* tournament for *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* (Valve 2012), Team Fnatic caused controversy when they won the third game of their best of three series against Team LDLC by making use of a map exploit known as pixel walking, whereby an error in the level geometry has placed solid, but invisible ground where it should not be (See Fig. 3).

Fig. 3 - Pixel Walking in CS:GO. The red rectangle indicates where a player avatar appears to be standing on nothing.

What was initially thought to be an innovative, never before seen way to gain tactical advantage was soon labeled as cheating. The game was patched to remove the invisible ledge and the third game in the series was no longer counted. Instances of player innovation are not always labeled cheating like pixel walking is, but the build-up and subsequent reaction in an eSports context tends to be the same – the exploit carefully guarded until an opportune match and if it is deemed too powerful, it is patched out and players return to trying to gain an edge in the competitive scene through other means.[13]

In contrast, when glitches are found in the speedrunning community, they are nearly always shared immediately via Twitter, YouTube, or the various speedrunning forums that exist. Oftentimes, the nature of glitch discoveries is such that runners will be unsure what exactly caused the new trick to occur and so the community of people who speedrun the game in question will work to figure out exactly why the glitch works or at least how to execute it reliably. This is likely another reason why collaboration is ubiquitous among members of the speedrunning community. The amount of theorycrafting that can be conducted and verified by a group of runners far outpaces the work that could be done by any individual.

As an example, I can recall one moment when a runner whose Twitch handle is skater82297 discovered a new glitch in *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, a major feat considering how old the game is and how many individuals have already combed the software for exploits. Within minutes of the trick being found, skater82297 was streaming his experimentation with the glitch and several other prominent *Ocarina of Time* runners who had read the news on Twitter or the speedrunning subreddit, went live on Twitch almost immediately afterwards and

[13] This is, of course, not always the case. A lot of theorycrafting occurs outside of the professional scene and becomes public knowledge immediately, but the fact is that events like Fnatic's pixel walking controversy still occur.

began working together to figure out how and why the glitch worked and whether it could be incorporated into speedruns to save time.[14]

Of course, these examples are chosen to provide as stark a contrast as possible in relation to how players from two different communities handle innovation in their respective games. Part of the distinction here is due to the specific contexts of speedrunning and eSports as practices – the *Counter Strike* tournament was highly competitive, with a 250,000$ prize pool for whoever won and, as such, had a long list of rules that included a ban on pixel walking or other map exploits. Speedrunning, on the other hand, is still a hobby for most runners and, as I will discuss at the end of this section, even those that have turned their practice into a means of earning a living do not need world record times to guarantee a regular audience.

Unfair though the comparison might be, then, it still strikes me as relevant given that there was an anxiety shared by some of the runners that I spoke to regarding the risk of speedrunning becoming "like eSports" (i.e. more professional and formal, with an entirely different focus, this concern will be fleshed out towards the end of the section) and the consequences this would bring for both the practice and the community. While one cannot deny that there is some level of competitiveness in the speedrunning community, competition is evaluated differently than it is in eSports. As one runner concluded: "People still seem to want to build each other up. The value in competition is if I have someone to compete against, that's supposed to better me […] if I build this person up, they're going to push me to better myself… I don't become less valuable because this person has increased their value, I gain value by having that compel me to move forward".[15]

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[14] Ultimately, the glitch resulted in a 14-second time save that skater82297[?] made use of to set a new world record for *Ocarina of Time*'s Any% (or, beat the game as quickly as possible) category, beating the game in 17 minutes and 45 seconds. For a discussion of categories as well as a better sense of how speedruns are measured, refer to Section 2.

[15] From my observations, it is, of course, not always the case that runners feel and act this way, but the community at large so stigmatizes practices like destructive competitiveness or keeping tricks a secret that these people do not rise to any level of prominence within the community.

And as I have shown, this was a feature of the community as far back as the collaborative effort that was *Quake Done Quick*.

Slow Growth and Isolation in the YouTube Era

By the late 90's, the *Quake* speedrunning community became more diverse in the games it engaged with and the *Quake Done Quick* website became *SpeedDemosArchive* (SDA), which remains one of the major community hubs to this day as well as the main organizer of the early *Games Done Quick* marathons, the name being a clear reference to the community's beginnings in *Quake* demo videos. At this point, speedrun videos from all manner of video games began getting hosted on the SDA website and on other video streaming services like YouTube as they became available towards the mid 2000's. Although the greater pool of games led to some growth in the community, this period in speedrunning history still left the practice quite niche for a number of reasons that generally stemmed from the relative obscurity from which speedrun videos would emerge and the tension that existed between hosting one's videos on SDA or YouTube.

"You would record runs to YouTube and you would have your own game threads on the SDA forums and you would update that every few days," one runner explained after I had noted that he had been speedrunning for a long time. The community was much more dispersed and, beyond the typed commentary that often accompanied uploaded videos, a runner's final product was posted with relatively little context and oftentimes with a very slim chance of even being watched by many people either inside or outside of the community. As another runner who was active during this period explained, "Sure you could post a video on YouTube, but then you've got things like search engine optimization […] to worry about in order for people to be able to find your video at all". YouTube was still relatively young and finding speedrun videos relied on knowing to search for them in the first place.

This, coupled with the fact that the recorded run was a segment of multiple otherwise failed attempts that the runner conducted with no audience, meant that it could be difficult for the practice to feel rewarding at times. One runner described how discouraging speedrunning before livestreaming could be: "If you're just focusing only on the game, you're staring at the screen, you're really invested in the

runs because when you hit that reset button, everything is lost. You got nothing out of that thirty minutes". This particular runner combatted this sense of loss by counting his attempts – "at least I got another tally mark, so it wasn't completely wasted!"[16]

This reality, coupled with SDA's emerging from the *Quake Done Quick* project, were quite likely the reasons why SpeedDemosArchive became the major hub for speedrun videos at the time. At the very least, a video hosted on SDA would have an audience. However, getting a video hosted on the community's hub came with a catch. "Because SDA was the only place, there was a higher emphasis on the post-production, commentary […] you had to focus more on making a video than producing a record because there were very strict requirements for what could be allowed on the site as a video…[17] ". This policy emerged in order to combat the various ways that people would fake a speedrun including 'splicing' or the process of stringing together optimized segments of a run from different play sessions with the aim being to pass it off as one full attempt. The relative obscurity of where a given speedrun demo actually came from caused the process of vetting runs to be hosted on SDA to take weeks or even months. As such, beyond the small number of YouTube videos that were both not faked and somehow managing to get some amount of viewership, innovating a faster way through a given game was a slower, and oftentimes more solitary, practice. But in recent years, much has changed.

In the contemporary speedrunning scene, YouTube and SDA still hold places as valuable repositories of knowledge and the disadvantages posed by both during the early years have largely been abated by the growth of the speedrunning community at large. Along with music videos and make-up tutorials, gaming videos have become one of YouTube's most watched genres, with speedruns accounting for

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[16] This process recalls the 'playbour' of theorycrafters and other instrumental players discussed by TL Taylor, among others.

[17] Some examples of requirements were that the video be of a certain quality, both technically and aesthetically. No frame drops or low bitrate recordings were allowed, which could be difficult depending on the hardware and software at one's disposal.

a part of this popularity[18]. And cheated runs have become less common, at least partially because as community grows, so too does the audience for these videos, meaning that there is more potential to spot splicing in action. Furthermore, with the onset of livestreaming as the dominant platform for producing speedrunning footage, splicing has become more and more difficult to accomplish with any level of success. But this is only one way that websites like Twitch have fundamentally changed the nature of speedrunning as both a community and practice.

When speaking with my participants about their sense of why the speedrunning community has grown so much in recent years, their answers tended to revolve around two things: the onset of livestreaming and the GDQ events:

> It's more just general exposure, especially with events like this becoming a lot more popular, a lot more online marathons[19] popping up […] It's one of those things that gets constant exposure, especially since you can always go on SpeedRunsLive[20] and find 20-30 people doing speedruns…

Both the nature and affordances of Twitch as a platform and the staging of the GDQ marathons as increasingly high profile, public facing events have caused the community to grow much faster than it ever did in the past, a trend that I will now investigate in depth, beginning with a brief history of Twitch.

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[18] For instance, typing 'speedrun' into YouTube yields multiple videos with millions of views, with the GamesDoneQuick account having over 100,000 followers.

[19] As the GDQs have caught on, many smaller, online marathons have been organized by members of the community for a variety of charities for a variety of reasons including giving less-high profile runners or people who cannot afford to travel the opportunity to show off their run in a marathon setting.

[20] SRL SpeedRunsLive (SRL) is a second major community hub that, rather than hosting videos, serves as a centralized location for finding speedrun channels that are live and facilitating the holding of speedrun races, where multiple people begin a run at a given time and log how long it takes them to finish. Being hosted on SRL's front page used to require participating in a certain number of races per month, but this was recently changed due to it being unfair for individuals who were potentially the only one attempting runs of a given game. The fact that such a change was made is indicative of how important SRL is to some runners for generating an audience.

Twitch, GDQs, and the Contemporary Speedrun Scene

What is now known as Twitch.tv emerged out of a general livestreaming website first founded in 2007 under the name Justin.tv. Although Justin.tv began with an interest in sharing live video feeds of all sorts online, it was of particular interest to gamers and indeed speedrunners as a way to combat the alienation of uploading gameplay highlights to YouTube and other video streaming sides like SDA. In its early stages, of course, the sociality of Justin.tv was not nearly as robust as Twitch has become. As one runner who streamed on Justin.tv explained,

> The channels were so small […] I just watched my friends and other speedrunners so you'd go into a channel and there's like twelve people in there and you hang out and you can count on one hand the number of people that you watch stream. And every once in awhile, it'd be, "Oh my god he's got 25 people in his chat!" But again, I don't know if that's a difference with Justin vs Twitch or just that speedrunning was so small.

Whether or not Justin.tv's initial lack of focus in terms of what could or could not be streamed had anything to do with this, it apparently came to the attention of the site's founders that gaming was by far the most popular content on the site and so, in 2011, Twitch was created as a game-only offshoot of Justin.tv (Ewalt 2013). Twitch grew to the point that Justin.tv was discontinued in August of 2014, shortly before it was announced that Twitch would be purchased by Amazon for 970 million dollars (Kim 2014). But what caused this steady growth in popularity that benefitted both streamers and Twitch executives? To properly understand how livestreaming played a role in the recent, almost exponential growth of the speedrunning community, one needs to be familiar with the nature of Twitch as a platform for generating gaming content. But first, a brief discussion of exactly how Twitch operates.

Livestreaming websites such as Twitch are exactly as their name describes – they afford one the ability to 'stream' video footage as it occurs 'live' in real time. In the case of Twitch, nearly all livestreamed content is game-related and is broadcasted to viewers through the use of particular software like Open Broadcaster Software or LiveSplit. Individuals playing PC games simply capture the

footage of their monitor, recording the gameplay and broadcasting it while individuals using a separate console must link a capture card between their computer and their game. These tools have become increasingly affordable over time and, as such, streaming is a relatively simple way to generate gaming content for an online audience.

In addition to sharing one's gameplay, broadcasting software allows streamers to set up a layout of exactly what their viewers see. This can include many things, from a webcam feed to text, or indeed the Twitch chat window. When one watches a stream on Twitch, a chat window appears alongside the video feed where spectators can chat with the streamer as well as each other. Below the stream feed, viewers can also see profile information that the streamer has posted including a brief biography, links to their social media pages, chat rules, and other relevant information including hardware specifications for the streamer's computer or personal best times in the case of speedrunners. Twitch also archives a certain amount of past play sessions, so one can easily return and view a broadcast that they missed. These elements all combine to form the basis for Twitch as a platform for content creation (See Fig. 4).

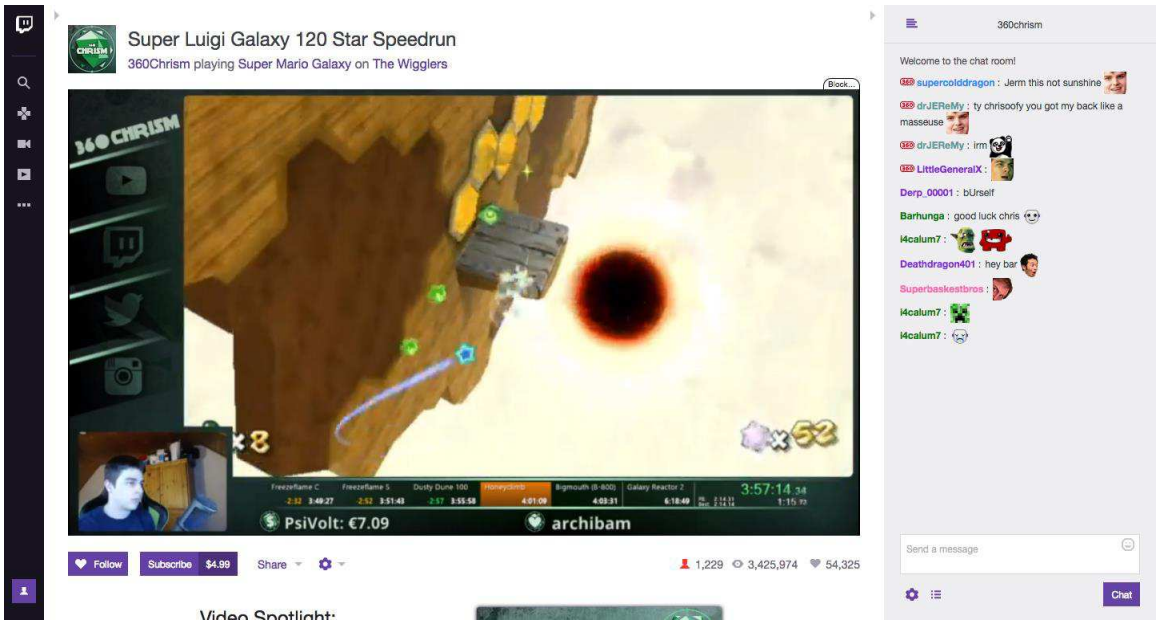

Fig. 4 – An example of a typical Twitch stream, complete with webcam feed of the player and the Twitch chat on the right.

The first step for anyone who wishes to make livestreaming into a career is earning the ability to collect subscribers. Twitch offers the potential for profit to prominent streamers by giving viewers the chance to become prominent in their own right. While anyone can watch a public stream on Twitch for free, for five dollars a month, people can "subscribe" to a Twitch stream, earning themselves perks like the ability to use channel-specific emoticons and access to the subscriber-only chat. 'Sub-only' mode is a feature that a streamer can enable, either to incentivize people paying a monthly fee to participate in the chat window, or as a way to cut down on the 'noise' of potentially thousands of viewers all overpopulating the chat with anything from legitimate questions for the streamer to phallic ASCII art.

As a Twitch streamer becomes more popular and more people tune in, subscriber status becomes a better investment. Streamers do not immediately have access to collecting subscribers or having tailor-made emoticons added to the Twitch chat lexicon, however. These are earned through demonstrating that one's gameplay consistently draws a certain number of concurrent viewers[21]. For people that wish to livestream for a living, this means that they must attempt to incentivize viewers to tune in through a variety of ways[22]. As such, when I asked speedrunners about how Twitch channels become popular, I received a range of responses including some that undercut my notion of there being some formula at all:

> That's the million-dollar question for Twitch. How do you get popular? And everyone wants to know it. There aren't any easy answers. People will say, "Keep a regular schedule so you always have regulars coming in" but I've never had a schedule – I stream 2 or 3 times a week at totally different hours and yet I've still been able to get partner and get about 100 views or so every single stream.

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[21] At the time of writing, applicants for partner status must either average 500+ concurrent viewers or have 100,000+ subscribers on a video hosting site like YouTube (Twitch Partner Application).

[22] For more on how sites like Twitch and YouTube allow content creators to incentivize viewers see Scully-Blaker et al (Forthcoming) and Postigo (2014), respectively.

As time went on, I began to rephrase this question by asking whether my participants could think of any commonalities between the more popular speedrunning streamers, which proved to be a more fruitful way of at least narrowing down what draws in audiences:

> I can view streamers in two different lights. You've got your really high quality speedrunners and you've got your really high quality streamers that also speedrun. So you tend to see a lot of people that are the really high quality speedrunners get a lot of viewers but only really when they're on record pace or something like that and if they play any other game, they get ten viewers. […] But then you've also got the really good streamers who interact with their chat and do everything that's involved with that and that try to really form a community around themselves as well as the games that they're involved with […] those type of people are probably going to run multiple games more often, they're going to, on average have worse times…

While there are exceptions and runners that have the rare combination of skill and a strong stream persona, these, by and large are the two major types of streamers that other participants cited as well, but it is not just the skill-entertainment dichotomy that this quote brings to light. As Twitch becomes an increasingly prolific medium for game-related content on the Internet, certain conventions of livestreaming have begun to take shape, which only serves to boost the growth of Twitch audiences, speedrunning streams included.[23]

For instance, streaming without a microphone and webcam is becoming less and less common in order to maximize the potential for chat interaction. In a speedrunning context, this is particularly helpful for allowing theorycrafting to occur live, both on the part of other runners or even unknown members of the chat. One participant recalled, "Everybody helps… It can be a random dude in my chat that's like, 'Why do you jump there?' and I'm like, '…Good question! Let me see why I

[23] It may be noted that the monetization of play through Twitch would seem to clash with the collaborative model of the speedrunning community presented here. To this I would say that speedrunners 'collaborate' in this sense as well by sharing audiences and sending viewers to each others' streams. The exact 'flow' of viewers from stream to stream is something I would be very interested in tracking in the future.

jump there…'". Returning briefly to the earlier discussion of the collaborative nature of speedrunning, there are even members of the community who do not run games themselves, instead preferring to glitch-hunt or find reliable set-ups for difficult tricks to help drive world record times lower and lower. For some of my participants, however, the most important aspect of their growth was simply effective networking:

> I got very lucky very early. I had a few people who were veterans that started watching me and I started networking in other channels. I was a moderator for Trihex's channel […] and I got to know people and network with them, so when they raided me – this was even before hosting – there would be people coming into my stream and once they saw how I was playing, they would contribute towards the fund, saying "[…] we want to see what this person can do when she has a proper layout…"[24]

Clearly, there are many ways for members of the community, even those that do not speedrun, to acquire a particular status among their peers, what Consalvo (2007) calls "gaming capital" (Consalvo 179). And although this concept will be discussed further in the following chapter, it is worth mentioning here as a potential explanation as to how individuals can meaningfully contribute to the speedrunning community in a variety of ways.

Although the community's growth means that speedrunning is a far more social practice than it was in the age of YouTube or earlier, the fact that there are now so many people running different games also makes it more likely that a particular runner goes unnoticed regardless of skill or sometimes even regardless of entertainment value. Several people I spoke to brought up Trihex, a well-known *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island* (Nintendo 1995) runner, as an example of a member of the community who has a massive audience without necessarily the most high-skill gameplay while _Trix, the current world record holder for *Yoshi's*

[24] It is worth noting here that Twitch streamers often have a mechanism in place for receiving donations from viewers in place of or in addition to the subscriber revenue. Donations tend to go towards hardware or a plane ticket to the next community event, although some streamers go as far as having 'wishlists' of things people can buy them.

Island has less than 2000 followers. Through networking and Twitch-specific tactics like 'raiding'[25] or 'hosting'[26], some runners, like the one quoted above, are able turn the odds of gaining popularity in their favour and so more speedrunning streams rise to prominence which, in turn, increases the potential for the general speedrunning audience to grow as well. Lave and Wenger's cycle of knowledge production and expansion within a community of practice is on full display here.

Livestreaming creates a cycle of events that ensures the continued growth of speedrunning. As speedrunners network and their audiences grow, some of their viewers inevitably take up the practice themselves. Many of the newer members of the community that I interviewed cited watching other people's streams or GDQ events as what first got them into speedrunning.

> There was a summer where I was watching streams on Twitch and a speedrunner named Siglemic was doing 12 hours a day of just attempts of *Super Mario 64* and I watched it and I really got into it […] and that turned into me finding other speedrunners like [Narcissa Wright] playing *Wind Waker*[27] and after watching enough of it over enough time, I was like, "I should find a game and give it a shot"

Whereas previously one could only find completed runs on YouTube or SDA, livestreams now allow the viewer to experience successes and failures as they happen. Livestreams allow a new runner to learn from observation. These new streamers in turn acquire a regular viewership over time and the cycle repeats.

It is because of this process that one can see such an unprecedented growth of the community, one that, given the difficulty of tallying an exact count of speedrunners, can best be measured by observing that the earliest GDQ events were

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[25] Raiding is something that streamers do shortly before signing off. The broadcaster will spam a link to another Twitch stream (usually a friend or a runner of the same game) in his or her chat, prompting those who wish to keep watching runs to jump over to this other channel.

[26] Hosting is a more recent feature added to Twitch whereby a streamer that is not broadcasting can 'host' the broadcast of another channel on their channel. The result is that if someone goes to check whether their favourite streamer is on, they'll be introduced to this other streamer instead.

[27] Nintendo 2002

happy to collect between 10,000$ and 50,000$ USD for charity, whereas now, only five years later, 1,000,000$ is considered a benchmark. As this section draws to a close, let us conclude by examining some of the potential consequences of this increase in popularity as the growth and monetization of speedrunning slowly creeps towards professionalization.

Conclusions – Growing Pains in the Speedrunning Community of Practice

After asking my participants about why they felt the community was growing and how Twitch streams become popular, I followed up with the question, "Do you see the community's growth as a positive or negative?", noting that 'neither' and 'both' were acceptable answers. And while for a fair number of the runners I spoke to, the answer was a quick "Of course," some offered a more measured reply. As one might predict, some pointed out that having more people in the speedrunning community was a double-edged sword because it meant that there were more negative or destructive people within the community as well. I say that this was a predictable reply because this is something that can be observed in any community as it grows. However, what was most surprising to me, was that, as was noted earlier, some of my participants alluded to a tension within the community that speedrunning might someday become 'like eSports' if it grew too large:

> Some people really want to see speedrunning get to the level of eSports stuff and get to televised events and big-money competitions. […] Maybe people would think of speedrunning races becoming eSports or something but I really don't think that format applies here.

The fact that speedrunning, like eSports, seems to be a part of what Taylor means when she refers to instrumental play and power gaming coupled with the increasing number of streamers who make money off of speedruns pushes the practice closer to the realm of professionalization and the mainstream.

While the exact origins of these concerns is difficult to pinpoint, I believe that recent events such as the Games Done Quick organization becoming a limited liability corporation as the marathons grew larger or several prominent

speedrunners being invited, along with popular YouTube personalities, to participate in the *Nintendo World Championship* in June of 2015 have made some people question the place of speedrunning as both a community and a practice within game culture. As one individual who was also a regular attendee of the European Speedster Assembly, an annual marathon in Sweden explained:

> I prefer the setup at ESA, it's more about the background stuff and less about the marathon and charity. […] That's the excuse to have a cool meet-up with friends. Whereas over here, they're like, "We're having a really important charity marathon and you might be able to play some games in the back..." […] ESA was always set up to be a meet-up […] and I think the way the GDQs have evolved [it was] "We're making a lot of money here. We could really bolster this." […] Either way people are here and having fun, but the mission statements are very different.

By taking steps to trademark and corporatize a charity marathon that serves as one of the cornerstones for the community's growth and continued existence, GDQ's new model of development has aroused a fair amount of concern within the community at large. In discussing the nature of speedrunning as a practice, the following section will keep this tension between speedrunning and eSports in mind and assess both to what extent the two are like practices and in what ways playing games quickly is unique.

This chapter has offered an in-depth look at the history and structure of the speedrunning community. By tracing the emergence of speedrunning through collaborative projects like Quake Done Quick and describing how the community carried this spirit of cooperation through its development and growth courtesy of sites like YouTube and Twitch, I have provided the background against which to set an analysis of speedrunning as practice and how speedrunning relates to the museum of accidents. Furthermore, I have mapped the inner workings of the community, from how people become members to how the speedrunning knowledge base is enriched and maintained with a view to showing that speedrunning is a community of practice as outlined by Lave and Wenger.

As the current dominant platform for sharing speedrunning content online, Twitch has been highlighted as a platform that enables this model of development to

perpetuate itself. Viewers are afforded the opportunity to ask questions through the chat window and, by becoming invested in particular streamers, are often tempted to try speedrunning for themselves. The same collaborative spirit that pushes runners to theorycraft together about the fastest route through a game also leads to runners being eager to encourage new members of the community by publicizing their streams or sharing strategies. And with more runners playing a wider pool of games, the speedrunning community grows at rates that were simply unheard of in the days of SpeedDemosArchive and YouTube. While we will return to the inner workings of the community at the end of the following chapter, from a discussion of community of practice, it is now time to examine the speedrunning practice itself.

Chapter 2: Speedrunning as Practice

Introduction

Thus far, I have concerned myself with speedrunning as a growing community that collaborates in both online and offline spaces to complete games as quickly as possible. From the community that surrounds the practice, it is now time to investigate the speedrunning practice itself. The purpose of this chapter is twofold: first it will serve as the foundation upon which a theoretical framework for discussing speedruns is put forth. To do so, this section will plumb two major concepts – space and speed – around which an understanding of the speedrunning practice can be assembled.

Theoretical work on the space of the 'real world', which will be referred to as *natural space* from now on, will be covered first. This will be combined with more recent game scholarship on *virtual space* and how it might be similar to or different from the domain of the natural. Next, the discussion will move to speed. There are many theoretical works about speed with reference to natural space, but fewer make reference to virtual speed. It falls to the first half of this chapter, then, to supplement the lack of relevant discussion on virtual speed, a contribution to game scholarship that will be accomplished by combining theories of natural speed with the conclusions that can be drawn from my work with both natural and virtual space.

Second, with speedrun as practice properly situated with reference to the key concepts of space and speed, this chapter will move to a discussions of rules in games since the virtual boundaries of space and speed are effectively that – encoded constraints which the player cannot refuse. The question of whether speedrunning breaks rules will be taken up for indeed, many of my interviewees noted that a common accusation coming from outside of the community was that speedrunning is simply a form of cheating. I will then briefly return to the realm of eSports as a means to talk about the rules that have emerged around speedrunning itself. A discussion of community-based decisions to curate the constraints that must be respected in order for a speedrun to be valid will follow.

Ultimately, this chapter serves to take speedrunning and situate it within extant scholarship before using the speedrun as practice as a means to begin pushing said scholarship further. The case will be made that speedrunning does not break a game's rules. Rather, it demands a hyper-awareness of the underlying code that goes into constructing a virtual space. The external rules that speedrunners make for themselves will be put forth as grounds to make the claim that speedrunning is an example of what Paul Virilio calls the Museum of Accidents – a claim whose exact significance will be taken up at the beginning of my third and final chapter. Before establishing the theoretical framework necessary for making these claims, however, there is other relevant literature that must be discussed first.

Review of Literature

As an investigation into a particular gaming practice, this chapter situates itself within the long tradition of academic studies of play that many argue began with Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1950), which famously opens with the claim that "play is older than culture" (Huizinga 1). This text is the first in a long line of works that attempts to offer some sense of a definition of play. The writings of thinkers like Huizinga or French sociologist, Robert Callois (1961), who built on the theories of *Homo Ludens*, have their place within game studies as foundational texts of sorts, but their legacy has also served to demonstrate the folly and potential unimportance of attempting to formalize a definition of something as malleable as 'play' or 'game'.

Indeed, this chapter does not look to Huizinga and Callois for definitions, but rather, takes a cue from Brian Sutton-Smith's *The Ambiguity of Play* (1997), and suggests that the main lesson to be learned from early attempts to define the concept is that "any earnest definition of play has to be haunted by the possibility that playful enjoinders will render it invalid" (Sutton-Smith 213). The moment that one attempts to codify something as broad as play or game they will be faced with any number of 'playful' counter-examples that either lead to hair-splitting or else completely undo the definition that was put forth. In sum, it is not the place of this thesis to attempt to synthesize a definition of play when such a definition risks becoming exclusionary or simply incorrect almost immediately. Instead, this

chapter discusses one context of play. The proceeding treatment of speedrunning as a practice seeks only to set groundwork on what play is in this instance, rather than aiming for any claims to universality. For indeed, even the seemingly obvious notion that play is fun is potentially subverted if one considers speedrunning in relation to T.L. Taylor's notion of the 'power gamer'.

Though it was already cited in the literature review of Chapter 1, Taylor's *Raising the Stakes* (2012) is again relevant here. In discussing eSports as both practice and community, Taylor puts forth the term power gamer to refer to those players whose interactions with a game are "grounded in intense focus and instrumental orientation" (Taylor 2012 10). She goes to great lengths to explain the amount of effort involved in embodying the skills necessary to become a serious competitor in the eSports scene, from one's initial relation to a game as "a system with embedded rules and, typically, win conditions" to a level of skill and knowledge that allows one to "maneuver dynamically based on the actual play situation at hand" (92, 94). She also helpfully deploys the concept of 'serious leisure', whereby "a form of seriousness can infuse dedicated leisure communities", something that can arguably be seen amongst speedrunners as well (101).

All of this is done with a view to, on the one hand, acknowledging that power gaming practices involve a great deal of time, dedication, and labour, while, on the other, observing that "the line between work and play, pleasure and painful progression, [is] often blurred" (10). Whether such instrumental 'playbour' is monetized through professionalization like eSports or whether it remains a hobby like it is for most speedrunners, there is something at the core of such power gaming practices that unites the two communities - a desire to understand a game's underlying systems and constraints that complicates our notions of 'play' or 'fun'.

Casey O'Donnell also takes up Taylor's notion of instrumental play in his 2014 work, *Developer's Dilemma*. Here, he asserts that game developers, too, must approach games instrumentally over the production process. As he writes, "game developers cultivate a central desire to understand how games tick" in a manner similar to those players that seek to build the most efficient *EverQuest* character or, in fact, to complete a game as quickly as possible (O'Donnell 27). And whereas for

play communities this is done through testing various things at the level of gameplay with a view to discovering optimal pathways to success, for O'Donnell's developers, instrumentality is achieved through examining a game's code in order to "leverage software systems to produce interesting and innovative creative works" (Ibid). Both of these categories of instrumental players are of interest here because the speedrunning community operates with both the virtual space of a game and the software's code in order to determine the optimal route from a game's beginning to its end.

As was discussed in the introduction to this thesis, James Newman has also written on players who seek to push games to their limits. But beyond being one of the few texts to discuss speedrunning in and of itself, Newman's *Playing With Videogames* (2008) is also relevant here for its broader discussion of 'superplay'. For Newman, "superplay is a generic term that describes a range of gaming practices […] that are bound together by a common desire to demonstrate mastery of the game through performance" (Newman 123). Such practices require "great skill and commitment" as "collaborative strategies […] are devised and refined by gamers reviewing and discussing each other's work" (123-4). And while my initial discussion of Newman's work critiqued it for being dated, the superplay banner is still valuable for uniting speedrunning with other like gaming practices, including arcade culture.

Indeed, the origins of superplay can be found in early arcades and "world record culture" as it is discussed in Carly Kocurek's *Coin-Operated Americans* (2015 xviii). In the second chapter of her book, Kocurek argues that it was in the space of the arcade that "gamers" first came to be "cast as technologically gifted, highly competitive young men whose more mischievous impulses only reaffirmed their intelligence and creativity" (37). She presents a photo taken by *Life* magazine in 1982 of a gathering of America's best gamers that was orchestrated by Walter Day and taken near his famous Twin Galaxies arcade and argues for its role in cementing the popular representation of "a gaming culture tied in profound ways to individualized competition, technological proficiency, youth, and masculinity" (49). Skill at games was codified as male in the same vein as athletic ability or scientific

innovation ('the man of science') and became something to covet. Efforts such as this or the "Olympic Arcade Triathlon", a gaming competition held for athletes at the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid were undertaken with a view to making arcades more popular while simultaneously attempting to dispel video game moral panic.

For a time, Twin Galaxies also hosted a speedrun leaderboard, or what they called "Fastest Completion" records (Speedrun Wiki). While there is no definitive account of this period, most members of the speedrunning community apparently ignored the organization's efforts to curate world record times because, among other things, Twin Galaxies "initially refused to accept runs involving glitches" (Ibid). In this sense, Kocurek's assertion that "one principal lesson that the arcade teaches players is that there is only one way to play" evokes the tension between speedrunning and Twin Galaxies' notions of curated superplay, something that I will return to in the final chapter of this thesis. (31).[28] Even so, Kocurek's pioneers of competitive gaming can still be linked to speedrunners through the concept of gaming capital as Mia Consalvo articulates it in *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames* (2007).

"Gaming capital", as articulated by Consalvo, is adapted from "Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'cultural capital'" that is, "a system of preferences and dispositions that ultimately served to classify groups by class" (Consalvo 4). This 'currency' is a way of framing game player knowledge based on interactions between players and games or other players. Just as "successful FAQ writers" (who have taken conventional cues from mainstream strategy guides) "gain a certain status" on game walkthrough sites as their reputations grow, so too do people who demonstrate great skill like speedrunners or e-athletes (179). Indeed, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, it is this 'knowledge', whether it be an

[28] Twin Galaxies has more recently attempted to add speedrunning to its site once more, but raised controversy when, in aiming to curate records on the speedrunning community's own terms, they lifted rules for speedrunning various games from the community's speedrun.com website. At the time of writing, the Twin Galaxies online database appears to be a skeleton – the infamously copy/pasted rule sets are present, but the actual records are not.

understanding of why particular glitches work, or the ability to execute these glitches in completing a speedrun, that at least partially fuels the drive to bring world record times lower and lower. It is helpful for our purposes to put the concept of gaming capital in conversation with the speedrunning practice both in this sense as well as in relation to the question of cheating.

A common accusation levied against speedrunners is that their practice is tantamount to breaking a game with cheats. And while it is certainly true that, as Consalvo found, each player "define[s] cheating in their own terms", it may be difficult for non-speedrunners to look at the practice and not question whether a game's rules are being infringed upon (5). Consalvo's note that "cheating can also confer certain kinds of power and gaming capital, depending on the audience sought as well as the particular situation" puts speedrunning even further into question by suggesting that even those who play outside the rules can accrue some amount of gaming capital. Before this chapter can fully interrogate whether speedrunning is cheating and what it would mean to make a claim either way, however, it is necessary to understand this thesis' framing of space and speed.

Theories of Natural and Virtual Space

I deploy the concept of space in the way that Michel de Certeau discusses it in Chapter IX of his 1980 book, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 'Spatial Stories'. There, space is defined as "a practiced place" (de Certeau 117). Whereas place refers to "an instantaneous configuration of positions", space "exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables" (Ibid). Put simply, "the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers" (Ibid). These articulations of space and place are useful even in discussing a virtual world. For indeed, if I borrow the phrasing of De Certeau's street – walker relation, it can certainly be argued that 'the game environment coded by programmers is transformed into a gamespace by players'.

This parallel is made stronger if one considers de Certeau's assertion that "every story is a travel story – a spatial practice" (115).[29] The notion that narrative(s) can be derived from interacting with an environment is a familiar topic within game studies[30] which, when combined with the notion of space as a practiced place suggests that the way that players of video games interact, or play, with a virtual space generates a unique experience, or narrative.

Indeed, this is exactly what Michael Nitsche posits in his 2008 book, *Video Game Spaces* when he writes that "player action in game spaces infuses [the spaces] with new meaning" and that "this meaning can allow for a higher quality of placeness[31] in these environments" (Nitsche 196). Although he notes that "…it does not matter whether players fulfill the designer's expectations or behave as a nonconformists (sic)", Nitsche's spectrum of what constitutes nonconformity is relatively lacking for my purposes (Ibid). It is certainly the case that in *Final Fantasy XI* (Square Enix 2002), "players [deciding] to leave their characters" on a particular bridge "while inactive" is an example of an 'unintended' gameplay practice, but Nitsche's discussion of virtual space and virtual place never strays from the assumption that players interact with game spaces on the virtual worlds' own terms (Ibid). Any deviation from using a virtual space for its intended purpose is only minor. There is no mention of glitch, sequence break, or indeed speedrun in the book's index.

It is for this reason that I now return to *The Practice of Everyday Life,* this time focusing on the introduction and the famous seventh chapter, 'Walking in the City' where De Certeau discusses, among other things, the concepts of *strategy* and *tactic*. He calls a strategy "the calculus of force-relationships which becomes

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[29] Though the work of De Certeau is invoked for this thesis, for more on games as travel narratives see Fuller and Jenkins 1995.

[30] See Aylett (1999), for example. This concept is referred to as 'emergent narrative' and although emergence is of relevance to my research, for the purposes of this thesis, I limit my focus to emergence in relation to gameplay practice rather than narrative.

[31] It is important to note that Nitsche primarily draws upon Lefebvre's *Production of Space* (1974) rather than De Certeau's later work, hence his use of 'placeness' to refer to what I would more readily call 'spaceness'.

possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an environment" (De Certeau xix). It is, in other words, the planning-out of a distinct space by those who have dominion over it – "a victory of space over time" (ibid).

Reframing this for a virtual context, then, I am reminded of a point raised in Squire and Jenkins' essay, "The Art of Contested Spaces" (2002 Web):

> Game worlds are totally constructed environments. Everything there was put on the screen for some purpose - shaping the game play or contributing to the mood and atmosphere or encouraging performance, playfulness, competition, or collaboration.

Game spaces are intelligently designed, strategic spaces that make operational assumptions about how players could or indeed should interact with them, but these assumptions are not always correct.

A tactic, on the other hand, is "a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization) nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other" (Ibid). Unlike a strategy, "because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time – it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized" (Ibid). Many activities are tactical in nature for De Certeau, "clever tricks" - in essence, an individual's intelligent ways of making-do in an existing system much larger than themselves (Ibid).

This concept of tactics also reminds me of an observation made about player interactions with game spaces, this time made by Katie Salen (2002 Web):

> Because the creators of emergent systems, like generative music or games, can never fully anticipate how the rules will play out, they are limited to the design of the formal structures that go on to produce patterns of events. Sometimes the forms of play that emerge from these structures overwhelm and transform, generating rich and resistant outcomes. Sometimes, in fact, the force of play is so powerful that it can change the rule structure itself.

In few gameplay practices, I would argue, can one find a more apt example of this than speedrunning. Indeed, runners are able to exploit holes in a game's programming (strategy) to create drastically shorter paths (tactics) through a game.

Of course, this is achieved not only through knowledge of the game space, but also through an insistence on moving through the virtual world as quickly as possible. To better understand this drive for acceleration, let us now turn to the concept of speed itself.

Theories of Speed

This thesis frames its theoretical consideration of speed around the writings of Paul Virilio, specifically *Speed and Politics* (1977), *The Aesthetics of Disappearance* (1980), and "The Museum of Accidents" (1986). Like De Certeau, Virilio is interested in the ontology of the urban space. In *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology,* he describes Paris as "a tapestry of trajectories, […] subject to a police repression intended to control [one's] wanderings" (Virilio 1977 29). Quoting Josef Goebbels, Virilio therefore describes the act of occupying the streets as "the first form of expression to be truly animated and galvanizing" (30). As the modern world comes to be composed of these intertwining lanes and avenues and military struggles are won and lost by the principle that "*stasis is death*", Virilio makes the dromological assertion that "Speed is Time saved in the most absolute sense of the word" (38, 46). And while Virilio approaches military technology from a Heideggarian point of view in an effort to describe the rapid, destructive action at a distance made possible by nuclear weapons and missiles (something that may seem beyond the purview of the present discussion), he still concludes his work with the broader assertion that "the violence of speed has become both the location and the law, the world's destiny and its destination" (167).

It is this notion of *the violence of speed* in particular that needs highlighting for our purposes. For indeed, Virilio argues, "the strategic value of the non-place of speed has definitively supplanted that of place" because "geographical spaces have kept shrinking as speed has increased" (149, 150). Speed has overtaken space as the most strategically relevant aspect of war through its unleashing of a violence that trumps any distance that exists between two territories in natural space. This is a theme that carries through from *Speed and Politics* into the author's later work.

"'To conquer is to advance,'" Virilio quotes from Frederick II in *The Aesthetics of Disappearance* (Virilio 1980 97). And those advancements that happen more

rapidly can be said to dominate in their respective fields, whether one speaks of military campaigns or of technological innovation. In speaking about the car, Virilio argues that "at the instant of its functioning it is no longer what is to come, it is obsolete" (104). It is this fervour for progress (in this case, the development of more powerful motors), Virilio argues, "from which we derive the need for speed records; the record will link the technical machine with an imaginary dimension that is boundless – because no one can know the upper limits of speed" (Ibid). In both speedrunning and the technological sophistication of the automobile, higher speeds mean lower times to cover a distance, which in turn denotes progress.

All of this for Virilio stems from the same drive for far-off lands felt before the world was completely mapped. But now that most spaces on Earth have been explored and mastered, speed becomes the dimension of movement whose boundaries humans have not run up against:

> From the very inception of the transportation revolution certain persons had the merit of discerning in the desire for movement, peregrination, voyage, more of a desire for the discovery of speed than any far-off elsewhere.
>
> (111)

Indeed, as the science and technology industries push our notion of travel speed further and further, acceleration comes to be exploratory and revelatory in its own way, both in natural and, I would argue, virtual space.

"The Museum of Accidents" (1986) is an essay written by Virilio to help inaugurate the Parisian museum now called the City of Science of Industry in which he attempts to formulate "the science of an anti-science museum" (Virilio 1986 82). He opens by observing that "there is an urgent need, it would seem, to make room in public information for *fallibility*" (Ibid). Citing the infamous Space Shuttle Challenger disaster that had occurred in that same year, he writes:

> These 'extreme situations' require the utmost vigilence (sic) against routine; it should be the same when it comes to information on 'extreme technologies,' and this should apply not only to professionals, those responsible for the programs and other decision-making executives, but also to the amateurs and naive spectators of recent technological achievements.
>
> (83)

Virilio is adamant that the risks that come from the drive for technological advancement cannot be kept unexposed from all those save for the select scientific elite that are undertaking these innovations. And so while there exists simulation technology whose purpose is "exposing the accident [to scientists] in order not to be exposed to it", Virilio argues that "the same should hold for the new museography" (82). Technology has reached a point whereby both its past and future can no longer be curated without "exposing what is improbable, what is unusual and yet inevitable" (Ibid). Virilio concludes his piece by asserting that this 'Museum of Accidents', the curation of all the risks posed by scientific advancement, already exists – it is the television.

Though the essay is only a handful of pages long, it is of note for my work in that Virilio makes reference to speed in contexts other than the natural. Whether it is through simulation technologies or through the mediation of video footage from violent disasters like the Challenger explosion or the Hindenburg disaster, Virilio here begins to speak to some notion of virtual speed, which I seek to expand upon in this chapter. Furthermore, the concept of a Museum of Accidents will be returned to once again towards the end of this chapter and into the next one with a view to thinking through speedrunning in relation to games and game design.

In the *Aesthetics of* Disappearance, when Virilio evokes the figure of "the mountain climber who doesn't want so much to scale the peak as level off and flatten the mountain" (1980 119), I immediately think of the speedrunner, who can be said to do something similar to the narrative architectures of games. And from this, another question emerges. If a game's narrative is expressed partially by the virtual space in which play takes place, then one must ask whether or not play that is concerned with speed above and beyond the implicit importance it holds in the game 'does violence' to the software in some way. My analysis of speedrunning as a practice will seek to answer this question and, in so doing, will begin making the case that speedrunning is a Museum of Accidents within the sphere of the virtual. As such, let us now move to a discussion of virtual speed and rules.

Virtual Speed, Implicit and Explicit Possibilities

Video games come in many forms and evoke many experiences for different players, however it can certainly be said that there are some things that most games share. In the first place, I would argue, Virilio (through Frederick II)'s assertion that 'to conquer is to advance' is generally as true in virtual spaces as it is in natural space. Whether one 'advances' the plot in a story-heavy game by moving through virtual space and completing objectives or simply advances to the next level in a puzzle game, titles that have a clear 'end'[32] to them are 'conquered' (players often use the similarly militaristic term 'beaten') through player progress. This stems directly from one medium-specific quality of the video game – the need for interaction.

For indeed, as Mark J. P. Wolf observes in *The Medium of the Video Game* (2002), "video game play requires input – physical action of some kind – from the player in order to function" (Wolf 16-17). And one measure of how 'well' someone interacts with a game is how quickly a player can string together inputs and advance to the game's completion. If one accepts this, then it stands to reason that speed in games is something that players should generally covet and that developers should generally incentivize.

And beyond the obvious example of racing games where the only goal is going faster than competitors or finishing before time runs out, there are still many examples of both players and game companies using speed as a measure of skill or even as an advertising gimmick. These include Capcom's *Resident Evil* series, which incentivizes fast playthroughs by unlocking additional content if a player finishes the story in a certain time limit or Sega's early *Sonic the Hedgehog* games, whose speed was put in direct competition with the *Super Mario Bros.* games with the famous slogan 'Genesis does what Nintendon't' and the rhetoric of Blast

[32] As opposed to ones that continue indefinitely like many old arcade games.

Processing.[33] In the interest of space, however, I will focus on one prime example of both player and developer cementing the claim that speed in games is coveted as a measure of skill.

In *Starcraft* (Blizzard 1998), a real-time strategy game where players harvest resources and build armies to wage wars against one another, a tactic emerged known as the 'Zergling rush'. One of the playable factions in the game, the Zergs, is capable of producing a large number of very weak units from the moment the game starts. As such, players began to realize that if they sent a formidable amount of these weak creatures to swarm an enemy base as quickly as possible, they could often win a match within minutes of starting because the enemy would not have had time to build up any significant defenses (See Fig. 5).

Fig. 5 – A zergling rush in progress. The opponent has only had time to build one structure (in the centre of the image), which is now surrounded. With just a small group of weak units, the attacker has positioned themselves to win through speed and skill alone.

[33] Blast Processing is an infamous term coined by Sega during the early stages of the video game 'console wars'. Sega's attempts to sway consumers to the side of the *Genesis* rather than the *Nintendo Entertainment System* often cited their console's superior speed, which was attributed to 'Blast Processing' – a term that was ultimately meaningless. To this day, hardware specifications are one area in the game industry that the positivist rhetoric of speed is deployed. Each new generation of video game consoles is touted as being faster (and therefore better) than the last simply because it can process information faster to render better graphics. The actual quality of gameplay does not figure in to this logic.

While opinions on the fairness or legitimacy of this tactic is oftentimes still a matter of debate, players are here shown to be taking the quickest path to advancing a game to a victory state (Starcraft Wiki).

Beyond these Blitzkrieg tactics, competitive *Starcraft* players are also notorious for measuring their 'Actions Per Minute' (APM) as a way of showing not only how difficult some manoeuvres in the game are, but also as a means of distinguishing themselves as more technical than other players. Within the *Starcraft* community, a player is deemed 'proficient' when they reach upwards of 150 APM. As professional *Starcraft* grew, the measuring of APM became so pervasive that, in the sequel, *Starcraft II* (Blizzard 2010), not only was APM made readily observable in-game, but Blizzard also introduced a metric known as EPM, or Effective actions Per Minute, that counts only player commands and not superfluous clicks. (Starcraft Wiki). Whether this emerged out of the players' interest in APM as a metric, or Blizzard's desire to appeal to the competitive *Starcraft* scene, the point remains that in this and many other instances, both the producers and consumers of video games tend to agree that, simply put, going fast in games is a good thing.[34]

This remains true even in non-competitive gaming contexts. Just as Virilio observes of our interactions with natural spaces, the application of speed to virtual spaces 'reveals' fundamental properties of a game world. At a basic level, movement through a game literally 'reveals' new environments or plot points. This is clear if one recalls Wolf and a game's need for interaction in order for progress to occur. However, if I lay Virilio's work in *The Aesthetics of Disappearance* over this assertion, then it is clear that speed eventually reaches a point where travelling from Point A

[34] As with any statement about games in general, there are certainly exceptions to this. Nintendo's *Animal Crossing* series, for instance, beyond being a game with no time-sensitive goals, punishes players who run too much by making flowers eventually disappear if they are trampled on too much. The emphasis here and in some other games is, perhaps counter-intuitively, to slow down and enjoy the game world. There is also the matter of slow play, an emergent play practice where players deliberately adopt constraints that dilate gameplay rather than contracting it. And while this practice is of great interest to me for future work, this thesis is not the place to discuss it further.

to Point B is so streamlined and a game's space is so mastered that the upper limits of speed itself are all that is left to uncover.

This can be observed in a title like *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda Game Studios 2011) where players can explore every nook and cranny of the massive game map on foot or on horseback. From the moment the game's tutorial ends, the player has access to nearly everywhere in the virtual world. Travel becomes streamlined as a player fills in the blank spaces on their map and unlocks the ability to 'fast-travel', literally teleporting (even if in-universe, the player still technically walks) from their location to any previously-visited landmark and the space is ultimately mastered. At this point, a speedrunner would begin to probe at the game, finding ways to clip into buildings that are locked in order to skip hours of questing or discovering methods to move faster than intended. From appreciating and mastering the game space as Bethesda has planned for players to do, the focus shifts to attempting to understand how going faster than intended can be used to reveal a game's inner workings, or rules. These upper limits of virtual speed and the possibilities it affords are the raison d'etre of the speedrunner.

Now that I have described the significance of virtual speed, let us move to what virtual speed effectively *is*. Virtual speed, like natural speed, is a measure of distance travelled divided by time – kilometers per hour, meters per second, and so on. However, whereas natural speed is governed by physical laws, virtual speed is itself a law (or rule) as dictated by the game's code. What I mean is that whereas the boundaries of natural speed are dictated and limited by our own understanding of the laws of physics, virtual speed is something that is directly addressed by a game's code through its physics engine or through artificial limits put on how fast a player can travel called speed caps, all of which can be readily accessed, understood, and ultimately undermined.

Virtual rules are something that has been written on extensively by other game scholars[35], but none of the models that I have encountered frame speedrunning as a gameplay practice in a wholly satisfactory way. This is why the first piece that I published on speedrunning served, in part, to "put forth the terms *explicit* and *implicit* rules" (Scully-Blaker 2014). In "A Practiced Practice: Speedrunning Through Space With De Certeau and Virilio", I define *implicit rules* as:

> the rules that govern normal playthroughs, […] these limitations and affordances are only put in place by what Consalvo (through Huizinga) refers to as the "Magic Circle", or "the space apart from regular space" created by the action of virtual play [...] This does not mean that these rules necessarily apply, however.
>
> (Ibid)

In other words, implicit rules are those that players generally assume exist, either out of a sense of immersion in a game world or from a sense of video game convention.

For instance, in a game like *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 1998), players that are familiar with the series, or general video game logic would assume that it is impossible to walk through the Door of Time without satisfying certain conditions first, in this case collecting three Spiritual Stones and the titular Ocarina of Time. This same rule would also become apparent to even those unfamiliar with the series when they see the giant, stone door with a pedestal placed in front of it that reads, ""*Ye who owns 3 Spiritual Stones/Stand with the Ocarina of Time/And play the Song of Time*" (See Fig. 6). Both the game's narrative and the gaming convention of collecting items to progress to a new part of the story would signal to the player that the Door of Time is impassable without the required tools. However this is not actually the case.

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[35] Salen and Zimmerman (2003), Juul (2005), and Parker (2008) are examples, although there are many others. Salen and Zimmerman in particular have their own notion of implicit rules, however it is more concerned with etiquette and the presence of other players than the implied narrative of a game.

Fig. 6 – The sealed Door of Time, apparently impassable without several key items.

Explicit rules are the rules as they actually apply. To quote from my original article once again:

> Such rules, though convoluted, reflect the real scaffolding of the game they apply to. These are the rules that govern speedruns (and necessarily any play session, although less immanently […])
> (Ibid)

Explicit rules, then, are the exact permutation of what is afforded by a game's code, glitches and all. To explain what I mean, let us return to our example of the Door of Time and the implicit rule 'The Door of Time will not open unless the player collects all 3 Spiritual Stones and Ocarina of Time, and then plays The Song of Time in front of the door".

In this instance, the explicit rule would be "With a properly-timed side-hop into forward slash, Link can clip out of bounds next to the Door of Time and then back in-bounds on the other side" which, from a speedrun perspective effectively bypasses the need to open the Door entirely. This explicit rule is an accurate description of a glitch known as the Door of Time skip, which is one of the many tactics that *Ocarina of Time* speedrunners make use of (See Fig.7). Note that the

phrasing of this rule demands a very specific set of terms that are not going to be familiar to individuals who do not have much experience with *Ocarina of Time*.

Fig. 7 – The Door of Time skip in progress. Note that the player-character's body is in the process of clipping through the side of the door (the large, grey rectangle in the middle of the image).

Even those who have played the game and could potentially understand this rule may not be able to actively exploit it without a fair amount of practice. And while someone at some point discovered this glitch, the method of skipping the Door of Time is not something that most players would attempt in a normal playthrough. This is because the explicit rules of a game often undercut our assumptions of what is possible in a given virtual space.

By conceptualizing rules in this way, I allow this thesis to move beyond Nitsche's limited discussion of "transgressive or emergent play" where the extent of the 'transgression' is players turning a particular spot in a virtual space into a meeting place, or the natural space of "the Dogtown area in West Los Angeles" getting turned into "the Mecca of the skateboarding community" (Nitsche 195). His interest in deviant play is limited because the analysis of player activities in game spaces is intimately tied to the assumption that implicit rules are the ones that ought to be used to contextualize a game. What I am interested in here, however, is what

happens if I instead focus on explicit rules, if even glitches are treated as a part of a virtual space presented to players.

As a result, the type of play one sees in speedruns becomes 'transgressive' and 'emergent' in more ways than allowing for virtual spaces to gain "a new cultural significance through […] unexpected use" (Ibid). In the first place, though it is not always the case that a particular game allows for what I have called a deconstructive speedrun that "exploits glitches within the game to break scripted sequences and potentially skip several hours of gameplay altogether", those that do dismantle "narrative boundaries by transgressing both the literal narrative and the narrative implied by the design of the gamespace" (Scully-Blaker). As I showed with the Door of Time skip, a wall that is implied to be impassable is shown to be a suggested boundary, a velvet rope in the curated virtual-narrative experience that is *Ocarina of Time* that can be respected or bypassed.

Secondly, the players who attempt these runs and the theorycrafters and glitch hunters who work at the level of a game's code to figure out how glitches work 'transgress' against and ultimately surpass the knowledge held by the people who coded the game to begin with, winning themselves a great deal of gaming capital in the process.[36] In this sense, the speedrunner is De Certeau's tactician and the strategically designed city becomes the game space. This knowledge, combined with Virilio's speed as progress, is what goes into the execution of a speedrun. And it is through framing a game's rules as either implicit or explicit that this can be seen the most clearly.

Implicit and explicit rules also bring us closer to addressing the question of the violence of virtual speed. For indeed, if one considers games with reference to their intended narratives, their implicit rules, and the Magic Circle, then

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[36] Indeed, as the GDQ marathons have become more prominent events, individuals that worked on titles ranging from indie hits like *Super Meat Boy* (Team Meat 2010) and *VVVVVV* (Terry Cavanagh 2010) to major studio releases like *Banjo Kazooie* (Rare 1998) and *Metroid Prime* (Nintendo 2002) have been patched in via Skype to comment on the run. Along with stories of these games' development cycles, a recurring theme is that the people who worked on a title are consistently surprised by what is possible to do in the game to speed things along.

speedrunning is wholly destructive and can arguably be said to do violence to the integrity of a virtual space. However, as I have now shown and will discuss further in the following chapter, I argue that it is far more interesting to consider the overclocking of virtual speed that one sees in speedrunning as a revelatory force rather than a destructive one.

Conceptualizing a game's rules in this way allows us to make many other important observations about speedrunning as a practice, perhaps most notably in relation to whether speedrunning can be considered cheating. In my earlier piece on speedrunning, I moved from a discussion of rules into this conclusion:

> I would argue that while speedrunners clearly trespass against the implicit rules of certain games, they cannot be considered cheaters with reference to a game's explicit rules, because explicit rules cannot be broken. […] To those who suggest that speedrunning is cheating, then, I would say that it is simply a matter of perspective. If one views speedrunning as an activity fundamentally attached to play and the Magic Circle, then the 'cheater' label is understandable, but I would argue that the realm of the Magic Circle and the realm of the speedrunner must be of separate species.
>
> (Ibid)

And with what has already been said here, one can see that this claim still holds. While Consalvo found that individual definitions of cheating do vary from person to person, to treat a speedrun in the same way that one does a normal playthrough of a game is a mistake.

Speedruns, particularly those deconstructive runs that are most likely to be labelled cheating because they skip entire segments of gameplay with glitches, do not concern themselves with the implicit rules of a game or the narrative's reasons for why players must collect particular items or slay particular monsters. The only 'text' that runners are concerned with is the code, or the explicit rules - the conditions that must be met for the game to consider itself completed. The more 'deconstructive' the run is, the more that the implicit and explicit rules differ. But at no point do runners actually break a game's explicit rules because they are, by definition, immutable. The speedrunning practice thrives on finding the distinction

between implicit and explicit rules by dispelling the former and discovering the latter.

At this point it may be observed by the reader that, along with glitches, the definition of explicit rules must include cheats since, beyond external peripherals like the *GameShark* or *Action Replay* that allow savvy users to rewrite a game's code at will, the cheats present in a game are consciously programmed in for players to use.[37] However, this tension is resolved by a separate set of rules – those laid out by the speedrunning community itself. A meaningful parallel can be drawn here by first considering external rule systems in eSports.

Communities of (Regulated) Practice

As Taylor writes in *Raising the Stakes*, "While games certainly ask for us to adopt special conditions vis-à-vis some notion of a 'magic circle' we step into […] this circle is malleable and porous" (Taylor 2008 62). eSports, like speedrunning demands some instrumental understanding of a game's explicit rules, but beyond this, the communities around various games also construct their own cultural norms and guidelines. Taylor therefore takes great care to offer "a more nuanced understanding of how ludic systems work in the face of concrete human action", tracking how player etiquette and notions of fair play emerge across different games and in different play contexts (Ibid).

What emerges, ultimately, are systems to anticipate and deal with episodes like the 'seam walking' glitch in *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* that was discussed in the last chapter – rules that set limits on player actions within "the dynamic context of play itself" (Ibid). Despite the fact that eSports is a "moneyed", "competitive" play practice while, as was said in the last chapter, speedrunning is neither, the need for external regulation of speedruns remains. Like Taylor, I argue that this complicates "the notion that computation serves as a totalizing agent – a penultimate game master, if you will, in computer game play" (84). As much as a game's explicit rules

[37] I am most interested here in the sort of cheats that require entering a particular password or button combination to unlock or skip game content with a view to modifying gameplay to make it easier or potentially more entertaining. While looking up a walkthrough may be considered cheating to some, it is not something that is relevant to the present discussion.

are what inform the speedrun in and of itself, there is still a myriad of community standards that must be met - a means of curating and legitimizing runs.

The best summary of community rules that apply to all speedruns can be found on *SpeedDemosArchive*. These include conventions for different speedrun categories[38], how to time runs[39], and, most importantly for our purposes, a comprehensive list of what constitutes cheating in speedruns, which I present in a truncated form here:

> **Cheat Devices:** Game Genies, Action Replays, etc, are not allowed.
>
> **Emulation & Virtualization:** Emulators are generally not allowed, unless they are official rereleases of games such as Nintendo's Virtual Console library […]
>
> **Hardware Modification:** Console games must be run on official hardware […] you may circumvent region-locking, and you may mod your console to output higher-quality graphics or sound…
>
> **Software Modification:** Removing or altering any part of a game is forbidden. Examples include software mods, the crooked cartridge trick, or disk streaming…
>
> **Input Modification:** Console players may use third-party controllers, but may **not** use features not present on controllers bundled with the system. […] PC gamers may use any reasonable input device and remap keys, but may not use macros, scripts or programmable keyboards to automate button-presses.
>
> **Codes & Cheats:** Beneficial cheat codes of any kind, such as invincibility codes, debug or console options, and so forth, are not allowed…
>
> (SDA Rules Page)

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[38] Speedruns are divided into categories as a way to distinguish between different sets of constraints runners must respect while completing a game. Any% refers to simply beating the game as quickly as possible and, along with 100%, or beating a game while collecting all relevant items, is the most common speedrun category. There are other categories as well, though these vary from game to game.

[39] The options for timing a speedrun largely boil down to a choice between real-time or in-game time. The latter is preferred if the game's timer is reliable.

While these rules contain a lot of jargon that may not be clear to all readers, it can generally be said that they serve as a way to standardize play practices across all platforms that a game is made available.

Emulators[40], for example, are usually disallowed because they can run a game more efficiently than the native console could, thereby tampering with the amount of time it takes to load cutscenes or the game environment. Emulators also allow for players to create 'save states', or moments in gameplay that can be returned to at will. And while this is very helpful for practicing particularly difficult tricks, it also makes it easier to string together segments from different attempts and pass them off as a single-segment speedrun. As was discussed in the previous chapter, this practice is known as splicing and is considered cheating in most contexts, further stigmatizing emulated runs.

Beyond these regulatory stipulations, the sub-communities that are built around particular games or franchises set their own rules and conventions. The exact definitions of Any% or 100% runs and any categories in between as well as when exactly to start and stop timing for a specific title are once again of great importance, but the discussions are simplified or complicated by the game in question. At the time of writing, for example, there is a debate within the *Pokémon* speedrunning community that illustrates several salient points about how speedrun sub-communities operate.

On February 19, 2016, runner Gunnermaniac set a world record for *Pokémon Red/Blue* version (Nintendo 1996) Any% Glitchless by completing the game in 1 hour and 48 minutes according to the in-game timer, beating the old record by less than a minute. Already this offers us certain things to unpack. In the first place, runners in the *Pokémon* community do not distinguish between the *Red* and *Blue* entries in the series since, despite certain minor differences, they are the same game

[40] An emulator is a computer program that effectively pretends to be a video game console, allowing any PC to run video games that traditionally exist only on cartridges or discs. While recent efforts on the part of console manufacturers, like Nintendo's Virtual Console act similarly, emulator software alternative for many because all of a console's games are generally downloadable and the practice, though illegal, is completely free.

from a speedrunning perspective. Secondly, runners in this sub-community have opted to measure completion time according to the in-game timer to ensure uniformity across all attempts. Although Gunner's run clocked in at 1:49.07 in real-time, the record is noted as a 1:48 because the game clock is not always counting. This also means that whether his time was 1:48 flat or 1:48:59, the game notes it identically - a potential shortcoming of the system that, despite historically leading to many tied world records, runners in this community accept.

Under normal circumstances Gunnermaniac's record would be recorded and the bar for *Red/Blue* runners would be raised, however this particular run had something unique – it was the first world record to make use of a bug known as 'Instant Text'. For reasons that are not entirely understood, if a player enters into conversation with a particular character in the game and concludes the dialogue by pressing the B button, all dialogue boxes that are triggered thereafter scroll much faster until the next time a player is prompted with a specific type of dialogue box that asks them to answer 'Yes' or 'No'. This effectively allows a player who plots out their route carefully to save a substantial amount of time in mandatory dialogue sections in an otherwise remarkably optimized speedrun.[41] As such, the legitimacy of Gunnermaniac's apparent world record run was questioned due to its use of this 'bug'. To understand why the use of Instant Text complicates the acceptance of Gunnermaniac's run, is to understand the difference between an Any% speedrun of *Pokémon Red* and an Any% Glitchless speedrun as well as why this distinction exists.

The world record for *Pokémon Red* Any% is 0:00. The run makes use of a major glitch that skips the player from their childhood home in Pallet Town to the Pokémon Hall of Fame and the fanfare of the end credits. By resetting while the game saves, the runner is able to corrupt their file and turn the menus into a rudimentary hex editor to rewrite how the game responds to the player leaving

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[41] I say that *Pokémon Red/Blue* runs are remarkably optimized because the race for the world record is down to a matter of seconds. The *Pokémon* speedrun sub-community is also one of the oldest and largest, meaning that more people have logged more hours honing the current fastest route through the game. Not all games are as close a contest and fewer still are as collectively mastered from a speedrun perspective.

their house at the beginning of the game. Because the actual amount of time that the in-game timer is running for during this process is less than one minute, it is rounded down to 0:00. And because this trick is relatively easy to execute, the world record for Any% is a tie between so many people that the leaderboard is not even kept on Speedrun.com.

In order to avoid the obsolescence of an entire knowledge base that had been built up before the discovery of that glitch, the community as a whole decided to create Any% glitchless, a much more entertaining category for runner and spectator alike which (fittingly) forbids the use of glitches. However, what counts as a glitch in this context is decided on a case by case basis since the Any% glitchless run still makes use of some notable programming oversights like the fact that certain elements of the game's battle system go faster if the player's Pokémon are at low health or, more recently, the Instant Text 'bug'.

Before Gunnermaniac's run, the community had passively accepted the existence of Instant Text, but Gunnermaniac's 1:48 represents the first time that someone used the trick to achieve a world record and the discussion of whether the trick should be considered a glitch was re-opened. All *Pokémon Red/Blue* runners who have a 'real interest' in the community (which translates to having a time of at least 2:10 on either game) were invited to discuss and vote on the Pokémon Speedrun Forums to decide whether the trick should be allowed. For now, it seems, the decision has been to create a separate category where 'minor' glitches like Instant Text are allowed, but whether this will stand will only become clear with time (Pokémon Speedrun Forums).

This process as a whole recalls David Myers' work with 'Garfinkeling'[42] and games "where game rules are verifiably distinct from prevailing social orders and etiquettes" (Myers 4). Myers' research was set in the massively-multiplayer online game, *City of Heroes* (Cryptic Studos 2004) and consisted of using tactics to defeat other players that, while fully allowed for within the games rules, were frowned

[42] Developed by Harold Garfinkel, Garfinkeling is a technique for determining how various groups build and maintain social order that involves deliberately trespassing against social norms and observing how members of the group react.

upon by the community. However such discrepancies between game rules and community rules are clearly not limited to players that engage with a game as-intended. Although the speedrunning community thrives on playing by a game's explicit rules as effectively as possible, there are still community norms and etiquettes that dictate how such play can occur. Despite being a much more grassroots gaming community than eSports, or a much less immersed gaming community than the *City of Heroes* player base the speedrunning community is just as concerned with maintaining external, context-sensitive rule structures with a view to curating a 'game' within games, or a play practice within a play practice.

Conclusions, Into the Museum of Accidents

From the preceding discussion I have demonstrated how speed in games is viewed as a positive, both by players and by game developers and how speedrunning emerges as a logical extension of this joy of acceleration. Theories of natural space and speed have been cited as parallels to the tactical, violently dromological practice of playing games quickly. Virtual space and virtual speed have been framed as part of a game's rules, both implicit and explicit. It has been shown that speedrunners cannot properly be referred to as cheating since none of the glitches or exploits performed in a run violate a game's explicit rules. Rather than ignoring a game's rules, speedrunners are in fact challenged to hone a hyper-awareness of the inner workings of a game's code to the point that individuals within the community do not run the games themselves, instead devoting their time to glitch hunting or theorycrafting as a means of accumulating gaming capital. Finally, the rules that the speedrunning community sets for itself have been discussed to show that speedrunning is a heavily curated gameplay practice.

It is this curation in particular that will be taken up in the following chapter as the first in a series of claims that are made based on the work laid out in chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis, namely that speedrunning is a Museum of Accidents. By establishing this at the outset, the rest of the chapter will be free to flesh out an understanding of speedrunning as both practice and community that can serve as fertile ground for future game and media scholars who which to grow the study of speedrunning into any number of directions. Having presented the most detailed

portrait of speedrunning as both a community and a practice to-date, it now falls to me to combine the findings from my interviews and participant observation with the works of my theoretical forebears and the thoughts they have inspired in me. It's time to bring it all together.

Chapter 3: The Speedrunning Museum of Accidents

Introduction

Moving into the final chapter of this work, I have laid out a comprehensive understanding of speedrunning as both a community and a practice, academic work that had been gestured towards elsewhere, but not yet assembled as such. I will now begin to push speedrunning scholarship further by exploring one avenue of inquiry that my present characterization of speedrunning has allowed for, namely that speedrunning is a museum of accidents, a re-curation of play experiences through their explicit rules. Once explained, this assertion will then be used to account for the various ways that developers, as the original curators in this context, react to their games being played in this way. As will be shown at the end of this section and in the conclusion of this thesis, there are many other facets of speedrunning scholarship that are ripe for further investigation.

I will begin by taking up the thread from the end of Chapter 2 by establishing exactly what Virilio's museum of accidents is and how the concept relates to speedrunning. This is accomplished through a close reading of Virilio's text on the concept with speedrunning as a lens for the analysis. Although Virilio speaks of the 'accident' with reference to disasters and cataclysms, it will be shown that his theory can still be applied to my research. Through considering the glitches that distinguish a game's explicit rules from its implicit rules as 'accidents' of a different sort, the relation between speedrunning and Virilio's museum is made clear.

I then argue that speedrunners 're-curate' a play experience. This is done by first reading broader notions of what the 'curatorial' is against speedrunning and then distinguishing curatorial play from other common terms for play practices that are similar to speedrunning like 'emergent' or 'expansive' gameplay.

Finally, the latter section of this chapter moves into a discussion of the game developer. As one may imagine, although speedrunners encourage finding loopholes in a game's narrative space, the developers of games are not always as thrilled at the discovery of game-breaking glitches, let alone the prospect of these glitches being recorded and shared. Through my participant observation of the community, I have

noted a variety of potential developer reactions to speedrunning and its community as well as the impact that these varied reactions can have. The final section of this chapter clusters these responses into several categories – prevention, compromise, and endorsement – and provides case studies with a view to both showing some of the tensions that exist between game makers and game players and demonstrating how much speedrunning has grown since my research began.

If the first two chapters of this thesis served to lay the groundwork for future speedrunning scholarship, this chapter serves as a first step to going beyond the community-practice binary that has thusfar defined the thesis. Altogether, this chapter stands as a final gathering of my thoughts and a gesturing to some areas where speedruns can fit within the broader game studies corpus.

Review of Literature

Though it was already discussed in the theoretical framework of Chapter 2, Virilio's 1986 essay, "The Museum of Accidents" ought to be addressed here again to account for the shift in analytical focus of this chapter. Whereas previously I was most interested in the essay for its allusions to virtual speed, it is the goal of the first part of this chapter to make the case that speedrunning itself is a museum of accidents, a position from which I will be able to move into a discussion of curatorial play and developer reactions to speedruns.

As was noted in the previous chapter, Virilio's "Museum of Accidents" was the beginnings of a "science of an anti-science museum" written with reference to the opening of Paris' City of Science of Industry (Virilio 1986 82). In the essay, Virilio derides the contemporary museum of science and technology for being what he perceives as "a lyrical illusion of progress whose purpose is to continuously mask all that is negative in the name of science" when in fact, he continues, it is folly to suggest that technology "would progress by dissimulation, or censorship of its own errors and false calculations..." (Ibid). Censoring the potential for and the occurrence of accidents is not only detrimental to researchers, however. Virilio suggests that the call for transparency "should apply not only to professionals, those responsible for the programs and other decision-making executives, but also to the amateurs and naive spectators of recent technological achievements." (83)

While Virilio's essay is written with reference to the public representation of major pillars of modern society like 'science' and 'technology' and his 'accidents' are large-scale disasters like the Challenger or the Hindenberg explosions, I believe that there is room to read speedrunning into his notion of the museum of accidents. Indeed, when Virilio writes that "To innovate the vessel was already to innovate *the shipwreck,* to invent the steam engine, the locomotive, was again to invent *the derailment,* the rail catastrophe", I would argue that to innovate the video game was already to innovate the desire for virtual speed, the glitch, and indeed the speedrun. (Virilio 1986 81). Before that argument can be fully expanded upon, however, there are several other texts that inform the work done in this chapter, particularly with reference to players, play, and preservation.

This chapter emerges in part from work done by Mia Consalvo, Jason Begy, Sarah Christina Ganzon, and myself on a concept we dubbed 'tandem play', or "when two or more players engage with a single-player game together, moving through the game with a variety of potential motives" (Consalvo et al, 2016, 9). The study was undertaken with a view to filling a perceived lack in extant scholarship, namely that "game studies has largely ignored the study of sociality or multiplay experiences found in relation to single player games" (2). To obtain as robust a sense of how tandem play occurs in different contexts as possible, participants were split into two groups, one group was further divided into pairs to play *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (Bethesda 2015) in a 'couch co-op' format while the other group played the game alone, but livestreamed their play.

From our observations of these play sessions as well as exit interviews collected from the participants, a working understanding of the tandem play practice was formed:

> Tandem play is not an activity we invented, even if we are coining this term to describe it as a specific style of play with both a long history and contemporary expression. It occurs across players of different ages, abilities, platforms and genres. Tandem play occurs when players come together to play, although not perhaps necessarily to progress in, a game. Players may have different goals for the play session, but must

> take account of who else is playing with them, or witnessing their play.
>
> Consalvo et al 22

This has proven to be a very helpful concept for thinking through how members of the speedrunning community gather around many single-player titles and collaborate to bring the fastest completion time lower and lower. In this chapter, the sociality of even single-player games will be used to recall Chapter 1's claim that the speedrunning museum of accidents is an intensely collaborative endeavor. This is not the only text that will be used to reframe what I have discussed earlier in this thesis, however.

I also return to Felan Parker's (2008) discussion of what he terms "expansive gameplay" for the conversation it enters into with Juul's (2005) discussion of "emergence" in games (Parker 2, Juul 73). Juul describes emergent gameplay as "situations where a game is played in a way that the game designer did not predict" (Juul 76). Examples of emergent gameplay, this "interaction between the game system and human cognition" are distinct and many (Ibid). From making machinima out of gameplay to the development of optimal strategies in eSports to the glitches that speedrunners use to skip entire gameplay segments, the term is broad enough to encompass play practices that are varyingly problematic from a game design perspective. Emergence does not equate deviance, nor, as I will show, is all emergent gameplay curatorial.

Instead, I make a similar rhetorical turn to Parker in his discussion of expansive gameplay. He coins the term "to refer to the imposition of rules by players" in the sense that such play creates "a new range of possible game events and experiences" (Parker 3). When putting forth this concept, Parker is quick to note that "Expansive gameplay can be seen as one of many specific facets and examples of emergent gameplay, but not as a synonymous concept" (Ibid). And while he does not devote time to explaining exactly what he means by this, the rhetorical break is still one that I will seek to make in discussing play in relation to curation.

For indeed, although speedrun play fits into the frameworks of both emergent and expansive gameplay, these are two specific lenses for reading the act of play which, while significant, do not account for speedrunning as a museum of accidents. As such, breaking from these concepts will be helpful to me in this chapter, however this cannot be done without finding a separate theoretical framework to anchor my discussion. For this purposes of this chapter, that anchor is to be found in broader discussions of play as preservation and the philosophy of curation.

James Newman's *Best Before* tersely summarizes the issue of video game preservation by opening, "Videogames are disappearing" (Newman 2012 1). Throughout the book, he discusses how gaming hardware decays over time and attempts to preserve the games themselves either through porting them to new systems or through emulation are rife with their own issues such as inferior performance or technical limitations. In response to this, the final chapter of his work suggests that, in addition to games, we ought to conserve gameplay as well. Indeed, any hardware or software hurdles are ultimately of note for negatively impacting "the integrity of the experiences of play" (149).

For Newman, to preserve a game is not the same as preserving the "variety of related, but significantly different practices and performances that are contingent on the different motivations of players" (150). Fittingly, to demonstrate this point the author uses the example of speedruns to argue that "players often explore and perform with their games to – and even beyond – destruction […] exploiting […] a host of bugs, glitches and other inconsistencies in the operation of the games code" (Ibid). In other words, if we were simply to preserve games, we would lose access to an entire range of play experiences that divert from playthroughs governed by a game's implicit rules.

Newman helpfully notes that some practices central to the speedrunning museum of accidents such as "the exploitation of glitches […] have become written into the standard lexicon of gameplay" while even specialized language to describe game-specific exploits is "coded" for "more sophisticated players" and "specific types of play" (Ibid). SpeedDemosArchive and smaller community sites like

ZeldaSpeedRuns.com are specifically cited as examples of play communities that are already working to preserve the unique gameplay experiences that speedrunning produces. Though I agree with Newman in this regard, the book is of particular use for this chapter as a jumping-off point for my own argument. For indeed, if play communities can be said to preserve their unique brands of play, then the gap between speedruns and curation is narrowed considerably since preservation is arguably a side effect of curation, even if not all acts of preservation are inherently 'curated'. This will be better understood when I discuss the philosophy of curation and apply it to play later in this chapter. Before moving to such considerations, however, it is necessary to give form to my notion of the speedrunning museum of accidents, the project that allows for curation to take place.

Speedrunning as Museum, Glitch as Accident

When attempting to read speedrunning into Virilio's writing on the museum of accidents, the greatest obstacle that I perceive is a matter of scope and scale. For example, to mention the infinite sword glitch[43] and the Challenger Explosion in the same sentence (See Figs. 8 and 9) risks aggrandizing one and trivializing the other without any context. And yet, if I reframe Virilio's essay – if I substitute science and technology for games – then it is remarkable how little the rest of the piece is unraveled. This is because "The Museum of Accidents" can speak to exhibiting 'the accident' more broadly than the context of tragic, real-life disasters. Despite one taking place in virtual space and the other taking place in natural space, the infinite sword glitch and the Challenger disaster are both essentially 'accidents'. The fact that one is a coding oversight that allows players to complete *Ocarina of Time* faster than intended while the other is an engineering oversight that led to the deaths of seven individuals as well as the halting of any American space shuttle launches for several years still does not prevent one from applying Virilio's piece to speedrunning.

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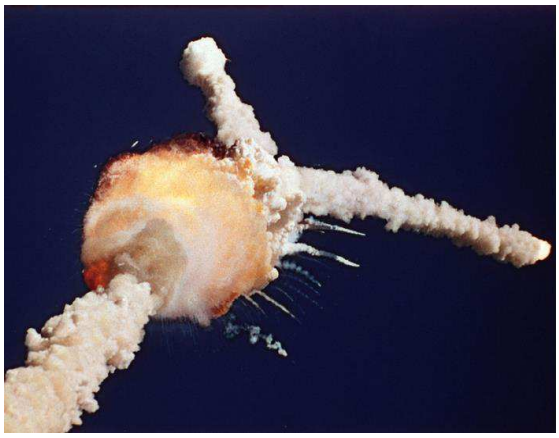
[43] An important glitch in both *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 1998) and *Majora's Mask* (2000) that tricks the game into thinking that Link's sword is constantly swinging, bestowing other odd properties to Link that lead to other glitches.



Figs. 8 and 9 – On the left, the infinite sword glitch being performed in *Ocarina of Time*. Note in particular the white glow trailing Link's sword. On the right, the famous image of the Space Shuttle Challenger coming apart following an in-flight breakup on January 28, 1986. I would argue that these images both depict 'accidents' in one form or another.

The only major discrepancy between the museum of accidents in Virilio's context as opposed to my own is that, within Virilio's frame of reference, the project necessarily emerges out of a certain sense of moral obligation. Whereas Virilio writes that "pontifical infallibility does not exist when it comes to major catastrophies (sic)" and that "these 'extreme situations' *[situations-limites]* require the utmost vigilence (sic) against routine...", it is difficult to suggest that one ought to have similar feelings about discovering and exhibiting glitches (Virilio 1986 83). As I have shown, runners have a variety of reasons for playing through games as quickly as possible, but the proceeding analysis does not wish to suggest that my data has revealed any ethical imperative behind what speedrunners do. Rather, I would argue that the speedrunning museum of accidents represents a more pointed discussion of what some[44] have already gestured to in game scholarship, namely speedrunning's place as a community-based form of gameplay preservation and media archiving. With that said, let us proceed with an analysis of the speedrunning museum of accidents, beginning with the concept of 'accident' itself.

"To innovate the vessel was already to innovate the shipwreck", Virilio states in the opening to his essay (81). He continues, "the beginning of wisdom would be,

[44] I am here thinking of Russel (2014) and LeMieux (2016), for example.

above all, an awareness of the symmetry between substance and accident, instead of constantly dissimulating them." (Ibid). In other words, every object, by virtue of existing, threatens itself and those around it with the risk of the accident, and I would argue that the video game is no exception. As with any emerging medium, there have been plenty of claims made and studies done based on whether games are harmful to players. However, to avoid treading off our present train of thought and into the realm of moral panic, this chapter is only concerned with the threats that a game poses to itself – glitches, both slight and major. If video games are the substance in Virilio's equation, then I put forth that, so far as the speedrunning museum of accidents is concerned, glitches are the accident. The linkages between the text and speedruns do not end at substance and accident, however.

Just as Virilio argues that his new museology would overturn the "philosophical and scientific positivism" that obscures "all that is negative in the name of science", it is clear from what has been said that speedrunning overturns notions of conventional, immersive play (Virilio 1986 82). Still, while Virilio is actively interested in changing how museology is conducted through the development of a "platform for what never exposes itself, yet nevertheless exposes us incessantly to major risks", speedrunners are, of course, less directly interested in impacting game design. Nowhere in my interviews did runners note that they came to the practice with a view to exposing programming oversights so that the quality of games might somehow be improved. This is not to say that speedrunning has never altered game design, however. As I will discuss below, developers have responded to speedruns in many ways, sometimes making design decisions explicitly based on the community. Both Virilio's museum and the speedrunning museum of accidents bring about change through a subversion of the norm, both with reference to how science (game design) is done and with reference to how it is curated (played).

Speedrunning as a project is effectively a museum of accidents that consists of curating the fastest playthroughs of games (substance) as well as all the glitches and exploits (accidents) that make these playthroughs possible. By reading speedrunning in this way, it becomes clear as to why one of the few ways that the

practice has been discussed by other game scholars is with reference to its potential as one way of presenting an archival game history. Indeed, when Virilio writes:

> It would no longer be a question of simply exposing new objects or the aftermath of disasters, nothing to stimulate the morbid curiousity of visitors which would only favour a new romanticism based on technological ruin in the manner that a beggar exaggerates sores to inspire pity. […] No, what is needed is a new scenography where only *what is exploding* or *decomposing is exhibited*.
>
> 84

we can see that speedrunning falls in line with the text once again. The history of science and technology is not properly told by the charred remains of the Challenger[45], nor is the history of video games entirely summarized in romanticized stories of the Video Game Crash of 1983, complete with the infamous tomb for copies of Atari's *E.T.* (Atari 1982).[46] These are relics of an old museology, historically relevant, perhaps, but doing less to put the accident on full display and more to help emblematize 'pivotal' moments in their respective histories.

Instead, the speedrunning museum of accidents exhibits glitches as they occur *in real time*. Whether I am referring to a livestream of run attempts, a YouTube video of a completed run, or even a recorded glitch tutorial, speedrunners revel in understanding and showcasing how games are broken. This, in turn, creates unique 'histories' for particular games as glitches are discovered and applied and world record times are traded back and forth. Collected as a cohesive project, speedrun videos and forums become histories of applied theorycrafting in this sense. It is how these histories are shared that shapes the speedrunning museum of accidents.

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[45] Some of which are, in fact, on display in museums.

[46] The example of Atari's *E.T.* may strike one as strange given that it is not explicitly tied to glitches, however, as the emblem of the Crash of 1983, an event treated by most game histories with as much gravity as the stock market crash, it is by far the best example of a romanticized relic of the 'dark days' of video games. The example of old video game magazines, another common game history artifact that sometimes showed pictures of glitches, could serve just as well here.

Throughout his essay, Virilio uses the phrase "exhibiting the accident" to refer to the main role of the museum (Ibid). And given his characterization of 'exhibiting the accident', namely that it consists of "exposing what is improbable, what is unusual and yet inevitable", the speedrunning community's use of Twitch, YouTube, and forums to share information immediately comes to mind. And when Virilio writes, "the 'museum of accidents' already exists, I've seen it: it is the TV", it is simple enough to make the leap from the Challenger disaster being broadcast on television to speedruns being broadcast on the Internet through these same video and discussion-hosting websites. In so doing, however, there arises a key difference between natural and virtual accidents that must be addressed.

"'To expose or to be exposed, that is the question'", Virilio writes, "to be or not to be conscious, scientifically speaking, of risks, of what befalls without consent: accident, the hidden face of all natural or man-made substance" (83). Ultimately, the answer offered by "The Museum of Accidents" is that, courtesy of television, it is impossible for the advancements science and technology to be curated without their corresponding failures and immoral for any attempts of the sort to be made. As such, we must move museology away from an ideological focus on progress by exhibiting the accident. For games, however, this is not exactly the case.

As I have shown, players are deeply fascinated with glitches. Indeed, most older videogames could never be curated without mention of these programming oversights. From as early as 1995, the users of websites like GameFAQs have written and shared in-depth walkthroughs of how to complete various games. And, as Newman has noted, "Game Guides often list [glitches] and the conditions under which they can be called into being with as much rigour and detail" as they expand on describing item locations, boss strategies, and so on (Newman 2008 114). However, as I showed with the *Counter-Strike* example, contemporary developers have the ability to 'patch' these mistakes, effectively removing them from the game. The erasure of the accident is much more possible in virtual spaces than it is in the natural world.

And yet, within the speedrunning community, the drive to exhibit the accident continues to exist despite the fact that games, unlike live, televised

broadcasts, can be edited or 'repaired'. By either keeping track of speedrun records from various versions of a game's software, or by deliberately running an obsolete build of a particular game, the gameplay contained by the speedrunning museum of accidents is one of the few instances in game culture where one can still find certain glitches and exploits that have otherwise been erased from existence. This would be reason enough to argue for the importance of speedrunning for game scholars, however the linkage between speedrunning and the museum of accidents can be pushed further.

As I have said throughout this thesis, speedrunning is a broadcasting of an alternative to conventional, immersive play. The practice is also heavily curated by a tight-knit network of expert communities, making the likening of speedrunning to a 'museum' seem natural. And now, with the matters of scope and scale addressed and certain textual parallels established, it has been made clear that speedrunning is a project, a museum of accidents, a re-curating of a game through play according to its explicit rules. What is meant by the term curatorial play and how speedrunning fits this definition must now be discussed.

Exhibiting the Accident Through Curatorial Play

I am by no means the first to point out that certain players take joy in exhibiting the accident, although others may not use the same terminology. This assertion lies very much within the tradition laid out by other game scholarship[47], including James Newman's characterization of glitches as "another attempt to seek alternative gaming pleasures" as well as "further evidence of the way videogames are played *with*" (Newman 2005 63). For certain subsets of players, the glitch is viewed as "a morsel to be found and savoured" (Newman 2008 113). Indeed, within non-competitive gaming environments, glitches are often "collected and curated with the same care and precision […] as the fragments of knowledge pertaining to strategy or the locations of items in the gameworld", and from what has already been said, it is clear that speedrunners are, if anything, more inclined to share

[47] Beyond Newman (2005), (2008), other academic treatments of glitches include Consalvo (2007), Bainbridge and Bainbridge (2007), and Švelch (2014), among many others.

glitches with each other than most players, especially if they have the potential to shorten the necessary time to complete a game (114). Even so, this is not enough to suggest that play itself is potentially curatorial. The pursuit of glitches is a respected part of what 'knowing' a game entails, but the pursuit of this knowledge - what I have seen referred to as 'procedural trivia' elsewhere[48] - does not inherently come with the overarching organizational vision that one traditionally associates with curation. Indeed, as I will suggest, to re-curate a game through playing it requires intentionality and certain specific contextual elements. But first, a note on curation itself.

What it means to curate, or occupy the role of curator is a subject that museologists have mulled over at great length and presented numerous, disparate stances on, many of which extend beyond the basic premise of displaying artifacts in a space. In a chapter from *The Curatorial: The Philosophy of Curating*, for instance, the Raqs Media Collective uses a form of poetic acrobatics to qualify curation with terms from A to Z. Under C is collision – "we come face to face with the 'curatorial' whenever we witness within ourselves or around us the collision of artistic forms" (Raqs Media Collective 18). These collisions include but are not limited to "unforeseen accidents" and "the accumulation of readings against the grain of intention" (Ibid). Under J is jailbreaking, in the sense of "the liberation of a device from the straightjacket of its prescribed mode of operation" - "one can coax a work out of its accustomed frame, provoke a situation into yielding results other than what its authors, actors and agents intended" (21-22). The curatorial practice, then, is one that has the potential to defy authorial intention and become a reframing, or indeed, a re-curation since the assertion that artists cannot preemptively curate their own works is debatable, particularly with reference to mediums that make use of the moving image like film or games.

Whether an artist can curate their own work or whether a curator can organize an exhibition in such a way as to become a new author of a work or series of works are both questions raised in Section III of *Cultures of the Curatorial* (von

[48] Watson (2016)

Bismarck et al 2012). This blurring of roles acts as a helpful backdrop to our discussion in that it allows for an artist to curate how individuals 'collide' with their work while simultaneously suggesting that a curator can directly colour how a work is encountered. An example of the artist turned curator that is particularly helpful as a springboard here for its ties to the moving image can be found in Cihat Arinç's notion of "the curatorial mode of filmmaking" (Arinç 183). He argues that some filmmakers[49] "assign priority to the set design, or the narrative organization of cinematic space, through visible, audible and intelligible objects" (184). By carefully staging what is shown to a viewer frame by frame, these filmmakers *curate* the cinematic experience to evoke particular emotional responses.

Although, in games, it is not always as simple to dictate exactly how a player behaves, the overall 'narrative organization of the virtual space' is still a matter of concern for game developers. Even 'open-world' or 'sandbox' games that tout unprecedented player freedom still have to create boundaries in which those choices may be made in order for play to occur. I believe that, like the set design or narrative organization of certain films, these virtual boundaries constitute a form of curation, a guiding of exactly how players might experience the virtual worlds that are on display. However, there are entire ranges of player experiences that can occur within even one specific game world. And some of these, speedrunning included, are a jailbreaking – a step further along in the artist-curator authorship debate whereby the visitors to these curated virtual spaces offer alternate interpretations of the games and ultimately re-curate them through their play.

It is important to note that I am not suggesting that all styles of play involve some form of curation, nor indeed would I suggest all instances of curatorial play involve *re-curating* a particular play experience. A casual playthrough of a game that follows the nodes of the plot in an appropriate order, perhaps digressing into side-quests or simple exploration of the virtual world is akin to experiencing any other curated experience in an intended way. Such 'immersive play' experiences only have the potential to become curatorial if the player shares the account of their play

[49] Particularly those working in the genre of memory-film.

experience, perhaps online in the form of a YouTube video or Twitch livestream. The act of sharing one's gameplay to the digital commons suggests intent on the part of the player to offer their interpretation of how to navigate the game - the Let's Play has become a standard format for such playthroughs. By splitting gameplay into segments and (potentially) offering commentary as the game unfolds, players who take part in this practice are simultaneously preserving and exhibiting – in other words 'curating' - a play experience, but one that does not enter into conflict with the original artist's intentions.

It is only once the act of play opposes authorial intention that I would suggest a 're-curation' might occur. When speedrunners collide against a game's implicit rules, thereby revealing the scaffolding of the explicit rules behind them, they suggest an alternate way that the game can be experienced. Like immersive play that goes unshared, this sort of play is not inherently a form of curation, it is simply deviant play. However, when coupled with the collaborative project of the speedrunning museum of accident, whereby these alternate pathways through a game are not only shared but carefully regulated and classified, speedrun play can truly be said to re-curate the range of play experiences afforded by a game.

Like Parker's expansive gameplay, I would suggest that curation (and indeed, re-curation) through play is only a facet of what is more broadly understood as emergent gameplay, or the unintended interactions with a piece of software that come to light once a game is made available to players. Beyond the fact that not all curatorial play is inherently emergent (in the sense that Let's Plays are now ubiquitous rather than 'unexpected'), the key distinction between the two concepts lies in the intentionality behind curating one's play experience for others to share in. To reiterate, then, curatorial play is that play which is intentionally preserved and organized with a view to being shared. If such play also operates according to a separate set of standards that stands opposed to the traditional mode of interaction with a game, then it can be said to re-curate a gameplay experience.

While there are certainly other examples of players or play communities that potentially re-curate games in particular ways (machinima and modding come to mind), few have drawn as much of a range of responses from the games' original

curators as speedrunning. As such, with what remains of this chapter, I will complete my treatment of the developer-player ecosystem that one finds in speedrunning by examining how game developers have reacted to their games being played in this way. This spectrum of reactions speaks not only to speedrunning as re-curation, but also serves as a looking-back on how much the speedrunning community has grown since my research began.

The Role(s) of the Developer

Although gradients may exist, from my observations, developer responses to speedrunning can generally be placed into three categories, which I call (in order from most to least common) prevention, compromise, and endorsement. In this section, I will discuss each category of response, citing relevant examples where appropriate. While each of these categories is interesting for a variety of reasons, the very existence of such a range of interactions between developers and the speedrunning community also speaks to how much the community has grown since I began my research. As such, this section serves not only as a discussion of the original curators of the pieces exhibited in the speedrunning museum of accident, but also as a concluding look at the significance of speedruns (and this thesis) for game studies.

The first and most common developer response to speedrunning is one of prevention. This refers to any instance of developers attempting to fix glitches that are used in speedruns. The clearest example of this can be found in contemporary console and PC games, particularly those released by large, 'triple-A' companies. When new games first come out and runners begin to find game-breaking glitches, it is not uncommon for an update to the software, usually referred to as a patch, to be released that fixes these exploits, forcing runners to make route changes to adjust to this new version of the game. In some cases, a community of runners may even decide to avoid updating their copies of the game at all if a particularly large glitch is removed and no suitable alternate routes can be found.

To expand upon the notion of developer prevention in relation to speedruns, I will be using the example of Nintendo's *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* (Nintendo 2002) and its HD remake (2013) for the Wii U. For although the original

Wind Waker was released before the onset of online play (and with it the downloadable update), the relatively recent overhaul of the title was put in direct conversation with the speedrunning community's style of play when it was discovered that a major glitch had not made the jump to the HD version.

The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker altered the Zelda formula by trading Hyrule's verdant fields for an imposing Great Sea. Instead of travelling by foot or by horseback, Link sailed from island to island in an effort to defeat evil. From a speedrunning perspective, these serene boating interludes, which could take up to 5 minutes, did not seem to be the optimal way to navigate the game world. Indeed, when the game was first released, even more conventional players complained that the sailing sections felt too long. As time went on a glitch was discovered that drastically shortened the trips from one plot point to the next, even cutting out entire segments of the game altogether. Known as 'super swimming', the glitch caused Link to gain infinite speed while treading water in the Great Sea. If enough speed was built up and players could control their avatar properly, then Link would be sent rocketing across the sea in a matter of seconds.

Whether Nintendo was initially aware of this glitch or not, when the announcement of *Wind Waker HD* came, it was clear that they were aware of broader complaints from their playerbase that sailing was potentially tedious (Good 2013). Along with a graphical update to the game, the HD port offered new items including the Swift Sail, which allowed players to navigate the game world much more efficiently, although still not nearly as quickly as super swimming. At this point in the narrative, details become somewhat speculative but at least this much is clear: prior to *Wind Waker HD*'s release, Nintendo toured the game at multiple Best Buy locations, at least one of which was visited by members of the speedrunning community who were curious about whether the major glitches were still present in this new version of the game. From one account of the event, a runner successfully executed the super swim glitch and actually crashed the game demo as a result (Gulyas 2013).

It is not clear whether a Nintendo representative at the event took note of the glitch, whether the multiple online accounts[50] of the event drew too much attention, or indeed whether the development team simply had not had time to patch out super swimming for the demo build of the game, but whatever the reason, when *Wind Waker HD* was released (a mere three months after the Best Buy tour) the glitch that facilitated super swimming had been patched out. As a result of this, the route through *Wind Waker HD* differed considerably from the original *Wind Waker*'s speedrun and many in the community were unhappy with the decision to remove what was perceived as a glitch so obscure that it could only matter to speedrunners from the game.

Nintendo's internal reasoning for removing the glitch has never been made public, although some motivations can be guessed. Super swimming represents a diversion of the virtual space put together by the *Wind Waker* development team. Sailing and harnessing the power of the wind to control one's navigation of the Great Sea are arguably the core mechanics that were introduced to distinguish the game from other Zelda titles. Link even has a fatigue meter associated with swimming so that players could not undertake the tedious, but sequence breaking task of swimming from island to island without a boat. In a *Wind Waker* speedrun, all of these measures to ensure a particular narrative experience are thwarted and the accident of the super swim is used to re-curate the game in a different light. As the speedrunning museum of accidents is circulated through videos and livestreams, even non-runners are exposed to the programming oversights that exist below the apparent polish of a finished, triple-A title.

For Nintendo, this likely raises at least one of two concerns:

In the first place, although runners tend to maintain a sense of respect for game makers despite finding errors in their works, the existence and dissemination of an accident like the super swimming glitch arguably carries with it an implication of a job poorly done on the part of Nintendo. It recalls something that Tanja Sihvonen speaks of in relation to developers and modding communities, namely that

[50] Beyond Gulyas' article, there were numerous forum posts on the subject including Noke0 (2013).

"the game industry fervently aims at staying in control of its business interests" by curtailing how games are played and tinkered with (Sihvonen 2011 75). Just as game companies seek to control how (if at all) their games can be modified, so too do they sometimes seek to put restraints on how play itself is undertaken. The parallel is particularly apt if one considers both speedrunning and modding as curatorial practices. Indeed, if speedrunners can be said to re-curate a game through its play experience, then I would argue that mods re-curate a game through the code itself.

Second, although perhaps inseparably, the transformation of the *Wind Waker*'s narrative into one that involves Link racing across the ocean while flailing wildly, can potentially be said to do violence to or 'ruin' the game – not, as I have shown, on the level of the narrative as guaranteed by the code, but rather on the level of the implicit rules, or the immersion players create for themselves. If this were their reasoning for patching super swimming, Nintendo would by no means be alone in this sentiment. At the time of writing, *Undertale* (Toby Fox 2015) developer, writer, composer, etc, Toby Fox has recently come forward in a since-deleted tweet stating that he does not want his game played at *SGDQ* 2016 for similar reasons[51]. The prospect of one's game being exposed to Virilio's violence of speed in a forum as large as the speedrunning museum of accidents does not necessarily appeal to game makers, triple-A or otherwise. While the exact motivations for developer prevention in response to speedruns are undoubtedly based on the specific context of the game in question, the example of the *Wind Waker HD* points to some potential tensions that underlie the developer-runner dynamic. However, not all game makers are so quick to curtail deviant play of this nature.

Compromise is a more recent development in the relation between runners and developerss because, from what I have seen while observing speedrun forums and livestreams, it occurs exclusively in the case of small, independent ('indie') game companies. It refers to a middle-ground approach to glitches and the speedrunning community whereby some exploits are left untouched. Because the

[51] Record of the tweet can still be found on the speedrunning subreddit (Bthedestryr 2016).

tricks executed by runners often require a very specific series of inputs or only function in particular locations, some developers decide that the glitch is so unlikely to be encountered by regular players that it may as well remain in the code for what it gives to the runners that engage with their title. Other examples of compromise include games that feature 'speedrun modes' that incorporate a reliable in-game timer, further incentivizing people to try and play through as fast as possible. Compromise mainly occurs with indie titles because speedrunners are a more significant proportion of the player base than in triple-A games. To better illustrate this, I will look at two brief examples – *A Hat in Time* (Gears for Breakfast Forthcoming) and *Deadcore* (5 Bits Games 2014).

A Hat in Time is a 3D adventure-platformer game that consists largely of jumping and running across various environments collecting items to advance the story. While the game was being Kickstarted in 2013, an early build was given to a well-known member of the speedrunning community, Narcissa Wright to play on her stream. Although giving an early build of one's game to popular Twitch personalities is a common practice for advertising one's game, the fact that Narcissa was a speedrunner provided some specific benefits.

First, because she would be interacting with the game in non-intuitive ways, the likelihood of Narcissa finding mistakes in the game's coding to allow for sequence breaks was high. Beyond being free advertising for the development team during a crucial period in their game's lifecycle, the decision to offer the game to a runner also gave Gears for Breakfast access to someone who was effectively a seasoned play tester. Gears For Breakfast's policy from this period into their beta release has been that any bugs discovered by speedrunners or otherwise will be fixed. In return, however, they "will not fix an exploit after release, if it has speedrunning value and it is unlikely to be reducing the experience of a regular player" (A Hat in Time Blog).

Second, by picking a prominent figure in a then-niche community, the developers of *A Hat in Time* got the attention of both Narcissa's fans and members of the speedrunning community more broadly. While the title has since been greenlit for release on Steam and has undoubtedly drawn the attention of a wider audience,

a large portion of initial interest in the game stems from Narcissa's livestream and YouTube videos about her experiences with the game. This example is also notable because, from my observations, this was one of the first games that was marketed towards speedrunners as a recognizable community.

On the other hand, 5 Bits Games' 2014 first-person shooter/platformer *Deadcore* also sought out people who enjoyed speedrunning, but not in the same way. Instead, they equipped their game with a 'Speedrun Mode' that had a reliable in-game timer and cultivated a leaderboard that tracked the best completion times for each level. As such, runners soon came across the title and began to experiment with it and optimal routes through each level were found. In time, glitches were discovered that drastically shortened the game's overall completion time and trivialized certain levels in ways that the developers had not anticipated. One glitch in particular, called wall-blast, would rocket players up any surface, launching them to extreme heights, and in some cases, the end of the level. This upset some players who may have had record times without identifying as speedrunners who saw their near-perfect, glitchless times on the leaderboard being completely overshadowed by wall-blasters. Rather than patching these glitches outright, the *Deadcore* development team opted to compromise. There are now two versions of the game that exist with two separate leaderboards – a bug-free version for the average player and a deliberately outdated 'speedrun' version that keeps these major glitches intact. By not defaulting to the more common tactic of prevention, 5 Bits Games was able to satisfy both factions of its player base.

From these examples, one can see several issues that exist even when developers and runners seek to collaborate in some way. There is a clear sense of there being 'good' and 'bad' glitches, that varies from title to title. In general, ease of execution, coupled with a major sequence break means that even indie developers will want to patch out the bug. As Gears for Breakfast explains in a blog post about the *Hat in Time* beta:

> If you find some wicked way of getting into the sky or under the ground and it requires a crazy combination of button presses, then we have no reason to remove that alternative experience from the game.
>
> But if there is a chance it might happen on accident to a regular player, then we will have no choice but to patch it. I hope this is understandable.
>
> (Ibid)

As speedrunning grows in popularity, some developers are now slowly beginning to think of them as 'alternate experiences' as I have been considering them, rather than insults or implications of a job poorly done. *Deadcore*'s solution to pleasing players on both sides of the wall-blast debate is a rare case of such glitches not being patched outright. I would argue that this is due mostly to the development team's apparent interest in speedruns as a form of gameplay as well as the relatively large proportion of speedrunners that make up their playerbase.

Both *A Hat in Time* and *Deadcore* are definitely what one would call 'indie' games – they are made by groups of people that are not directly affiliated with triple-A studios.[52] Their budgets and their audiences are smaller than a game like *Wind Waker HD*. In the above examples, both development teams used this to their advantage and were able to directly engage with speedrunners in a way that was mutually beneficial: speedrunners found two new titles to engage with and enjoy without fear of their practice being curtailed by patch notes while the developers found an audience to play and share their game. Perhaps the reason that developers have only recently begun to compromise with runners is because it has only been in the last few years that the community has grown to a point that it is a recognizable audience. Speedrunning has come to occupy a significant enough place in game culture that independent game developers wish to cater to them on some level. However, when a developer's efforts to harness the speedrunning demographic are too pronounced, the result is not nearly as positive for either game player or game maker.

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[52] Although *Deadcore* was published by Bandai Namco, a triple-A company, this does not generally revoke a developer's 'indie' status within game culture.

Endorsement refers to a relatively uncommon developer response to speedrunning whereby individuals strive to design a game with the community explicitly in mind. As is the case with compromise, endorsement only occurs at a very grassroots level, with individuals usually posting on the speedrun subreddit or other community forums to pitch their game idea and ask for input or testers. This type of developer response is quite uncommon for two reasons – on the one hand, designing a game with such a niche demographic in mind means that games in this category seldom gain much of an audience and, on the other, in almost all cases these games do not actually generate interest from speedrunners and so do not get made. As a result, there are not any particularly poignant examples of endorsement to present here. Still, it is prudent to discuss such attempts more generally as a means to recall what this chapter, and indeed this thesis, has done to explain exactly why designing a game specifically for speedrunning has yet to be done well.

One of the questions that I asked my interviewees was 'What might a game designed with the speedrunning community in mind look like?' From my time spent on speedrun forums, I was familiar with the infamous posts from individuals making speedrunning games that almost never saw the light of day, though this was not necessarily what I was after in the question. Rather, I was interested in what constituted speedrun-friendly gameplay mechanics in games that runners enjoyed. Still, my wording suggested that I was interested in the former rather than the latter and based on the responses I received in my first few interviews, I eventually found myself adding in a disclaimer that I was not suggesting that speedrunning games were an idea worth entertaining. As one runner put it:

> I see a lot of people that post posts like that on /r/speedrun and stuff like that. I'd say, if someone would want to design a game with speedrunning in mind, I would say add movement options – so not just one set speed for your character - but except for that, just make your game. If you put intended glitches into the game it takes away from the magic of speedrunning…

All participants responded similarly, perhaps adding skippable cutscenes, the ability to quickly reset or retry, and a reliable in-game timer to the list of desirable

gameplay features.[53] I selected this quote in particular for the participant's (perhaps unintentional) oxymoron of the intended glitch as a means of encapsulating exactly why a game made for speedrunning is almost always a failure.

From what I have said about the speedrunning museum of accidents, if speedruns are the exhibit then glitches are the accidents – the unintended, undiscovered seams in the code that allow one to navigate a virtual world in unexpected ways. It would be impossible to design a game with intended glitches because glitches, by definition, are never intentional. A developer may intentionally leave a glitch unpatched as was shown in the examples of developer compromise, but to code in a deliberate error is something that arguably cannot be done. If speedrunning, by its nature, is a re-curation of a developer-intended play experience, then any attempt on the part of a developer to anticipate and design the re-curation of a game that never existed would be unable to escape from being an original play experience that could then inevitably be altered by runners.

In other words, even if, one day, someone made a game that deliberately has glitches left in for speedrunners to use, runners would still undoubtedly play it in a manner that differs from the developer-intended path. Until someone codes a gamification of the meta-game of routing a speedrun, however, this claim cannot be verified. Instead, I must be satisfied with the statement that efforts to design a game to be speedrun have, to this point been poorly executed and poorly received. I do not believe that these attempts at game design are damaging to the community or the practice, however. The very notion that games are being designed with speedrunners in mind at all is quite the positive thought with which to conclude the arguments of this chapter, and indeed, this thesis.

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[53] I should note that there are games like this that exist – *Super Meat Boy* (Team Meat 2010) comes to mind, but I believe that such examples only exist with reference to finesse speedruns rather than deconstructing speedruns. As such, it is potentially more accurate to say that these games are designed to be time-trial friendly, rather than speedrun friendly. A game does not become a 'good speedrun' simply through having these gameplay mechanics, nor are most developers who make such games likely to have made them 'with speedrunning in mind'.

Conclusions – Enclosure and the Velvet Rope

We have now seen that speedrunning is a museum of accidents, a re-curation of games through how they are played. The notions of re-curation and curatorial play have been explored with reference to museology and game studies and it has ultimately been shown that, while not all play is curatorial (or re-curatorial), the specific character of the speedrunning museum of accidents as a collaborative project to exhibit the accident distinguishes it from other forms of play by fitting into this category. This, in turn, has been used to account for the various ways that game developers have responded to their games being speedrun. Some have found the re-curations through speedrun play to be too divergent from their vision of the game's narrative and have therefore patched out glitches while others have taken a more measured approach to whether or not a glitch ought to be removed. Others still have been so inspired by the play exhibited in speedruns that they have sought to design games specifically with the community and play practice in mind, although these efforts have thusfar been failures due to the inability to program 'intentional accidents'. All the same, the range of responses that I have discussed are firm indicators not only of some of the tensions between game makers and game players, but also the unprecedented significance speedrunning has come to hold for games and game culture.

In *Players Unleashed!* Sihvonen discusses, among other things, how, in an attempt to incentivize the release of mods for *The Sims* (Maxis 2000) while still maintaining some creative control over what gets released, the developers created "The Sims Carnival […] a modding toolkit that is extended to promote creativity" (Sihvonen 74). Maxis realized that a community of players that interact with and re-curate their software is a demographic worth befriending and rather than antagonizing. And while there is certainly a discussion to be had about enclosure in relation to such practices (for indeed, the mods that are released are now entirely on Maxis' terms), for our purposes it can be said that it is arguably better for both parties if the developers of *The Sims* stimulate the modding community rather than issuing them cease and desist orders.

In the same vein, as I have been writing this thesis, even triple-A companies have begun to acknowledge speedruns and the speedrunning community. Though I mentioned it briefly in the previous chapter, The Nintendo World Championship is here relevant once more. As a throwback to the early days of competitive gaming contests and a celebration of the original event's 25th anniversary, it was certainly a milestone event for Nintendo and their entire playerbase. Still, few, I imagine, felt the momentousness of the occasion more than speedrunners. For indeed, six of the eight invited players were high-profile members of the community and several of the rounds of competition involved completing parts of various Nintendo titles as quickly as possible. Whether this is an indication of Nintendo warming to the idea of their games being speedrun or whether it was simply a move to maximize viewership for their event remains unclear and only in time will we know whether the community will come to view such public recognition from major developers as a boon or a hindrance. For the present, however, our research on the subject is concluded.

The purpose of this chapter has been to move beyond the work laid out in chapters 1 and 2. With speedrunning as both a community and practice properly explained and situated in extant theoretical works of sociology, media studies, and game studies, this chapter has sought to take my collected observations and arguments and bring them one step further. Still, the project of the speedrunning museum of accidents is but one major way that speedrunning is relevant for media and game scholars who wish to do further work on this subject. While the work of this thesis is nearly over, there remains much research to be done and it will be my final task to both recap what has been said and then point to what has not.

Conclusion

From the outset, this thesis was a project to fill a perceived lack in extant scholarship. While some had written on speedrunning in the past, these accounts were generally outdated or only used speedrunning as an example for a larger point on play, rules, and spectatorship. Here, I have endeavored to provide as complete a picture of speedrunning as both community and practice as possible and have in turn demonstrated that my findings can be turned to the broader purpose of advancing game and media studies.

I began by relaying and analyzing the results of my fieldwork at Summer Games Done Quick 2015 as well as the hours of informal and eventually more focused participant observation. From the questions I posed my fifteen interviewees, I was able to refine my initial observations of the community and its operations and present a holistic view of speedrunners as a collaborative and still-growing community. I traced a spectator's history of speedruns, from the lonesome practice of uploading videos to SpeedDemosArchive to the contemporary moment when Twitch has become the dominant platform for disseminating speedruns. I have particularly noted the qualities of Twitch that perpetuate Lave and Wenger's community of practice cycle within the speedrunning community at an unprecedentedly fast pace and pointed to potential growing pains that speedrunners may face as the community continues to expand.

Next, I moved into a theoretical treatment of speedrunning as a practice. Beginning with theories of natural space and speed from Michel De Certeau and Paul Virilio respectively, I presented space as something that is fundamentally tied to narrative and speed as something that holds within it the potential for violence and transgression. I then employed the work of Michael Nitsche to provide a more pointed grounding in theories of virtual space as a consciously constructed environment designed to evoke a particular set of experiences. Unable to locate any extant work on virtual speed, I then presented my own thoughts on the subject, suggesting that, based on how the thrill of acceleration is so ubiquitous in certain

games while in others players are directly rewarded for faster completion times, speed is generally something that players are intended to covet.

These analyses done, I used the fact that both virtual space and virtual speed are, in the simplest terms, part of a game's rules, to segue into a discussion of how speedrunning interacts with a game as a rule system. Through the use of my tailor-made taxonomy of implicit and explicit rules, I demonstrated that, despite the numerous claims from gamers to the contrary, speedrunning cannot be considered cheating because it never breaks a game's explicit rules. From there, I cemented this claim by discussing the perpetually-emergent, but staunchly enforced rules that speedrunners use to govern themselves, a practice that I argued likened the recording and archiving of speedrunning videos to a form of media archaeology or curation.

On the note of curation, my final chapter reintroduced Virilio's essay on the museum of accidents. By close reading the essay with virtual worlds as a lens, it was shown that for every video game (substance), there necessarily exist glitches or programming oversights (accidents) and that by documenting these in speedruns, the very practice of speedrunning is a museum of accidents, in other words, a re-curating of a game according to its explicit rules. To support this claim, it was then necessary to explain exactly what was meant by re-curation, or, more accurately, to defend the notion that play could be a form of curation at all.

This was accomplished by suggesting that anyone who plays a video game with a view to sharing their play with others 'curates' a particular experience of the software. Games as a medium demand interaction and game developers prepare for a set of possible player experiences such that even the most linear games can be completed with any number of variances both minor and major. As such, even a player who shares footage of their playthrough of a game on YouTube or Twitch without trespassing against the game's implicit rules still curates their own particular play experience. Having established that play can be curation, it was then a simple movement to suggest that play can be re-curation. When an individual engages with a game in such a way as to divorce it from its original (curated) narrative context, be it with mods or through the use of glitches, for example, and

then shares this style of play with others they can be said to re-curate a game according to a separate set of standards.

With speedrunning as museum of accidents and (re)curatorial play fully fleshed out, I concluded by using these notions as a frame for discussing the range of responses that game developers have had to their games being speedrun. Three major types of reactions were presented – prevention, compromise, and endorsement and case studies were provided to present as full an understanding of each as possible.

Prevention, or the practice of removing glitches through patches or across various versions of a game, was exemplified in Nintendo's curtailing of super swimming in *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD*.

Compromise, or the choice to keep certain glitches intact for the sake of speedrunners was discussed in relation to two indie titles – *A Hat in Time* and *Deadcore*.

Finally, although there were no concrete examples that I could locate, the folly of endorsement, or attempting to design a game specifically for speedrunners was discussed with reference to everything that I had presented about the nature of speedrunning as both community and practice thusfar. The paradox of the 'intentional glitch' was presented as proof that designing a game exclusively for speedrunning is likely an impossible prospect. Ultimately, the fact that such attempts exist at all was presented as proof of speedrunning's significant and still-growing significance for games and game culture.

Given that I have spent the past two years researching and writing this thesis, it seems daunting now, in the final pages, to evaluate the ways that this work does something as grand as 'contributing to game and media studies at large', but I do not wish to suggest that this thesis has accomplished nothing! What strikes me immediately is that, as far as I can tell, my thesis represents the first ethnographic study of the speedrunning community that has been done. As such, the first-hand accounts of the community collected here are of value for anyone who wishes to do further work with speedrunners or indeed any other niche online community, particularly those are part of game culture. Beyond this, however, my first chapter

also presents some initial observations on the nature of Twitch as a platform, which, at the time of writing, is still something that extant scholarship is only beginning to understand. In a more specific sense, the parallels drawn between speedrunning and eSports are good fodder for anyone who wishes to do work with either of these communities or broader notions of instrumental play and metagaming.

My second chapter pushes academic notions of virtual space further. As was indicated, Nitsche's work on virtual space is very helpful, but only insofar as one examines a game with reference to its implicit rules. Furthermore, the treatment of virtual speed I offer in that chapter, however introductory, is a new contribution to scholarship. Still, there is far more room for work to be done on virtual speed than what I have laid out here and a more pointed analysis of speed in games and how playing games at different speeds may reveal political assumptions made by a game's developers is something that I may consider doing in the future. Though I first presented implicit and explicit rules elsewhere, I still believe that their application here serves as a good indication of the potential uses such rule taxonomy might have for future work on rules in games. And chapter 2's brief return to an analysis of the inner-workings and rule structures of the speedrunning community is also something that could be expanded upon in a broader treatment of communities and their rules.

Finally, chapter 3 establishes the link between speedrunning and Virilio's museum of accidents. This connection is, in my mind, one of the most important rhetorical and theoretical movements I make in this thesis for two reasons. First, Virilio's assertion that substance is inexorably tied to accident is of value for any game scholar doing work on glitches and other hardware or software quirks, or indeed any media scholar who wishes to investigate a given medium and the ways that it can break down. Virilio's science of the anti-musuem is, at its simplest, a helpful reminder to anyone investigating particular technologies that these devices carry with them the potential to malfunction. One of the important questions that Virilio presents, and that many users attempt to answer, is how these malfunctions can be adapted to new purposes.

Second, my particular invocation of the museum of accidents has allowed for me to tread into the murky waters of what seems to me to be a new concept – (re)curatorial play. Given that games are designed experiences that draw on multiple sources external to themselves, be they film, fine art, history, or indeed other games, in order to evoke a particular set of experiences, it does not strike me as a stretch to suggest that a game is a curation of sorts. From there, the specific context of Virilio's museum, or anti-museum presented me with an opportunity to suggest that play itself can enter into conversation with this designed (curated) experience and substitute one of its own.

Play has historically been viewed as something performative (Sutton-Smith), and with the emergence of video hosting sites like YouTube or livestreaming sites like Twitch, this conversation has only become more prevalent. With the commodification of play through subscriber and advertising revenue allowing for the emergence of the professional gamer (whether Let's Player or e-athlete), questions of who owns play and whether the player becomes a sort of author (Poremba 2003) are more relevant than ever. In the midst of this discussion, my notion of curatorial play presents an alternative framing of the problem.

By repurposing the debates around artists (or filmmakers) as curators and curators as artists for the medium of the video game, I offer a way of considering speedrunning, and indeed many other player communities such as modders, as an intentional gathering of individuals who do critical work on games through playing them. Whether (re)curatorial play or indeed play as critique is ultimately a concept that can stand will only be determined in time, but my specific framing of speedrunning as a museum of accidents and the discussion of play as curation that comes with it are important contributions to the conversation. Were I to push the notion of curatorial play further, then literature on play as critique would be where I begin. But, for now at least, I have said my piece.

In any text of this length, it is always remarkable how quickly certain subjects exclude themselves from the discussion for one reason or another. While the bulk of this concluding section has served to recapitulate and highlight the specific contributions my work has made to game and media studies at large, there are still

many things that this thesis lacks. As I admitted from the outset, the fact that this was an initiatory investigation into the speedrunning community, coupled with the results of my solicitations for participants meant that I did not feel capable of discussing how issues of identity such as race or gender play into the speedrunning community. Furthermore, I did not devote as much space as others may have to discussing the choice of some runners to identify more with the speedrunning community at large than any one sub-community or vice versa. These are both areas that ought to be investigated by someone who seeks to deepen the academic understanding of the speedrunning community presented here.

Another large omission for the sake of limiting my analytical scope was the Tool-Assisted Speedrun (TAS) community, a group of players that use computer software to plumb games at the level of their code with a view to finding even faster ways to travel through them from beginning to end. In many cases, TASes involve button inputs that are impossible for human hands (pressing a button 30 times in a second, holding left and right on a joystick simultaneously), but in some cases there is a great deal of knowledge circulation between TASers and speedrunners. Some of the community members who do not speedrun, instead opting to glitch hunt would quite likely identify as TASers. Connected to this discussion is the broader idea of how speedrunning relates to hacker practices or Galloway and Thacker's (2007) notion of the 'exploit'. Both of these subjects are an important facet of what I think makes speedrunning of interest for academic investigation, but my own theoretical background made me loath to discuss anything pertaining too closely to code and software.

I could go on. There are, of course, numerous other subjects that one could consider in an academic investigation of speedruns, from aesthetics to studies of time. It is my hope, however, that what I did choose to focus on here will be of use to future game and media scholars, be they are working directly with speedrunning or whether they simply have an intellectual curiosity for this small group of players that thrive on going fast.

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Appendix 1 – Sample Questionnaire from SGDQ 2015 Interviews

Consent

Do you freely agree to the terms and conditions indicated in the consent form provided to you by Rainforest Scully-Blaker alongside this interview?

Background

1. What is your name (online handle is okay) and age?

2. What game(s) do you currently speedrun?

3. How long have you been playing videogames?

4. How long have you been speedrunning?

5. How did you first get into speedrunning?

6. Is this your first GDQ event? If not, what was?

Your Speedrunning Practice

7. Are there any games that you enjoy playing but not speedrunning or vice versa?

8. Has speedrunning changed your relationship with gaming or games?

9. What do you usually look for when deciding what game to speedrun next?

10. What do you usually try to avoid?

11. A quick look at SpeedDemosArchive.com shows that speedruns can last anywhere from under one second to over twelve hours. How long does a run in your game traditionally last and how do you feel that affects your motivation to do repeated runs of a game?

12. How often would you say that you reset? How far into the game does this usually happen? How do these things affect your speedrunning?

13. It is not uncommon to see speedrunning world records set and beaten within a few days of each other. Does this have an effect on your motivation as a speedrunner?

14. As speedrunning becomes more popular and more people tune in to the livestreams, how does speedrunning, as more and more of a 'spectator sport', alter your experience as a runner and a streamer?

15. Have you ever found any in games that you run? How were they found (by chance, through exploring the game code, etc)? How were most glitches found in the game(s) you run?

16. Are you playing something at this GDQ?

17. If so, what does it mean to you to be playing a game on-stream at a GDQ event?

18. What do you enjoy about GDQs? What don't you enjoy?

Your Sense of the Speedrunning Community

19. In the last few years, speedrunning has become much more popular, with Awesome Games Done Quick getting higher viewer counts and more money raised for charity each year. Why do you think that speedrunning is becoming more popular?

20. Do you see the community's growth as a positive or a negative? (Saying 'neither' is an acceptable answer)

21. As the speedrunning community grows, in what ways do you see it as similar to other gaming communities? In what ways is it unique? If you consider yourself a member of another gaming community (eg, FGC), feel free to make any direct comparisons you think are important.

22. Why do you think that particular games are more popular to run than others?

23. Why do you think that particular streamers are more popular than others?

24. Do you find yourself identifying more with the speedrunning community as a whole, or the community of runners around your game(s)? (Again, neither is an acceptable answer)

25. What does it mean to you to be a member of the speedrunning community (or sub-community)?

26. What do you feel your place is within the community (or sub-community)? Do you perceive any form of 'hierarchy'?

27. In your experience, what are some of the best and worst things that come from being a member of the speedrunning community?

Your Sense of Speedrunning as a Practice

28. Elements of design in certain games have been built around a player-created metagame (ex. Fighting games). Do you think that speedrunning has informed game design in similar ways? If yes, how? If no, then why not?

29. What might a game designed with the speedrunning community in mind look like?

30. Finally, in any questionnaire like this it is always very hard to cover everything about a given area of research. As a member of the speedrunning community, what other question(s) do you think that I should have asked, in order to have a better understanding of speedrunners and speedrunning? Please provide an answer to your question as well, if possible.