Spectacularization of Play in Live-Streaming Speedrun Marathons: From Performance to Mediation

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LIÈGE GAME LAB

{EPITECH.}
RESEARCH

SPEEDONS 2022
INTERVENTION SANDRINE SIMON

MÉDECINS DU MONDE

LEOVERNARD · leovernard

27:48.2

Espion

Disques des Profondeurs

Paquet de pin brûlé

12050

DARK SOULS III

NO HIT SPEEDRUN ANY% · PC

0:55:00

À SUIVRE
HITMAN 2 (SAISON 1, 2, 3)
Silent Assassin / Suit Only (SA/SO)
omorsheriff

CHOIX DU MODE
SHOVEL KNIGHT TREASURE TROVE · SHOVEL OF HOPE 365 € · PLAGUE OF SHADOWS 317 €
DONS AU PROFIT DE MÉDECINS DU MONDE
193.964 €

1st · TIME 01:29:346

1st · TIME 01:28:725

P.1

MARIO KART

GOAL!

LAP 3/3

SEBY

NO_LAST_NAME__ · no_last_name__

1:38.3

MARIO KART DOUBLE DASH

ALL CUP TOUR · WII

0:37:00

À SUIVRE
DONKEY KONG COUNTRY
All Stages
!WannaBeYourJacky

ZERATOR & MISTERMV

DONS AU PROFIT DE MÉDECINS DU MONDE
143.291 €

MÉDECINS DU MONDE

802 166 €

- **17 semi-structured interviews** with SpeeDons 2022 participants:

  - Speedrunners

  - Commentators

  - Entertainers

  - Reviewers

- **Qualitative** analysis

- Focus on the links between **spectacularization and knowledge transmission**

2. Speedrunners' Relation to the Performance

The context of the performance

INF12:
"*At SpeeDons, we don't reset*"

INF04:
"*In marathons, we are not here to make a world record*"

INF10	"Lots and lots of practice. I was speedrunning a game which has a lot of RNG. Then, **we accept everything during practice. Even the worst scenarios**, you play with them. You don't know what's going to happen on stage"
INF03	"Before the big day, we practice to perform speedruns at home. [...] **Even if all possible disasters happen during the run, we keep going.** That way we are in condition for SpeeDons"
INF11	"**I was performing no-reset runs**, just to see how it goes so I wouldn't end up at the event and be like '*ah crap, I missed the first level, I'll do it again*'. It doesn't work like that"

Mistakes and humor as features

INF08	"It's like a performance in the theater. You forget what you have to say or you forget how to play it: you have to remedy. In a way, **you improvise to get back on track and then you carry on as if nothing had happened**. […] That's part of the entertainement"
INF13	"**The unexpected allows us to show that speedrun is not always perfect**. When you're a viewer, what you see are often world records, so it's the runs that are 'perfects'"
INF13	"If I can make people laugh, I feel like **I've achieved my goal**"

Display of skills, patterned behavior, keeping up the standard (Huuhkha, 2020)

INF06	"I have a humor that tends to be a little dark. [...] **It's a humor that I try to avoid as much as possible at charity events.** We represent this charity event so we can't say whatever we want" ⇒ Patterned behavior + Keeping up the standard
INF08	"**Runs during a marathon are much more about entertainment** than performance. [...] On the contrary, when we're trying to get a PB, we go for performance first and then, in a second step, entertainment" ⇒ Display of skills
INF04	"You have to be able to play between play, entertainment and performance. **If I had to put an order between the three, I think I would put: playful, entertaining and performance in that order**" ⇒ Display of skill, Patterned behavior and Keeping up the standard

• The speedrun marathon = an **embedding of different performance frameworks**

"The efforts to which players have to go in order to define elite performances points towards **the difficulty of developing a satisfactory theory of videogame performance as an overarching concept**" (Jayemanne, 2017: 5-6)

• 3 pairs of **conflicting goals**:

- Promoting the Game ⇔ Breaking the Game
- Impressing ⇔ Bringing into the Practice
- Making Understand ⇔ Making Stay

INF08	"When it's on a game with which I have a big affect, **I'll try to share that affect**"
INF12	"Being able to **share my love for the game,** it's really cool. [...] I know that there are people who may not be aware that this game exists, who may have discovered it through my run. If I can **make people want to... just play the game casually**, well that's good enough"
INF07	"**To transmit to them the love of a game,** what it is possible to do with a game [...]. I influenced a lot of people to start playing [that game]: **that's my pride**"

Promoting the Game

INF04	"We are also here to **showcase speedrunners**, as commentators, to **showcase** games, to **showcase communities** as well, potentially"
INF01	"I always feel a responsibility to say... It's my job to showcase the run, **it's my job to showcase the game**. [...] Even the worst game, you can showcase it in a super interesting way and you can present it in a super interesting way"

Breaking the Game

// Speedrun as **transgression** (Scully-Blaker, 2014; Hemmingsen, 2020; Newman, 2008: 129)

INF12	"We help each other in the end, because, well, **all we want is to be able to bust the game as best we can!** […] It's very satisfying to see the speedrunners break their games a bit, especially since there are **some speedruns that are very visual in terms of game breaking**"
INF04	"I like the categories where **you break the game as much as possible**. When you spend three quarters of your time out of bounds, it makes me laugh and I like it a lot"
INF15	"I've always had an interest in kind of… **turning games upside down**. Getting into the corners where the developers didn't necessarily want us to go. I've always had an interest in that… in **doing glitches** and stuff"
INF11	"Often the idea is just to find out what the run of a game that I might know as a casual gamer, but not necessarily a speedrunner looks like, to see a little bit of **how you break the game**, how you manage to finish it in less than an hour"

// Speedrun as **transformative play** (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004: 305)

Impressing

INF10	"My role in the event, an objective that I had in mind, was to perform. I told myself: **I have to show my level**. I told myself: **I have to impress**, a bit. That's what put a little pressure on me... it was like**: I have to be impressive**, I have to **show I'm up to it**"
INF02	"What viewers can expect is I think **something impressive** […], **to be captivated** in a way by what they are going to see and by the runs. […] Speedons is clearly focused on impressive runs. Something really **very difficult to achieve**. […] You go to see Speedons, you pay your seat at the Congress Palace to really see **something you cannot do**"
INF14	"We think it's pretty important to remind people that, even if it looks smooth and everything, what the guy on stage is doing is **a crazy thing**. There are **not many people who will be able to do it**. And so, yes, we try to highlight the runner so that people realize that what he's doing is **not normal gameplay**, that it's **difficult**, that there are **hours of training** behind it" BUT: "Our goal was not to tell people: 'this is hard, **this is hard, you won't be able to do it**', but rather: '**this is hard: he is very strong**'. You have to realize that he is strong."

Bringing into

INF03	"For me to **grow the community** like that, to **inspire people to try speedrun**, that makes me super happy"
INF12	"If I can **invite people to speedrun this game** to bring some French people here! Because right now I'm the only French person speedrunning the game, I feel a bit lonely [laughs]. Well, why not?"
INF08	"At the end of every comment I always make a point to say […], well here's the thing: 'there's a community Discord, we're very nice. If you have any questions or anything, if you're interested, **feel free to come on it, ask questions**. **We're very open**, blah blah blah. […] There's an interesting thing about speedrun […], it's that **anyone can be a speedrunner**. It's not a closed practice. […] **It's not reserved for just an elite**, as you might think at first, just by seeing the world record and saying to yourself: 'how can he do that, it's too impressive, I'll never manage to do that'. **Yes, it is possible!**"

Bringing into

INF02	"With my association, we do workshops or presentation shows, so as to **popularize the practice**, so as to **allow more and more people to be interested in it**"
INF05	"People often see speedrun as something either **elitist or extremely unattainable**, where you have to be very good at video games. But I don't really agree with that. […] Well, we've always presented things in a simple way, **to make it less dramatic, to show that it's accessible and all that**"

3.3. Making Understand ⇔ Making Stay

Making Understand

INF08	"And so, practically, **the commentary is more important than the in-game performance**. Because well... nobody cares that I lost fifteen seconds on my menu because […] I was focused on the commentary. **What's more important is to understand where we're going**, why we're doing what we're doing, and what the objectives are, so that we can understand what's at stake […]. What I think is important about a speedrun marathon is that **it's interesting for everyone and that** everyone can understand **what's going on** […] whether they are non-runners, people who have never played the games, or speedrunners"
INF01	"And **if we don't explain to them why what they're seeing is great**, and why what they're seeing is exceptional, well, it's a bunch of pixels that are going into each other, and then sometimes the character goes 'zip zip' and... **We don't really** understand **why**. But if there's someone explaining to you: '*So wait, look carefully. Because there, in two seconds, he is going to try something […]. Dammit, he got it right the first time! And now he just skipped three levels. He had a one in 24 chance of getting it right, that thing, he got it right the first time!*' **Well, all of a sudden, it becomes exceptional**"

Making Understand

// Speedrun as a **"community of practice"**:

Learning is not considered as a peripheral activity, but as "**a way of participating** in social practices, **a status**, a **way of belonging** to a community, a way of 'being part of it'" (Berry, 2008: 13)

INF13	"So that's it: the goal is really to offer entertainment **so that people want to... well, to** stay and make donations if possible"
INF08	"We're on a charity marathon, **the objective is that... well, people** stay, people advertise, people are interested, people watch and so people donate"
INF10	[Commentators' role:] "**To please the public**, so that the public is a bit hyped, so that they are impressed by what they see. And... yeah, that would be it: explanations and **to keep the hype going all the time**, to make people want **to watch, to** keep watching and to impress them"

Making Stay
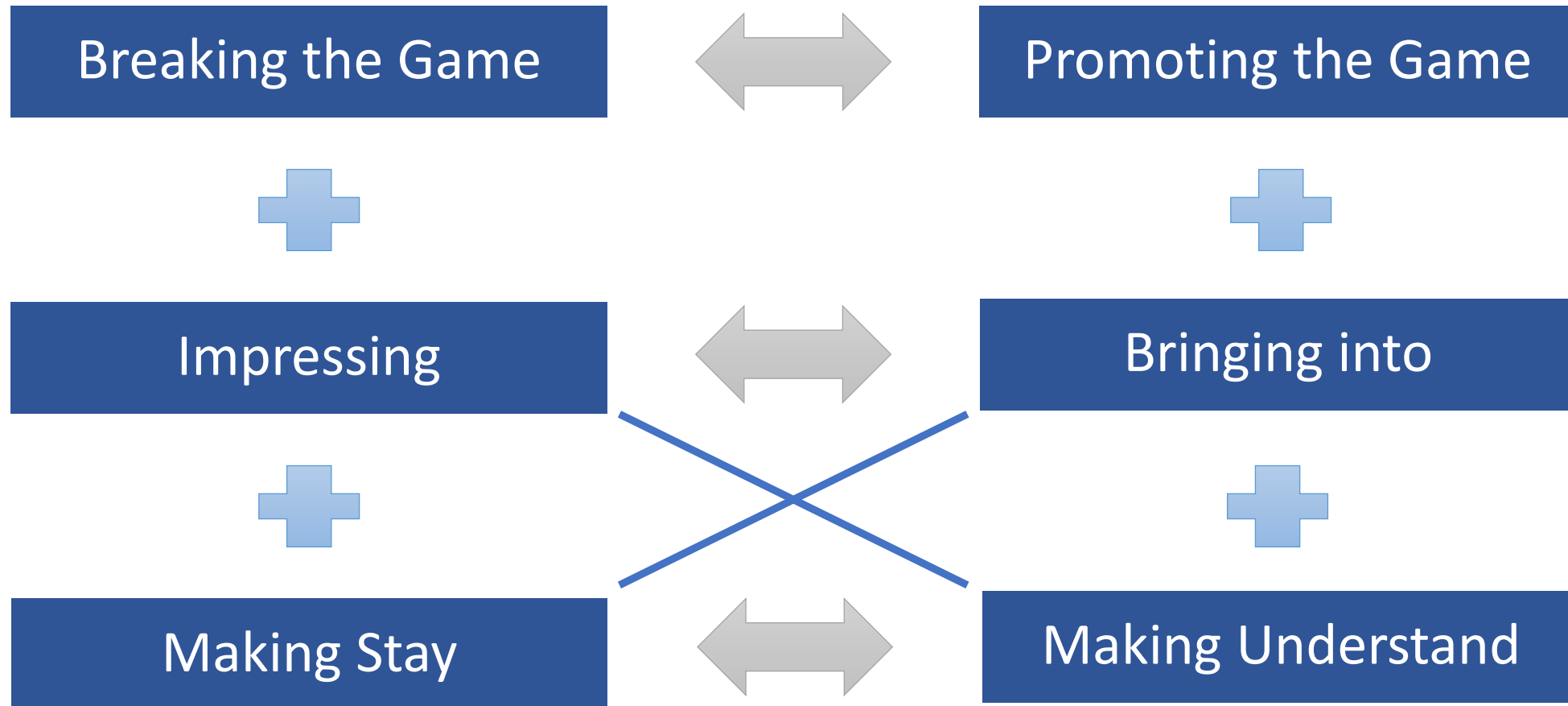
# 4. The Speedrun Marathon: A Composite Performance Drawing on Multiple Spectacle Frameworks

4.1. Speedrun // Music and Theater…?

INF08	"Speedrun is really **like a musical score**, like a piece of music that you are going to play. So the route is going to be your score. The way you played, that's going to be your performance."
INF07	"I'll draw a **parallel with theater**: people often ask me […] 'aren't you tired of doing the same show a hundred times?' I'm like: 'well, no, because even though it's the same show and the same text, **the same thing never happens twice in a performance**"
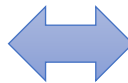
INF17	"You have to have a little bit... not an ability to improvise, but not be afraid to be in front of a camera without support and therefore you have a bit to... not 'improvise', **it's not theater**, but I mean, to know how to tell things" "Now, in terms of scenography, it's still very simple. […] I mean: we're not on a spectacle, actually. **Speedons is not a spectacle**, **it's a speedrun marathon**. […] I think the most important thing is to remember that people come to see speedrun. So in fact, it's useless to put a cosplay contest, dancers, fire-eaters... […] **It's a content event**. […] People know what they are coming to see, and there is no trick. […] That's it, it's not a spectacle"

4.2. Speedrun // Sport or Art...?

• Speedrun **// sport** because:

- it's **competitive** (INF08)
- it's **difficult** (INF13)
- it's **commented** (INF04, INF06, INF17)

• Speedrun **// athletics** (INF06, INF02, INF13)

INF02	"For me, speedrun is **absolutely not an art**. It is **the very opposite** of an artistic element. [...] For me, speedrun is a performance, how to say... **'criterionable' by a time**, obviously, since you are graded at the end by your own time. You can't 'grade' a work of art [...]. The practice of speedun is absolutely **not an art for the simple fact that it is a competition, like a sport**. [...] The danger of considering it, let's say, as an artistic practice, is to produce something not optimized, just because it is beautiful. [...] The main goal of speedrun is always speed. That's what takes precedence over everything else"

INF02	"When we do a speedrun show, when we do a **speedrun marathon**, let's say, with a schedule, with different 'acts' […], it's clear that yes... […] The organization of a schedule, the organization of light shows and everything... **Yes, so yes, it's obvious that it takes part in an artistic propensity**. But, once again, it is because […] we make sure that the runner must produce, not a personal record, for a speedrun marathon, he must not produce a time performance, he must produce, let's say, a presentation... **A demonstration of his speedrun** […]. That's why, for me, a marathon run presentation is **much closer to a showcase**, in fact, **a presentation, a show, than to a speedrun in itself** […] ".

• // **"Transformative" dimension of performance**: "the player is transformed into a performer, the meanings attached to the things in the game change to something different" (Huuhka, 2020 : 73)

• Marathon = **representation** of speedrun
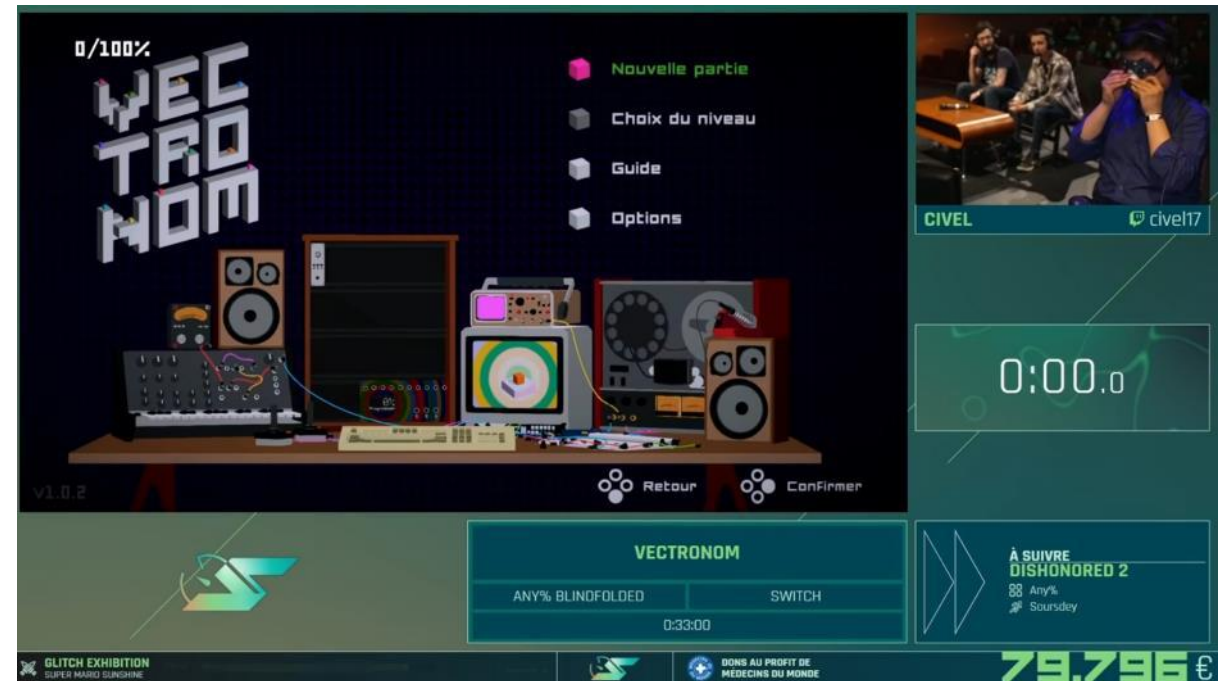
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