

# The Transformative Power of Speedrun

## Deconstruction and Recodification of *Pokémon* Games' Communicative Structures

### Introduction

This chapter proposes to study the video game practice of speedrun, which consists of going through a game from beginning to end as fast as possible and documenting the performance through a video recording. Specifically, I focus on speedruns of *Pokémon* games, in order to determine how this form of “transformative play”<sup>1</sup> (Salen and Zimmerman 2004, 41) reinvents a given fictional universe and how it alters the messages of the works it uses.

To do this, I will use the perspective of rhetoric and try to formalize what the “rhetorical figures” of speedrun can be. According to Bonhomme, figures are defined by the “salience” effects they produce in a particular discursive context: “figurative constructions manifest themselves through markings that detach them from their discursive framework”<sup>2</sup> (Bonhomme 2014, 31). In addition, far from being mere ornaments, figures perform different communication functions (expressiveness, performance, meta-communication, etc.). Based on this definition, I will try to identify the “salient” features in the speedrun videos and the communicative functions that they exercise, focusing in particular on the relationship they build between the original games and the derivative works produced by speedrunners. What is left of *Pokémon* games in speedruns? How does the speedrun work relate to its original support? How does speedrun redefine the boundaries of games and play?

---

1 “Transformative play is a special case of play that occurs when the free movement of play alters the more rigid structure in which it takes shape” (Salen and Zimmerman 2004, 305).

2 My translation of: « les constructions figurales se manifestent par des marquages qui les détachent de leur cadre de discours ».

Following an introduction that resituates the particularities of speedrun as a playful and creative practice, I will detail the rhetorical figures observed in two speedrun videos of *Pokémon* games. These form two main categories, defined by their functions: the figures of deconstruction (resemantization, anti-model play, exposure, deconstruction of auctoriality) and the figures of formalization (analogy, codification, over-compliance). Through the examination of these figures, we will see that speedrun invites us to reconsider the boundaries of the concepts of *game* and of *work*. On the one hand, the rules formalized by speedrunners and the different media they mobilize in their practice have the effect of extending the playing field beyond the strict boundaries of the game and of constructing what I call a “game apparatus”. On the other hand, speedrun is particular in that it is both an athletic and a creative performance. However, the speedrun “product” is not limited to the video recording (which serves as a trace and proof of the performance): it also creates an abstract (and collective) score or script, of which each performance is an actualization and a renegotiation.

### **Deconstruction of the game’s structure and codification of a new game apparatus**

Despite its status as a gaming practice, speedrun is a form of performance that does not quite “play the game”. It differs from other competitive uses of video games (such as e-sport or scoring), which are executed within the system of rules provided by the game. Unlike these, speedrun regularly moves away from the “model play”<sup>3</sup> constructed by the ludic work: speedrunners not only exploit games that offer speed challenges (such as racing games), but apply their activity to all types of video game titles. In this context, the speed objective takes precedence over other aspects of the gameplay: it is no longer a question of unlocking the entire content, of getting a high score, or beating an adversary, but rather of going through the game as quick as possible. Stops, detours, or side quests are forbidden in these performances, so the videos do not reflect

---

3 The notion of “model play” is an adaptation of the concept of “model reader” developed by Eco (1985). It designates a representation produced by the text of the competence that is expected of the reader; a representation of the success conditions “that need to be satisfied for a text’s potential content to be fully actualized” (my translation of: « qui doivent être satisfaites pour qu’un texte soit pleinement actualisé dans son contenu potentiel », Eco 1985, 77).

the difficulties of the title, its rhythm, the hesitations or frustrations sometimes caused by the level design, but only a generalized sense of urgency.

Moreover, speedrunners are not obliged to submit to the “implicit rules” of games (that is, according to Parker: “rules which are suggested or indicated by the game, and are understood by the players, but are not made rigid by code”, Parker 2008, 3–4). In order to optimize their trajectory, they can exploit glitches and programming flaws (indeed, this is an important dimension of the practice).

Because of the shifts it operates, speedrun is a form of transformative play (Salen and Zimmerman 2004, 41) or ludic *détournement* (Barnabé 2017<sup>4</sup>), since it is characterized by a “double movement of recuperation and transformation”<sup>5</sup> of a pre-existing work (Dupont and Trudel 2012, 5). The transformations that this practice conducts in games can be qualified as deconstructive: it deconstructs the model play of the original title; its complexity; its meanings and value system; and its coherence.

However, speedrun is also based on the formalization of a new system of rules, which it superimposes on the original title. Indeed, although speedrunners do not modify the code of the game they are playing with (because such an act would be considered cheating), their activity does not leave the game apparatus – in the broad sense of the term – completely intact: they add various “extensions” to the game-object.

In the first place, the game device is extended by the addition of a video recording as a new component. Capturing the performance becomes an integral part of the speedrun’s “rules”, since it serves as evidence to establish the record. The video acts simultaneously as a testimony, a demonstration, documentation, and a standard meter for speedrunners. As proof, it is usually the duration of the video that is favoured by the community for reasons of fairness, even when players tackle games that have an internal timer (see the website *SpeedRunsLive*<sup>6</sup> for an illustration).

In other words, speedrun is a gaming practice oriented towards the creation of a product, namely, a video. Performance is defined not only by the record it sets, but also by the path that led to it:

---

4 This chapter is adapted from my Ph.D. dissertation dedicated to video game *détournement* and entitled “Rhetoric of Video Game *détournement*: The Case of *Pokémon*” (“Rhétorique du *détournement* vidéoludique. Le cas de *Pokémon*”).

5 My translation of: « double mouvement de reprise et de transformation ».

6 *SpeedRunsLive*. “Frequently Asked Questions”. <https://www.speedrunslive.com/faq/>, accessed on 19 December 2020.

In order to appreciate the full significance of the practice, it is essential to understand that unlike online leaderboards or Coin-Op cabinet high scores that simply record the outcome of the achievement which disappears into the ether to be replaced only by three initials and the score, speedrunning does not only concern itself with the end result. The document of the journey is a vital element of the speedrunning endeavor. While the final time is of undoubted importance, and competitions abound, speedruns are captured on video and distributed in their entirety either on DVD or more usually as downloads or streaming video on the Web [...]. As such, where *Twin Galaxies* protects the strategies of its champions, the culture of speedrunning is oriented around the public exhibition of these performances in their entirety (Newman 2008, 132).

The integration of tools for capturing and broadcasting videos within the gaming experience therefore superimposes an external framework on the game device. In doing so, it extends and restructures the support of the playing activity – support that is no longer limited to the boundaries of the game-object, but that encompasses different media. Nevertheless, this transformation alone does not yet really distinguish speedrun from other emergent practices, such as *Let's Play*.

To this first “extension” of the game, speedrun adds a second one: the implementation of new objectives (speed and other constraints) and new rules. Whereas scoring in arcade games, confrontations in competitive games, or “time attack” in racing games, follow the goals defined by the game itself, speedrun overwrites its own imperatives onto titles that do not necessarily value them at the outset. The openings present in game systems, the indecision they contain, the “play” in their mechanisms, form many grips for speedrunners, who take advantage of them to implement rules of their own making. As such, their activity is both a gaming performance and an act of (meta) game design, since the run implements a system of rules different from the original game.

Nevertheless, the creators of speedrun videos do not lose their status as players (unlike modders or hackers, for example, who explicitly swap their position as players for that of authors, since they modify the game software without using it, Parker 2008, 3). Speedrun, in other words, is a case of “expansive gameplay”, as defined by Parker (2008): performers make additional rules manifest by playing, but do so within the framework of the game as it exists. It is here that the dividing line between speedrun and modding is drawn: while modders create new rules by writing them into the code, thus making them “fixed rules” that the future player cannot refuse (*Ibid.*, 3), the self-imposed constraints of speedrunners are purely social; they are not made rigid in the code.

However, this superimposition of several systems of rules is not enough to differentiate speedrun from a simple subjective gaming practice, since playing

always presupposes some negotiation of the rules: “playing with the rules is inherent to many forms of play” (Frissen, Lammes, De Lange, De Mul and Raessens 2015, 20). What makes speedrun different is that the “extensions” it applies to games are not individual and variable interpretations, but rather are established as collective norms. Speedrunners take great care when codifying their activity: each site precisely defines the conditions to be met in order to submit a video, as well as the steps of the evaluation process it will go through.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, these regulations are the subject of constant discussion within the community, through arguments that are sometimes very detailed and that can lead to changes in the definition of the practice (*Speed Demos Archive*, for instance, devotes a page to the inventory of changes in the rules of the site over time<sup>8</sup>). In fact, the members of *Quake done Quick* (a founding community in the field) expressly affirm this collective dimension of the practice at the top of their regulation page: “here at QdQ, we attempt to draw a clear line between altering your *Quake* configurations to suit your style, and altering it to play a different game altogether.”<sup>9</sup> Although speedrun involves deconstructing or twisting the game system, performers agree to carry out these transformations according to common guidelines.

In short, speedrunners are indeed playing, but they are playing a different game than the one they are using as a support. Or rather: speedrunners are playing the same game, but it is transported in another *apparatus* – a term designating the transmedia set of works, objects, and structures that serve as a support for the playing activity (games, websites, videos, streaming platforms, etc.). The game-object, in the strict sense, is not transformed by the performative act of speedrun, but the *apparatus* in which this game is embedded is modified: external rules and structures are aggregated to it, which are not rigidified by the code, but which exist for the performers.

As such, speedrun is as much a competitive gaming practice as it is a creative act, close to a form of (meta and collective) game design, since each performer manifests new constraints through play (and through the video that embodies it). The resulting work is profoundly “palimpsestuous” (Genette 1982, 557), because the transformations operated through the performance do not

---

7 For an illustration, see *SDA Knowledge Base* “Rules”. <https://kb.speeddemosarchive.com/Rules>, accessed on 19 December 2020.

8 *SDA Knowledge Base*. “Rule history”. [https://kb.speeddemosarchive.com/Rule\\_history](https://kb.speeddemosarchive.com/Rule_history), accessed on 19 December 2020.

9 *Quake done Quick*. “*Quake Done Quick*: allowable console changes”. <http://quake.speeddemosarchive.com/quake/qdq/articles/console.html>, accessed on 19 December 2020.

make the initial game disappear: on the contrary, the video allows us to read this original (its model play, its level design, its fictional universe) through the deforming filter of speedrun.

### Several degrees of deviation: Presentation of the two videos

Contrary to what the above introductory remarks may suggest, it should be noted that speedrun is not a uniform genre of performances: there is a great diversity of sub-categories, defined according to the different constraints that players self-impose. These distinctions are summarized by Scully-Blaker (2014) in an opposition between two major categories: “finesse runs” and “deconstructive runs”. The first designates efficient courses “in which the narrative architecture of the gamespace is largely left intact,” while the second are performances employing glitches in order to pass most of the game and abruptly reconfigure its structure.

To account for this variety, the rest of this paper will analyse two videos, each belonging to one of these categories but both dealing with the *Pokémon* licence: a glitchless run broadcast live (representative of the “finesse runs”) and a pre-recorded video with a heavy use of glitches (as a case of “deconstructive run”). Through their analysis, I will show that, beyond their formal differences, these two performances produce a set of similar figures, symptomatic of the double movement of deconstruction and codification peculiar to speedrun and definitive of its rhetoric. This analysis will also show the extent to which and by what means speedrun reconfigures the meanings of games – in this case, that of *Pokémon*. For the sake of clarity, before exposing the figures that emerge from these two works, I will first describe their development and main specificities.

#### *Pokémon Snap 100% finished in 23:40 minutes: Speedrun as live performance*

The first video is a speedrun of the Japanese version of the Nintendo 64 game *Pokémon Snap*, which was realized in a live-stream by the speedrunner Drogie.<sup>10</sup> The video holds<sup>11</sup> the third place in the world record for the “100%”

---

10 *Speedrun.com*. “Pokémon Snap – 100% – N64 in 23m 40s by Drogie”. <http://www.speedrun.com/run/wzpk02vy>, accessed on 19 December 2020.

11 As of 10 December 2020.



**Figure 1.** Speedrun of *Pokémon Snap* (all rights reserved).

category on the website *Speedrun.com*; it was chosen for its formal interest and, in particular, because it shows the speedrunner in the video’s frame.

*Pokémon Snap* is an unusual form of first-person rail shooter, where players navigate through different levels guided by a vehicle they do not control. They must take pictures of the Pokémon they encounter, knowing that a well-framed photo, or one that shows the creature in an interesting pose, will earn them more points. The selected speedrun has the particularity of finishing (in 23:40 minutes) the title “at 100%,” that is by taking a photo of all the (63) Pokémon that can be chanced upon. Since the game is a rail shooter, speed cannot be optimized by the avatar’s movements in the levels (over which the player has no control), but only by the efficiency of the camera’s movements and by the elaboration, beforehand, of a trajectory that unlocks all of the game’s options as quickly as possible (some Pokémon can only be photographed using objects that must be unlocked by earning enough points).

The performance was broadcast live on Twitch.tv – although it is now available on YouTube. This mode of production leaves its mark on the video, notably through the presence of a frame displaying not only a timer and a comparative table (which shows, for each stage of the speedrun, the time to be beaten in order to set a world record), but also a video capture of the speedrunner playing, and a reproduction of his joystick (see [Figure 1](#)).

*Pokémon Green finished in less than five minutes: A radical deconstruction*

The second video is a run of *Pokémon Green*, which is completed in just over four minutes using important glitches, so that the game's internal timer only counts 00:03 seconds. The performance is published on *Speed Demos Archive*, which – this time – takes into account the record displayed by the internal timer.<sup>12</sup>

The use of “uber-large-skip glitches” takes this speedrun far away from the *Pokémon Snap* video presented above. The beginning of the video is relatively respectful of *Pokémon Green*'s model play: the avatar meets Professor Oak, who gives him his first Pokémon; he then confronts his rival (and loses the fight), then travels to the game's second village, where he receives a package for Professor Oak. In order to continue the adventure, the player is then expected to return to the protagonist's home village to deliver the package.

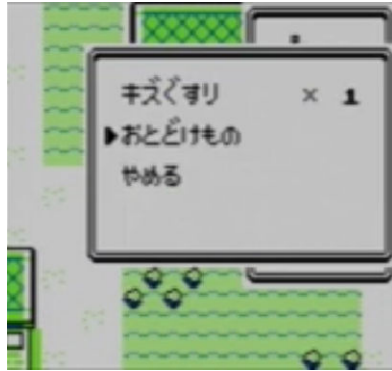
During this first phase of the performance, the video remains readable as a gameplay capture: the movements and choices made by the player are consistent with the coherence of *Pokémon Green*. A few salient features are certainly noticeable: for example, at the beginning of the game, the speedrunner renames the protagonist and his rival with a single Japanese letter (the first one in the syllabary: ア, “A”) in order to save time later in the display of the dialogues. This choice is salient from a semantic point of view, since it is not really a character's name and does not even differentiate between the two rivals. Likewise, the fluidity of the avatar's movements (who always opts for the optimal trajectory to get from one place to another) and the absence of pause or hesitation also present a strong visual discrepancy: they produce an effect of automatism, which contradicts the contingency proper to the playing activity (Malaby 2007, 106) and rather recalls the regulated nature of choreography. Lastly, the speed at which the player scrolls through the dialogues denies any possibility of reading them.

Nevertheless, it is especially in the last minute (from 03:30 onwards) that the video concentrates the most numerous rhetorical figures. The speedrunner exploits a glitch that is specific to the early Japanese versions of *Pokémon*, known as the *Dokokashira Door Glitch*. It is based on the game's functionality, which allows a player to change the location of items in the inventory and the order of the Pokémon in the player's team. A programming error makes it possible to select an item in the inventory, to exit the menu, and then, during the next Pokémon battle that is triggered, to exchange that item with a creature

---

12 *Speed Demos Archive*. “Pokémon Green”. <http://speeddemosarchive.com/PokemonGreen.html>, accessed on 19 December 2020.





**Figure 2.** The *Dokokashira Door Glitch* involves exchanging an item from the inventory for one of the team’s Pokémon, thus disrupting the functioning of the game software (all rights reserved).

in the player’s team. This forces the game to switch the only Pokémon the player owns for a non-existent second creature, effectively moving the menu marker indicating the end of the list of Pokémon carried by the avatar. These manipulations disrupt the software and, in short,<sup>13</sup> allow a player to change the destination of the game’s doors according to the number of steps the avatar walks<sup>14</sup> (in other words: they make it possible to “teleport” into any level of the game).

Concretely, in the speedrun, we see the player opening the inventory, selecting the package for Professor Oak, then closing the menu. This action already constitutes a deviation, both in relation to the context of a “standard” play session – since it does not serve the progress of the game in any way – and in relation to the context of the speedrun, since it appears, at first glance, as a waste of time.

Subsequently, the speedrunner returns to the first village and takes a detour to trigger a Pokémon battle. Since the fluidity of the avatar’s movements was established as an isotopy<sup>15</sup> from the beginning of the video, this detour

<sup>13</sup> For an in-depth description and technical explanation of how this glitch works, see: *Bulbapedia, the community-driven Pokémon encyclopedia*. “Dokokashira door glitch”. [https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Dokokashira\\_door\\_glitch](https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Dokokashira_door_glitch), accessed on 19 December 2020.

<sup>14</sup> All objects, creatures, attacks, or places in early versions of *Pokémon* games are associated in the code with values that serve as their identifiers. Glitch hunters have carefully identified and listed these values so that they can manipulate them at will.

<sup>15</sup> Isotopy is an internal regularity produced by a repetition of meaning, structures, or processes (see Klinkenberg 1996, 344–345).



ures of speedrun in two categories, according to the main function they serve: dismantling the game coherence, or codifying the speedrun apparatus.

## Figures of Deconstruction

### *Resemantization*

The first recurring figure contributing to the decomposition of the game's structure involves both the morphology of the game (because it modifies its "lexicon", i.e. characters, objects, places...) and its semantics (because it consists of attributing new meanings and functions to these different units, without changing their signifier). I therefore simply call this process: *resemantization*.

This formal mechanism is a direct consequence of the new layer of rules applied by speedrunners and leads to a rereading of the game elements through this filter. The addition of a different interpretative context transforms the mechanical function of the games' lexical units (in other words: it transforms the mechanical part of the "ludemes", Hansen 2019<sup>16</sup>), which has an effect on the meanings and representations they convey. For example, in the speedrun of *Pokémon Green*, the use of the *Dokokashira Door Glitch* results in a resemantization of the game's environments: the houses' doors no longer function as doors, but as "teleportation portals" granting access to virtually any level; walls or trees are no longer physical obstacles, since the glitch occasionally allows the avatar to walk over them as if they were non-existent. In the same way, levels no longer represent only geographical areas organized following a linear and thematic logic (Pallet Town leads to Route 1, which leads to Viridian City, then to Route 2, then to Viridian Forest, etc.), but appear as values that can be controlled and loaded by players in any order they wish. In this context, roads thus lose their role as guidelines, since speedrunners no longer make their way through the game environments, but through its code.

In the speedrun of *Pokémon Snap*, the imperative of speed leads to other forms of resemantization. For instance, one can see the speedrunner ostensibly leaning over the controller and hammering the keys to scroll through the dialogue at full speed. In the video, the narrative or informative function of

---

<sup>16</sup> The ludeme is the minimal functional unit of a game, which is "manifested as the combination of a grapheme (a graphic unit), of a sound, [...] and of mechanical properties or mechanemes" (Hansen 2019, 51). My translation of: « qui se manifeste ainsi comme la combinaison d'un graphème (une unité graphique), d'un son, [...] et de propriétés mécaniques ou mécanèmes ».



**Figure 4.** Some walls or trees lose their function as obstacles (all rights reserved).

these texts is denied (the speedrunner does not even look at them) in favour of their temporal properties. Moreover, unlike in other forms of play where dialogues can be perceived as empty moments to be spent mechanically, in the context of speedrun, they become obstacles to be overcome as efficiently as possible and the operators of a new gameplay mechanic, since they require the keys be pressed with a certain rhythm.

More generally, in this performance, the fictional universe of Pokémon is hardly visible: the narrative mini-sequences are eclipsed; the player's camera never stops on landscapes; and the creatures are only interpreted as functions and parameters of the run. Here, Pokémon are no longer characters or aesthetic objects to be photographed; rather, they represent a certain number of points and serve as tools to progress from level to level (between 09:24 and 11:00, for example, the speedrunner talks about the Pokémon Cloyster as a condition to be validated in order to set a record). This form of reinterpretation may be present in other forms of play than speedrun, but it appears here in a particularly exacerbated way, especially since *Pokémon Snap* originally invites players to cast an aesthetic glance on the fictional universe. In the speedrun, photos are poorly framed and rushed, as they are taken quickly, only to complete the list of Pokémon photographed, thus contributing to a general “de-aesthetization” of the game.

These remarks can be extended to other speedrun videos than those considered here. Indeed, whether in platform, action, or shooting games, the objective of speed redefines many of the game components: one will often see the avatar carefully avoiding bonuses or allied characters because they are a waste of time, and therefore obstacles.



**Figure 5.** The speedrunner pays no attention to his photos or frames (all rights reserved).

### *Anti-Model Play*

The mechanisms involved in the resemantization sometimes simultaneously serve another deconstructive function: *anti-model play*. Speedrun videos regularly contain salient actions that contradict the model play, reconfigure the level design, or make the gameplay falter. These figures are not specific to speedrun and are present in all forms of play, provided that play is always a transformative activity (Salen 2011, 4). Nevertheless, they are salient in that the speedrunner's actions brutally contradict or elude an instruction given or valued by the game. In other words, these actions do not make the speedrun a "deviant" form of play, but they mark the production by generating an *effect of deviation*: the video contains an internal contradiction (the game asks the player to do something and the speedrunner does not comply), which contributes to identifying it as a *détournement*.<sup>17</sup>

I have already mentioned, for example, that the absence of pauses in speedrunners' movements distinguishes speedrun videos per se from other types of gameplay capture. Speedrun performances, in fact, do not show the difficulty of the game, its rhythm, the player's hesitations, the frustrations, or successes.

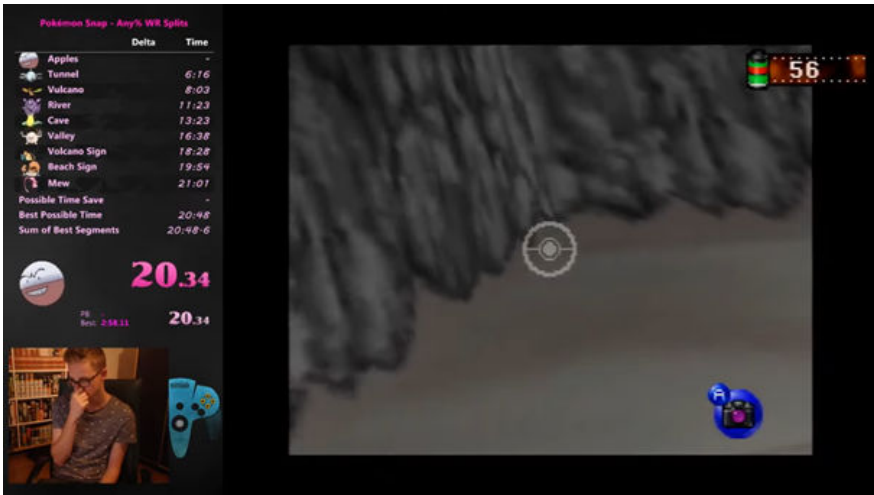
<sup>17</sup> It is important to emphasize here that I do not consider *détournement* or remix practices as a deviation from the norm of play, but as a marked actualization of the ordinary play (see Barnabé 2019, 11 for a detailed presentation of the concept of video game *détournement*).

Secondly, the description of the two videos showed that they regularly deviate from the model play of the game they capture: the speedrunner of *Pokémon Snap* messes up his photos, while the speedrun of *Pokémon Green* shows no Pokémon catching, few fights, and only reveals a few of the game's environments. Nevertheless, ruptures in the play syntax become even more apparent when the level design is no longer simply eluded, but completely reconfigured.

The fracture is all the more visible in the speedrun of *Pokémon Green* as, initially, the video complies to an extent with the implicit rules (Parker 2008, 3–4). However, the use of the *Dokokashira Door Glitch* literally redraws the game map, by moving environments that are supposed to be far away from each other and by removing the requirements to access to the last room. In this performance, the game ends before it really begins, as the speedrunner achieves goals that the game has not even had time to reveal to him yet: the avatar is nominated “Pokémon Master”, even though he has not won any battles.

While the reconfiguration of the level design is not as obvious in the speedrun of *Pokémon Snap*, the way the speedrunner exploits openings in the game still produces disruptive effects. *Pokémon Snap* is indeed divided into seven levels: the player initially has access to only the first one and must unlock the others by accumulating points. In addition, once a certain score is attained, the player will also unlock items needed to reveal some Pokémon hidden in the environments (apples to attract them, for instance). Therefore, in order to make the entire content of the title available as quickly as possible, the speedrunner initially takes only a few photos and instantly leaves each level once the score needed to progress has been reached. In the first level, the speedrunner captures the image of eight creatures before returning to the main menu and starting the next level, which is now accessible; in the second level, he only takes a single picture before leaving the level, which allows him to use the apples, and so on. Such a way of playing is not exclusive to speedrun, but the specificity of the practice comes here from the degree of optimization that is achieved. Indeed, while the game does not prohibit these early departures, its implicit rules (Ibid.) do not encourage them, since each level is written as a route with a predetermined pace, during which various Pokémon are encountered, all of which bring points. These exits from the game via the menu therefore bypass its syntax, which is otherwise very rigid.

This detachment from the model play is also evident in the movements of the camera directed by the player. Indeed, he optimizes these movements in order to always be ideally positioned for the next photo, which leads him to rarely aim at spots that are visually interesting. From the beginning of the first level (00:16), for example, he photographs three Pokémon birds and then immediately lowers the camera to the ground. This action denies the visual



**Figure 6.** Between each photo, the speedrunner generally directs the viewfinder towards surfaces of little visual interest (all rights reserved).

interest of the bucolic and rich environment, but places him in an ideal position to capture the photo of a Pikachu a little further away. Similarly, once the creature is photographed, he then turns his viewfinder towards the sky, which he will fix for nearly ten seconds, before a Butterfree crosses his path. These gestures, which anticipate the course of the level, can be described as “ludic prolepses,”<sup>18</sup> because they create a space in the image for points of interest before they even exist.

Such a process is salient in that it disrupts the linearity of the playing experience, but it is also deviant in relation to the context of enunciation specific to streaming: the speedrunner of *Pokémon Snap* broadcasts his game live on Twitch.tv and, in doing so, presupposes that it is a worthy spectacle. However, the economy of camera movement produces an “anti-spectacular” effect by rendering visually monotonous a game whose gameplay is based on the visual exploration of lively scenery.

Anti-model play can therefore be achieved through *ellipses* or *reconfigurations* (spatial or temporal, in the case of ludic prolepses), but a speedrun can also involve more direct ruptures. The enunciative context of *Pokémon Snap*'s speedrun implies that the speedrunner simultaneously engages in two activities that sometimes collide: on the one hand, he plays and tries to set a speed

<sup>18</sup> The prolepsis is a “narrative operation consisting in recounting or evoking in advance a later event” (my translation of: « manœuvre narrative consistant à raconter ou évoquer d'avance un événement ultérieur », Genette 1972, 82).

record; on the other hand, he manages and discusses with his community of viewers. Concretely, in the video, we regularly see the speedrunner simply letting go of his controller (during the waiting moments imposed by the game) to consult his computer, to write on his keyboard, to read and respond to his viewers' comments. Between 00:49 and 01:15, for example, we see him using his mouse distractedly; similarly, at 11:42, he obviously checks some information on his computer and nearly forgets to take an important photo. These shifts operated by the speedrunner from one enunciative posture to another contribute to the deconstruction of the game because they simply interrupt the performance and contradict the conception of play as an immersive experience. Even when caught up in a competitive activity, the speedrunner is constantly distancing himself from what he is accomplishing: by doing something else; but also by being ironical about the poor quality of the photos he takes (00: 49); by regularly criticizing his performance (08:12); or by complaining and showing signs of frustration, as if he were forced to continue but was not satisfied (between 06:51 and 07:12, he says explicitly, holding his face: "I can't play this game... I lost all my consistency... All of it! It makes me really sad").

Anti-model play therefore also involves a reversal of the value systems constructed by the games. For instance, the quality of the photos in *Pokémon Snap* or the victory in the battles of *Pokémon Green* no longer matter in the videos, because they are part of a new value system. Incidentally, the speedrunner of *Pokémon Green* explains in his commentary that it is more useful to *lose* the first fight against the rival, because defeat is faster than victory: "it should also be noted that losing to your rival is slightly faster than winning because the animations and sounds for levelling up and listening to the loser's speech are long."<sup>19</sup>

The inversion is yet achieved by revaluing design errors, namely, glitches. While they could appear as obstacles or problems, in the videos, they are represented as tools, opportunities, or even as signs of the aesthetics of speedrun. The place given to these dysfunctions – in the videos as well as in the discourses – is perhaps what most clearly manifests the deconstructive dimension of speedrun, in the sense that their use sometimes brings games to the limits of their destruction (Newman 2008, 114). For illustration, the ironic presentation of *Pokémon Green* by its speedrunner can be read in two ways: "The Green version is roughly equivalent to the American Blue version, but

---

19 *Speed Demos Archive*. "Pokémon Green". <http://speeddemosarchive.com/PokemonGreen.html>, accessed on 19 December 2020.



does have several small differences. It is also features the absolute best coding in any game ever. No bugs to exploit here. Not a [single] one.”<sup>20</sup>

The irony comes, of course, from the contradiction between the assertion of the absence of bugs and their radical exploitation in the video. However, the humoristic tone allows the author to gently mock the clumsy programming, while, at the same time, highlighting the importance of these mistakes for his practice. The figure plays here the role of junction operator between several paradigms, several value systems (in this case: that of the model play, where glitches are annoying, and that of *détournement*, where they are desirable opportunities).

### *Exhibition of the creation processes and exposition of the game system*

Speedrun, like any form of *détournement*, is not only a form of play, it is also a discourse about play. Through their performances, speedrunners say something about the playing activity and about the works they take over. As such, speedrun has a revealing function: it uncovers the possibilities embedded in the original game – *exposure*, which is another mechanism of its deconstruction.

It is rare that speedrun videos are not accompanied by an extensive escort speech (either in the form of an oral commentary embedded in the performance or in a paratext accompanying the video), in which the speedrunners explain all the details of their performance: the motivations that drove them; the difficulties they encountered; the strategies they adopted; the glitches they took advantage of; and the people who assisted them. In these comments, they often give explanations about the intimate logic of the game, proceeding with a kind of reverse engineering. The paratext of *Pokémon Green*'s speedrun is an example of this:

First, the run starts before the game even boots up. The ingame timer starts when you appear in your room, as long as you don't have a save file on the cart. If you do, the timer starts earlier, which is undesirable in such a tight time constraint. Therefore, you must delete your save before beginning.<sup>21</sup>

In the speedrun of *Pokémon Snap*, this analytical dimension is even present within the video, as the speedrunner realizes his performance while commenting on it live. The addition of this reflexive layer is salient in relation to the context of enunciation of the game: players are not expected to explain

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

verbally all their actions during a game. The presence of comments (internal to the video or paratextual) therefore gives the activity a meta-communicative dimension.

In addition to uncovering the inner functioning of the game, these meta-discourses also reveal the inner workings of the speedruns themselves, by constantly exhibiting the creation processes of the videos. In *Pokémon Green's* speedrun, this *mise en abyme* is achieved through the systematic explanation of the strategies employed and the glitches exploited. It also involves revealing the production conditions of the video and the meticulous inventory of the material used by the speedrunner. In the paratextual commentary, the author points out, for instance, that he plays version 1.1 of the Game Boy game, whose Japanese title is *Pocket Monsters Midori*; but also that he plays it with a Game Boy Player,<sup>22</sup> using a Game Boy Advance SP console as a controller, and that he does not resort to save file corruption, but uses “large skip glitches.”<sup>23</sup> In the speedrun of *Pokémon Snap*, the apparatus is even more revealing, since the frame of the video contains a representation of a Nintendo 64 controller on which the viewer can observe, in real time, the keys that are pressed by the speedrunner.

Through the presence of this *meta-discursive framework* (the controller and the player's video capture), all the components of the experience are exhibited simultaneously and on the same plane (reminiscent of Azuma's notion of hyperflatness<sup>24</sup>): the game; the play; and the act of creation – since the production of the speedrun itself becomes the object of the spectacle.

### *Deconstructing auctoriality: Speedrun as dialogical performance*

Simultaneously a playful feat and a creative act leading to an observable production (the video), the practice of speedrun is a performance both in the athletic sense of the term and in the cultural, interpretative sense (the player must find new solutions to the problems encountered and represent them in a video worthy of interest). The creative dimension of the practice is manifested, in particular, in the tendency of authors to use certain techniques with the

---

22 An accessory for the GameCube console that allows Game Boy games to be displayed on the television.

23 *Speed Demos Archive*. “Pokémon Green”. <http://speeddemosarchive.com/PokemonGreen.html>, accessed on 19 December 2020.

24 “The hyperflat world, represented by the computer screen, is flat and at the same timelines up what exists beyond it in a parallel layer” (Azuma 2009, 102).



**Figure 7.** The video includes a reproduction of the joystick used by the speedrunner, which allows the audience to observe in real time the keys that are pressed (all rights reserved).

sole aim of entertaining their audience or of being visually interesting, without these tricks implying any real time saving. Nevertheless, while being creators, speedrunners do not cease to be players, and thus construct an ambiguous status of author/performer.

The expressive significance<sup>25</sup> of the activity is especially blurred by the fact that speedrun has the particularity of being deeply collective. From the outset, these videos were conceived as a way for expert players to disseminate advanced techniques and as support for a community practice (world-record directories made it possible to make races “multi-player,” even when they were carried out in solo titles). The singularity of speedrun comes from the fact that it is part of several discourse registers that are generally opposed: that of competitive gaming; that of creation; and that of collaborative gaming.

This collective dimension is visible in the organization of the activity in general (in the fact that the strategies are listed and disseminated in participatory encyclopedias, for example), but it also leaves its mark on the videos and their paratexts. Although these videos, in certain aspects, are the rigid versions

<sup>25</sup> Or even the artistic dimension of speedrun, as claimed by some communities (see Barnabé 2016).

of a subjective play performance, they contain various processes that tend to open up their own boundaries (towards the spectator) and deconstruct the figure of the author (in favour of collegiality). Unlike the previous ones, the figures discussed below no longer serve to deconstruct the original game, but rather to dismantle the speedrun work.

First, speedrun videos rarely include a strong representation of auctoriality. On the contrary, the figure of the creator tends to be diluted in them. For example, despite the fact that each video is clearly attributed to a defined individual, the ephemeral nature of the performances (always susceptible to being superseded) makes this “intellectual property” a temporary state. The author, actually, is never the full owner of the performance, since it is only one step leading to the next record: “there is a clear sense in which the products and processes of speedrunning are owned by the community rather than any particular individual” (Newman 2008, 130). Besides, the dilution of an author’s subjectivity is due to the importance, in the comments, of technical and quantified considerations, leaving little room for the speedrunner’s personal expression.

Auctoriality is further distorted by the recognition of the role played by collective intelligence (Jenkins 2006, 139), which is attested in the paratext of the runs. Speedrunners rarely fail to warmly thank the players who helped them dissect the game system, or to acknowledge the merit of previous record holders. The speedrunner of *Pokémon Snap*, for instance, refers to some of his peers’ strategies during his performance (17:58) and takes the time to thank all those who assisted him during the game credits (24:05), thus recognizing that his record is the result of a collective effort.

The dilution of auctoriality also affects the content of the videos themselves. Indeed, unlike Let’s Play videos, which stage an individual experience of the game and emphasize the player’s subjectivity, speedruns tend rather towards the standardization of performances: speedrunners collectively develop an ideal trajectory, then compete to achieve it as perfectly as possible. The videos do not retrace the player’s personal interpretations or choices, but instead an over-codified choreography in which the speedrunner is only a performer, an instrument.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, speedrun deconstructs the figure of the author and the boundaries of the work in that the performance is part of a profoundly dialogical dynamic. The videos and their paratext are indeed characterized by a constant solicitation and consideration of the audience. This inclusion of the public in

---

<sup>26</sup> This depersonalization is completed in the case of “tool-assisted speedruns,” where the script is not even played by the speedrunner anymore, but by an emulator.

the creation is marked in the didactic concern omnipresent in speedrunners' discourses: the *Speed Demos Archive* website, for example, dedicates a forum to the introduction of beginners and another to the archiving of knowledge.<sup>27</sup> Presentations of speedruns are also guided by this didactic logic, given the thoroughness with which speedrunners detail how to reproduce their tricks – sometimes going so far as to provide the reader with “pedagogical material,” such as annotated maps (see Barnabé 2014 for more examples on this subject). The speedrunner of *Pokémon Snap* has also produced a tutorial video in conjunction with his speedrun,<sup>28</sup> for those who would like to achieve the same feat.

Because of this concern for popularization, speedrun offers a form of openness to interactivity: not only the meta-discourse gives spectators all the cards to make a run themselves, but they frequently also contain explicit invitations to the audience to intervene. This incitement manifests itself in the form of the run's presentations: they are generally addressed to the reader in the second person, like textbooks, and are written as if the reader were in the middle of a playing activity. For instance, the commentary about *Pokémon Green*'s speedrun literally dictates instructions to the reader: “first, the run starts before the game even boots up. The ingame timer starts when you appear in your room, as long as you don't have a save file on the cart. If you do, the timer starts earlier [...]. Therefore, you must delete your save before beginning.”<sup>29</sup> While the speedrunner of *Pokémon Snap* is less explicitly prescriptive, the comments he superimposes on his performance are no less didactic, and the audience's inscription in his video also passes, more directly, through the dialogue he maintains with his viewers (see, for example, between 18:41 and 19:28).

Furthermore, speedrun presentations almost always include mention of the points in the video that can be improved. The speedrunner of *Pokémon Green* reports as follows: “at most, one second was lost to execution, owing to small errors in text mashing and a slight hesitation during the trip back to Pallet Town. The route lost five seconds but gave the run a vastly higher chance

---

27 *Speed Demos Archive*. “New Users”. [https://forum.speeddemosarchive.com/board/new\\_users.html](https://forum.speeddemosarchive.com/board/new_users.html), accessed on 19 December 2020; and *Speed Demos Archive*. “Knowledge Base”. [https://forum.speeddemosarchive.com/board/knowledge\\_base2.html](https://forum.speeddemosarchive.com/board/knowledge_base2.html), accessed on 19 December 2020.

28 *Speedrun.com*. “Pokémon Snap – 100% Speedrun Tutorial – by Drogeriehund”. <http://www.speedrun.com/pkmnsnap/guide/08yk7>, accessed on 19 December 2020.

29 *Speed Demos Archive*. “Pokémon Green”. <http://speeddemosarchive.com/PokemonGreen.html>, accessed on 19 December 2020.

of finishing.”<sup>30</sup> These mechanisms make the speedrun video appear less a finite object with a fixed form and more a work in progress, a step in an ongoing process: as an illustration, *Pokémon Snap*’s speedrunner has barely finished his run when he is already announcing his next performances (25:14).

In short, the inclusion of the playing activity in a dialogic dynamic and the dilution of the author’s figure do not really contribute to making the speedrun appear as an autonomous work, but rather re-inscribe the video in a playful register. The deconstruction of the original game’s aesthetics in these videos also heads in this direction. However, as we will see below, other formal mechanisms, by contrast, contribute to formalizing the speedrun as a work that exists outside of the speedrunner’s playing performance.

## Figures of formalization

### *Analogy*

I previously emphasized that speedrun is not without an impact on the game it diverts, since it superimposes another layer of rules and objectives onto it. I should add that, by defining its own ludic apparatus, speedrunning also necessarily defines a new model play. If the videos regularly produce deviation effects from the model play of the original game (by short-circuiting its level design or ignoring its gameplay, for example), they tend, on the contrary, to merge completely into the second model play. Indeed, the optimization specific to the practice induces the standardization of trajectories, techniques, and courses used by the players, since the objective is to get as close as possible to an ideal performance. Thus, through their play, speedrunners do not just produce a video or a spectacular performance, they also write a *score*, a script, a model run that each of their performances will try to reproduce, but from which they will always be separated by a few execution errors. In other words, the work produced through speedrun is not limited to the video, since it is only a step, an attempt to perform the model play.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Without totally assimilating with them, this point brings speedrun closer to the performance arts, or Goodman’s “allographic arts” (where a score allows the work to be performed an infinite number of times and each manifestation retains the status of original), as opposed to the “autographic arts,” where the material support of the work makes sense and invites us to distinguish the original work from its reproductions, as in the case of painting (Goodman 1990, 147–148).

What Pinchbeck and Gras say about machinima seems to apply even more aptly to the case of speedrun: “machinima is the process of rendering a linear artifact from a nonlinear system, of reducing the field of affordances within this system to an individualized stream” (Pinchbeck and Gras 2011, 144). Speedrun takes this process one step further, since it not only produces a fixed interpretation from an infinite number of possibilities, but also a model to imitate precisely, a template towards which all singular interpretations aspire. This closure and standardization of playing performances that is visible within the videos is salient, as it calls into question the definition of play as a contingent activity (Malaby 2007, 106) or as an opening of possibilities. According to Genvo, the existence of indeterminacy in a situation is indeed a condition for the emergence of play:

Since playing is doing (Winnicott 1971), it is necessary, in our opinion, to add that playing is also making a decision and “exercising what is possible”. If playing consists only of a succession of single decisions, then the player has no “latitude” in his choices; he simply actualizes a proposition held to be true, which does not depend on his particular play<sup>32</sup> (Genvo 2011, 72).

However, while speedrun opens up the possibilities of the original game (in particular thanks to the use of glitches), it closes them just as quickly by codifying an optimal interpretation.

Concretely, the existence of this secondary model play manifests itself within the productions through *analogies*. Performances are regularly compared with other records achieved in the same game (in order to show the progress made by each one) or are compared with the “tool-assisted speedrun,”<sup>33</sup> which often serves as a model, since emulators make it possible to get closer to a theoretically perfect time. The speedrunner of *Pokémon Green* is actually very excited about the record he has set, for the very reason that he has almost equalled the tool-assisted speedrun of the same game: “this is my speedrun of the Japan-exclusive *Pokémon Green* in 0:03 by the ingame timer, which is

---

<sup>32</sup> My translation of: « Puisque jouer c’est faire (Winnicott, 1971), il est selon nous nécessaire d’ajouter que jouer c’est aussi prendre une décision et “faire l’exercice du possible”. Si le jeu ne consiste que dans la succession de décisions uniques, alors le joueur n’a aucune “latitude” dans ses choix ; il se contente d’actualiser une proposition tenue pour vraie, qui ne dépend pas de son jeu particulier ».

<sup>33</sup> Tool-assisted speedrun is a form derived from speedrun in which speedrunners use the functionalities of emulators to remove the limitations due to human errors and establish a theoretically ideal time. Tool-assisted speedrunners slow down the progress of the game and record, at each frame, the combination of keys that should ideally be pressed. This sequence of commands can then be read by the emulator.

literally unbeatable. Even the hyper-optimized TAS gets 0:03, so expect this run to stand for eternity.”<sup>34</sup>

The speedrun of *Pokémon Snap* formalizes the model play that it tries to approach through its frame. Indeed, the frame of the video contains a table showing, for each stage of the speedrun, the time to beat (that of the world record) as well as the relationship between the latter and the current performance. In Figure 8, for example, we see that the run is 1.62 seconds behind the ideal time at the Tunnel, but 1.61 seconds ahead of the time at the River. This comparison in the speedrun’s “interface” opens the video to intertextuality and functions as a constant reminder of the existence of a shared script behind the individual performance. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the division of the different stages of the race does not really correspond to the original division of the game into levels: rather, it represents the route that speedrunners have established as the most efficient (the first title, “Apples,” does not refer to a level, but rather to the route that leads to the apples, etc.). This division and the naming of each stage of the run graphically signal, in the video, both the rupture of the game’s model play (whose levels are reconfigured) and the existence of a secondary model play whose main prescription – time – is constantly repeated.

The speedrunner’s spoken comments double the analogy with the model play, because he regularly reaffirms that his performance is still in the wake of the world record, which he follows scrupulously: “I still have a world-record pace” (13:47), “we’re ahead of a world record by... six seconds for undo” (14:44) “seven seconds ahead... no ten seconds actually. Ten seconds ahead of world record” (18:33),<sup>35</sup> etc.

### *Codification*

Far from being only deconstructive, speedrun performances are also subject to an important *codification*. Firstly, the format of the videos is characterized by a strong uniformity, generally imposed by the reference site around which the community is organized. On *Speed Demos Archive*, for instance, videos cannot have been edited and they begin with a launch image containing the game time, the author’s references, and the reference to the host site. Besides, as we

---

34 *Speed Demos Archive*. “Pokémon Green”. <http://speeddemosarchive.com/PokemonGreen.html>, accessed on 19 December 2020.

35 *Speedrun.com*. “Pokémon Snap – 100% – N64 in 23m 40s by Drogie”. <http://www.speedrun.com/run/wzpk02vy>, accessed on 19 December 2020.





**Figure 8.** The frame formalizes a model play through a table that shows, for each step, the time to beat (all rights reserved).

have seen, the recordings are accompanied by an extensive paratextual commentary, in which speedrunners explain all the details of their performance.

The ambition of codification is also evident in a speedrunner tradition to give a name to the strategies they use. For example, the sequence of manipulations carried out in the speedrun of *Pokémon Green* has been formalized as a technique in its own right, known to all under the label of *Dokokashira Door Glitch*. The consequence of these titles is to make some course choices official and to give them a collective dimension. The itineraries and playing techniques – both integral parts of the playing experience – are thus subject to a form of “lexicalization”: by becoming formalized, these ways of playing become part of the game’s lexicon and form a shared code.

Additionally, the establishment of rules for the activity, the definition of standards, and the classification of the videos into categories require an important collective work of theorization. For example: under what conditions can a speedrun be qualified as “100%” or “low%”? What does it mean to finish *Pokémon Snap* at 100%? What about *Super Mario Bros* or *Metroid*? The criteria cannot be identical, so *Speed Demos Archive* reserves a forum topic for the

establishment of these definitions for each video game title.<sup>36</sup> All these formalization processes are an integral part of speedrun as a creative activity: the planning of a model play; the standardization of play performance and the production of a shared code constitute a framework that contributes to giving speedrun the status of *détournement*.

### *Over-compliance*

Finally, the definition of a model play specific to speedrun and the codification of trajectories and techniques make the videos salient because they *over-comply* with these models. The unusual precision of certain movements (the avatar's movements in the speedrun of *Pokémon Green*, for example, which anticipate obstacles and always follow the shortest path) and their mechanical optimization (such as when the speedrunner of *Pokémon Snap*, at 16:00, throws a ball at one Pokémon, but does not even take the time to look at the result of his action, because he is already completing the next task in his program) depart from the game as an exploratory, variable, and subjective activity because of their smoothness and perfection. While such optimized gestures appear regularly in competitive gaming practices (or in what Roth has described as the "analytical" posture sometimes adopted by players to satisfy the requirements of game systems, Roth 2017, 75), they characterize speedrun by their omnipresence: optimized trajectories or actions do not simply emerge occasionally, constituting a moment of intensity, as they would in other forms of play, but constitute a norm in these videos, an isotopy.

In short, speedrun differs from play because it has the effect of suppressing the low-intensity moments of videogame activity: moments of waiting, searching, trial-and-error or less commitment disappear from videos, whereas they represent the main part of daily play experiences (see Boutet, Colón de Carvajal, Ter Minassian and Triclot 2014).

## **Conclusion: Artwork, game and apparatus**

By analysing two very different runs of *Pokémon* games, a number of rhetorical figures of speedrun as transformative play were identified. These analyses showed that speedrun is a highly ambiguous creative activity: it mixes process-

---

36 SDA Forum. "low%/100% definitions". [https://forum.speeddemosarchive.com/post/low100\\_definitions.html](https://forum.speeddemosarchive.com/post/low100_definitions.html), accessed on 19 December 2020.

es of deconstruction (of the game and its codes) with processes of formalization (of a new apparatus and of a new model play); it is primarily a play performance, but it nonetheless alters games by superimposing an external framework on them; in doing so, it is both a playing practice and an act of “meta-game design.” Moreover, the reflexive dimension of speedrun (as a form of reverse engineering) makes it a powerful tool for analysing the game-objects that serve as its support.

Its specificities invite us to, in particular, rethink the notions of *work* and *game*. Indeed, in this chapter, we have seen that, in the field of speedrun, what is produced through play is not limited to a trace of a performance (the video), because this video only makes sense by being linked to a metadiscourse defining the rules of the practice (through websites, distribution platforms, etc.), to a paratext that makes the production readable, and to a planning through which an abstract “score” or script is drawn up. The speedrun product is therefore plural, transmediatic, and, above all, collective: it gives access to a play performance whose script was written by the community, so that each individual game session is integrated into a whole formed by the trajectories of other speedrunners.


On the other hand, this playing activity highlights the need to clarify the definition of what the “game-object” actually is. I have thus proposed to distinguish the *game* from the *game apparatus*: the first term designates the game-object in the strict sense (its code, its image and sound directories, its materiality), while the second refers to the transmediatic network of supports mobilized within the framework of the play experience (the paratext, the websites, forums and communities, the extensions or derived products, etc.). The distinction shows the essential role of those peripheral elements in the gaming experience.

As Després has said with respect to the field of dance, the work can only be defined as a virtuality, “as an abstract compound that suddenly emerges in current interpretive precipitates, the thousand and one interpretations or readings that manufacture and re-fabricate it”<sup>37</sup> (Després 2016). While I hope that the above analyses provide tools to qualify more precisely the rhetoric and aesthetics of transformative play, the analysis of speedrun also concerns broader issues in game theory: it invites us to re-examine video game materialities.

---

<sup>37</sup> My translation of: « comme un *composé abstrait* qui surgirait soudain en des précipités interprétatifs actuels, les mille et une interprétations ou lectures qui la fabriquent et la re-fabriquent ».

ORCID®

Fanny Barnabé  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1840-042X>

References

- Azuma, Hiroki. 2009. *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*. Translated by E. Abel Jonathan and Shion Kono. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Barnabé, Fanny. 2016. "Le *speedrun*. Pratique compétitive, ludique ou créative ? Trajectoire d'un détournement de jeu vidéo institué en nouveau *game*," *Interfaces Numériques*, 5 (3), 441–459. <https://www.unilim.fr/interfaces-numeriques/3113>, accessed on 19 December 2020.
- Barnabé, Fanny. 2017. "Rhétorique du détournement vidéoludique. Le cas de *Pokémon*,"—Ph.D. dissertation, University of Liège. <https://orbi.uliege.be/handle/2268/210764>, accessed on 19 December 2020.
- Barnabé, Fanny. 2019. "Video Game Détournement: Playing Across Media." In *DiGRA '19: Proceedings of the 2019 DiGRA International Conference: Game, Play and the Emerging Ludo-Mix*. Online. <http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/video-game-detournement-playing-across-media/>, accessed on 19 December 2020.
- Bonhomme, Marc. 2014 [2005]. *Pragmatique des figures du discours*. Paris: Honoré Champion.
- Boutet, Manuel, Colón de Carvajal, Isabel, Ter Minassian, Hovig and Mathieu Tricot. 2014. "Au-delà du virtuel. Interactions sociales et spatiales dans et autour d'un univers vidéoludique," *MEI : Médiation et information*, 37, 103–116. [https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00851446/file/Ter\\_minassian\\_et\\_alii\\_A\\_paraA\\_tre\\_dans\\_MEI\\_37\\_.pdf](https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00851446/file/Ter_minassian_et_alii_A_paraA_tre_dans_MEI_37_.pdf), accessed on 19 December 2020.
- Bulbapedia, the community-driven Pokémon encyclopedia*. "Dokokashira door glitch". [https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Dokokashira\\_door\\_glitch](https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Dokokashira_door_glitch), accessed on 19 December 2020.
- Després, Aurore. 2016. "Penser l'archive audiovisuelle pour la recherche en danse. Le Fonds d'Archives Numériques Audiovisuelles FANA Danse contemporaine," *Recherches en danse*, 5. <http://danse.revues.org/1307>, accessed on 19 December 2020.
- Dupont, Nathalie, and Éric Trudel, eds. 2012. "Tout peut servir." *Pratiques et enjeux du détournement dans le discours littéraire des XXe et XXIe siècles*. Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec.
- Eco, Umberto. 1985 [1979]. Translated by Myriem Bouzaher. Paris: Librairie Générale Française.
- Frissen, Valerie, Lammes, Sybille, De Lange, Michiel, De Mul, Jos, and Joost Raessens, eds. 2015. *Playful Identities. The Ludification of Digital Media Cultures*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Genette, Gérard. 1972. *Figures III*. Paris: Seuil.
- Genette, Gérard. 1982. *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*. Paris: Seuil.
- Genvo, Sébastien. 2011. "Penser les phénomènes de 'ludicisation' du numérique. Pour une théorie de la jouabilité," *Revue des sciences sociales*, 45, 68–77. [http://www.ludologique.com/publis/Ludicisation\\_Genvo\\_S.pdf](http://www.ludologique.com/publis/Ludicisation_Genvo_S.pdf), accessed on 19 December 2020.

- Goodman, Nelson. 1990. *Langages de l'art. Une approche de la théorie des symboles*. Translated by Jacques Morizot. Paris: Hachette.
- Hansen, Damien. 2019. *Morphologie du médium vidéoludique. Le ludème envisagé comme unité minimale fonctionnelle du jeu vidéo*, Master's thesis in linguistics, University of Liège. <https://matheo.uliege.be/handle/2268.2/8274>, accessed on 14 June 2021.
- Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers. Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Klinkenberg, Jean-Marie. 1996. *Précis de sémiotique générale*. Brussels: De Boeck.
- Malaby, Thomas M. 2007. "Beyond Play. A New Approach to Games," *Games and Culture*, 2 (2), 95–113. [https://www.academia.edu/239795/Beyond\\_Play\\_A\\_New\\_Approach\\_to\\_Games](https://www.academia.edu/239795/Beyond_Play_A_New_Approach_to_Games), accessed on 19 December 2020.
- Menotti, Gabriel. 2014. "Videorec as Gameplay. Recording Playthroughs and Video Game Engagement," *GAME*, 3, 81–92. [http://www.gamejournal.it/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/GAME\\_3\\_Subcultures\\_Journal\\_Menotti.pdf](http://www.gamejournal.it/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/GAME_3_Subcultures_Journal_Menotti.pdf), accessed on 19 December 2020.
- Newman, James. 2008. *Playing with Videogames*. London: Routledge.
- Parker, Felan. 2008. "The Significance of Jeep Tag. On Player-Imposed Rules in Video Games," *Loading...*, 2 (3). <http://journals.sfu.ca/loading/index.php/loading/article/view/44/41>, accessed on 19 December 2020.
- Pinchbeck, Dan, and Ricard Gras. 2011. "Machinima: From Art Object to Cultural Practice." In *The Machinima Reader*, edited by Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche, 143–158. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Quake done Quick*. "Quake Done Quick: allowable console changes". <http://quake.speeddemosarchive.com/quake/qdq/articles/console.html>, accessed on 19 December 2020.
- Roth, Martin. 2017. *Thought-Provoking Play: Political Philosophies in Science Fictional Videogame Spaces from Japan*. Pittsburgh, PA: ETC Press.
- Salen, Katie. 2011. "Arrested Development: Why Machinima Can't (or Shouldn't) Grow Up." In *The Machinima Reader*, edited by Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche, 37–50. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Salen, Katie, and Eric Zimmerman. 2004. *Rules of Play. Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Scully-Blaker, Rainforest. 2014. "A Practiced Practice: Speedrunning Through Space With de Certeau and Virilio," *Game Studies*, 14 (1). <http://gamestudies.org/1401/articles/scullyblaker>, accessed on 19 December 2020.
- SDA Forum*. "low%/100% definitions". [https://forum.speeddemosarchive.com/post/low100\\_definitions.html](https://forum.speeddemosarchive.com/post/low100_definitions.html), accessed on 19 December 2020.
- SDA Knowledge Base* "Rules". <https://kb.speeddemosarchive.com/Rules>, accessed on 19 December 2020.
- SDA Knowledge Base*. "Rule history". [https://kb.speeddemosarchive.com/Rule\\_history](https://kb.speeddemosarchive.com/Rule_history), accessed on 19 December 2020.
- Speed Demos Archive*. "Knowledge Base". [https://forum.speeddemosarchive.com/board/knowledge\\_base2.html](https://forum.speeddemosarchive.com/board/knowledge_base2.html), accessed on 19 December 2020.
- Speed Demos Archive*. "New Users". [https://forum.speeddemosarchive.com/board/new\\_users.html](https://forum.speeddemosarchive.com/board/new_users.html), accessed on 19 December 2020.
- Speed Demos Archive*. "Pokémon Green". <http://speeddemosarchive.com/PokemonGreen.html>, accessed on 19 December 2020.

*Speedrun.com*. “Pokémon Snap – 100% – N64 in 23m 40s by Drogie”. <http://www.speedrun.com/run/wzpk02vy>, accessed on 19 December 2020.

*SpeedRunsLive*. “Frequently Asked Questions”. <https://www.speedrunslive.com/faq/>, accessed on 19 December 2020.

---

### **Comment By Taeko Edaki**

This is a meaningful paper that clarifies the peculiarity of speedrun. It is interesting that the rules that the creator gives to the player are changed by the player and the community. Research into speedrun is also considered a significant area of study with respect to clarifying the process of community formation. Games that are not necessarily new or hit titles are played in speedrun. Despite being a community that requires difficult gameplay, many people with different characteristics are interacting online. Moreover, Real-Time Attack (RTA) festivals are held all over the world and RTA in Japan continues to expand every year. I hope that research into this field will be conducted from various perspectives, not merely from a game research perspective.

### **Comment By Melanie Fritsch**

In her chapter, Fanny Barnabé offers an in-depth discussion of the game-cultural practice of speedrunning. Speedrunners play in an optimized way; optimized here means that they finish either a full game or part of it (e.g. one level) as quickly as possible by exploiting every opportunity the game system offers them in order to speed up. Barnabé describes this as a form of meta-gaming that is constructed according to the rules negotiated in and with the community.

The chapter is thought-provoking on many levels, though I found the discussion of speedrunning as a creative act and thinking about speedruns as a socially negotiated form of game-cultural performance particularly intriguing. This sparked a question about whether we can describe such gameplaying in a similar vein to Christopher Small’s (1998) description of the act of music-making with the term “musicking,” i.e. as a social practice whose rules are constantly (re-)negotiated within a community of participants. In this regard, participants can be the performers (players, speedrunners) themselves, but also anyone else participating in setting the stage for gameplay performances (e.g. by providing the material) as well as evaluating them through online discussions and comments.