

# Playfully Perilous: Permadeath Streams of “The Last of Us: Part II” as a Dynamic Playground

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## Keywords

collective storytelling, streamers, game culture, play, gameplay, superplay, speedrunning, Twitch

This study explores how viewers and streamers co-create a unique online experience on Twitch that offers viewers and streamers a virtual playground for entertainment, connection, and community building. This research sheds light on the evolving nature of gameplay experiences on Twitch. Focusing on *The Last of Us Part II*, this paper examines the captivating realm of grounded permadeath streams where highly-skilled players navigate the perilous challenges of the game on grounded difficulty with self-imposed stipulations: kill all, no healing, no crafting, and no upgrades. These predefined goals are 1ALL (One Life Stages) requires the player to complete the game without dying, 1CC (One Credit Clear) requires the player to finish the game on one continue (life), and speedrunning are referred to as superplay. This exploration centers on how the community around superplay streams transforms the viewing experience. Within this dynamic co-created space, online gameplay transcends the individual player and fosters a collaboration and community. I define playground as a dynamic space where viewers and the streamer co- create the experience. The streamer establishes the “world” of his stream by creating an environment where viewers participate in the stream through chat discussions about gameplay and narrative or participatory activities such as using channel points through Twitch’s interface to predict if the streamer will achieve her stated goals.

This paper will draw on Katz and Blumler, and Gurevitch’s Uses and Gratifications theory to explore how participating on Twitch fulfills social needs, offers less skilled viewers the ability to gain skills through observation or simply and be entertained watching others play, contributing to the formation of a vibrant virtual community. As viewers spectate the perilous journey of Ellie and Abby, they actively participate by predicting the player’s potential progress, actively shaping the gaming experience and contributing to the atmosphere of the stream. Depending on the personality of the streamer, viewers can enhance dramatic moments in the narrative or gameplay by playing snippets of other media objects curated by the streamer and incorporated into her Twitch stream. Viewers can leverage channel points to influence the streamer’s content, such as drawing, crafting, or singing for example. Virtual play of these types on Twitch blur the boundaries between streamer and viewer and

promote an environment where the exhilarating challenges of gaming become a shared experience and promote the development of a community around *The Last of Us Part II* gamers and fans.

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