

5 Flawless in Defeat – In and For the Margins

Your opponent moves in your direction as the round starts. The fight is occurring in a remote place, a gothic ruin, an abandoned shrine, or even an underground car park, your choice. You remain immobile as your opponent grabs you, smothers you in a bear hug and throws you on the floor. Before you even have time to get back on your feet, they sadistically body slam you, crushing you with all their weight, leaving you breathless for a few seconds. You are still conscious, wondering whether making a move would be of any use: you accepted defeat as soon as the gong started, after all. They are much bigger and heavier than you, you might as well have forfeited before the fight, but what would have been the point? They straddle and pin you to the floor, trapping your head between their thick-as-tree-trunks thighs, sitting on your chest as you struggle to breathe again. You can see beads of sweat trickling down their chest, belly and the crotch that faces you. Dominant, they flex their biceps, grinning, the round is far from over.

This could almost be the set-up for a Gyaku Ryona video, which stages one-sided fights in video games, with the exception of actors, pornstars, and bruises being replaced with porcelain skin and uncanny valley-like facial expressions. There are many mysterious aspects surrounding Gyaku Ryona, the first one being its appellation. Because of a significant lack of academic sources, Ryona is a difficult term to define. Originally a portmanteau of the Japanese words *Ryōki* (猟奇, ‘Seeking the bizarre’) and *onani* (オナニー, masturbation), it is a fetish genre which depicts a character physically hurt in a sensual way, or in a sexual situation. Typically, the victim is a woman and the oppressor, if visible, a man. The victim is hurt in a way that wouldn’t immediately draw blood, cause lasting physical harm, or cause death (Sanwa 2013), even though there can be exceptions. Although erotic themes of abuse and domination have been present in many different cultures, the term is often linked to Japanese porn culture where these scenarios are often clearly categorised. It is worth noting that Ryona is a voyeuristic fantasy fetish which differentiates itself from sexual sadism or rape fantasies and is mostly devoid of explicit sexual content.

Ryona takes different forms online, it can stem from anime, cartoons, series, or even fan-made animation. One of its most popular forms, and the focus of this chapter, is the physical beating of characters in fighting games. Stemming from Ryona, several subgenres have been identified, mostly by subcultural websites,

such as Gyaku (meaning reverse) Ryona (逆リ ョ ナ), in which a male character is the victim. It is worth noting however, that neither subgenres and genre are restricted to a specific gender or sexuality. Some Ryona videos focus on humanoid robots, while others can be monsters and non-human beings (blob, sentient forms), most importantly, the genre exclusively involves fictional characters (Sanwa 2013).

Gyaku Ryona (M/M) videos rely on a controversial mechanic which consist in watching one's character being beaten up by dominant characters that repeat the same moves, making the fight repetitive and pointless to watch. Devoid of any form of competition, GRYM seriously lacks drama, it is arguably boring to both the trained and untrained eye, and most videos endlessly recreate the same scenarios, rounds after rounds. Its format prevents the telling of the thrilling stories of tournament champions as it opposes the common expectations of spectacle. As a result, it is disruptive enough to be insulting to the community, it challenges and obscenely subverts the codes of normative play.

This chapter dissects Gyaku Ryona YouTube videos with a primary focus on their content. This is due to two factors – first, Gyaku Ryona is primarily designed for viewers as its main platform of visibility is YouTube. Second, several aspects of playing Gyaku Ryona can be read through queer fun, failure, and unhappiness, the theoretical lenses chosen. As such, this chapter does not openly disregard the difference between playing and viewing Gyaku Ryona but concentrates on its primary mode of consumption.

This subgenre is divided into many subcategories that cannot be regrouped because of their core differences, and it would take a lot more than a chapter to study all its permutations. As such, this chapter focuses on YouTube videos which stage two male presenting characters from a fighting game franchise and are devoid of explicit sexual content by altering the game's original graphics.

It refers to Gyaku Ryona videos that were the most popular at the time of writing – GyakuRyonaMale (the most followed and one of the first YouTube channels to operate), Defeated Men (an up-and-coming channel which demarcates itself by giving a more cinematographic dimension to the fights) and Guys in Trouble which relies more heavily on character outfit modifications. These three channels together total more than 2,000 videos. Because of intellectual property rights, this chapter does not include any images of the videos analysed. Readers are highly encouraged to have a look for themselves, before proceeding to read this analysis.

Despite their 'popularity,' it is worth noting that the majority of the videos only have a few thousand views and that both Defeated Men and Guys in Trouble have stopped posting regularly. As such, the cultural space these videos occupy remains niche. Since these channels do not represent the genre comprehensively because of its exponential branches, I will refer to the selected form of Gyaku Ryona as GRYM, as an acronym for Gyaku Ryona Men.

These channels draw from most of the biggest franchises of the fighting genre such as *Tekken*, *Dead or Alive 6*, *Street Fighter V*, *UFC Undisputed* and *WWE 2K*. When possible, characters are represented in minimal clothing (half-naked,

swimming trunks). A typical video from these channels consists in a one-sided bout between two characters, which can be a full round ending with a K.O., or just the repetition of a specific move. For instance, ‘Injustice – Bane: “Break The Bat” & level transition on Batman (several costumes)’ (GyakuRyonaMale 2014), GyakuRyonaMale’s most popular video and a clear reference to the Batman comics, is a succession of back-breakers performed by Bane on the Bat, with a short transition at 0’38. In ‘PATREON REQUEST: Heihachi grabs King – Gyaku Ryona/Male Ryona’ (GyakuRyonaMale 2021a), one of the most recent videos of the channel, Heihachi unsurprisingly puts King, a meaty wrestler, in three different holds, for several rounds. King’s outfit changes with each round, but the wrestler doesn’t move an inch, and submits to the same repetitive holds, for a total of 5 minutes and 6 seconds.

While this chapter mostly focuses on GRYM videos’ content, it is worth mentioning that these videos are relatively easy to ‘perform’ as they only require the computer or the player to remain passive and not react to the aggressor, running counter to the ruling principles of fighting games. Indeed, the latter typically demand good reflexes as the player needs to enter correct button combinations in a limited time in order to cause maximum damage, grab and throw an opponent or block their attack in time. A GRYM video can be created by disabling the computer’s AI – a very simple modification which can be done via the settings menu of most fighting games – leaving the opponent at the mercy of the player or, conversely, waiting for the player’s character to be defeated. All that is left is to upload the recorded video on YouTube.

Although there is no clear data regarding the GRYM audience, both *GyakuRyonaMale* and *Guys in Trouble* present themselves as channels for people ‘who love Gyaku ryona (Gay ryona) with male assailant and male victim.’ Yet, the anonymity of many YouTube profile nurture the strong possibility that many viewers do not define themselves as gay men. For instance, boys’ love romances are notoriously famous for being historically popular amongst women in Japan (Mizoguchi 2003) and the West (McLelland 2005) and these often include BDSM dynamics between the characters. The same goes with fan fiction, as Chapter 2 discussed. There is, therefore, no reason why GRYM aficionados would be exclusively men. In the end, determining the audience members’ gender is irrelevant to this Chapter’s argument.

I repeatedly mention in this chapter how puzzling GRYM videos can be to the average viewers, particularly in relation to fighting game culture. A few gamers who have ‘inadvertently’ encountered them have been vocal about their repulsion for Ryona and its branches: ‘it just looks look like some freaky fetish. im not exactly sure how you can beat off to this lol’; Ryona’s messed up. Don’t get why it’s appealing. Just feel sorry for them’; Ryona is bizarre . . . I had no clue what this was until a few years ago when people asked me about it shortly after I made some *Soul Calibur* machinima films.’ (shamsh.phi 2012). However, GRYM videos remain overall too niche to be the objects of viral critics. This explains why there hasn’t been (yet) a visible discussion about GRYM in relation to fighting games.

Based on a little more than 200 videos watched on the three selected channels, this chapter approaches GRYM video as a polysemic text which is open to multiple readings. Admittedly, GRYM appears at first glance to be a sadistic and hypermasculine re-enactment of the punishment of weak masculinity, gender inequality between men, and the perpetuation of prejudice and discrimination through the hierarchisation of body image and gender dynamics. Yet, this is immediately counterbalanced by GRYM's twisting of the core principles of fighting game culture: competition, skills and spectacle. GRYM videos rely on failure as a golden rule and resist fighting game culture through its passive play style. In addition, GRYM channels use fighting games, and by extension, contact sport aesthetics, to create videos of queer erotica, and openly promote the sexualisation of hypermasculinity and homosociality, a 'condemned' behaviour in both fighting game and contact sport culture. Filling a gap in internet erotica, GRYM channels' admins put a significant amount of time and energy to maintain their activity, mostly without any remuneration. Here, the GRYM subgenre constitutes a compelling illustration of the delicate balance between queer labour, growing popularity and emerging financial incentives through membership service websites such as Patreon. This uncertain status is reflective of the fragility of the GRYM's 'community,' if it can be called as such, and the limited exchanges that occur between viewers and admins. Like many queer practices, GRYM is contrived, fragile, sometimes painful, sometimes joyous, always effervescent, and doomed to be misunderstood by most. With its paradoxes and contradictions, it remains a concrete manifestation of pleasure through queer play which openly reclaims video games as a kinky medium.

Queer Effervescence and Fragile Platforms

As the source of many questions and disruptions, queerness is destined to be fragile. Ahmed (2014) writes that queerness is imbued with fatalism as we learn 'making from breaking.' The perception of queerness as 'self-shattering' is deeply ingrained in the mindset of queer individuals – queer endeavours are expected to fail and lead to misery, loss and suffering, which fulfils the morbid assumption that these are the only logical outcomes of a queer life. This argument originates in Ahmed's (2010) pursuit of unhappiness, another queer feeling that resists the concealing of inequalities and oppression of marginalised individuals through happiness. At the risk of being judged and cast aside, nurturing 'bad feelings' is sometimes the only way to escape the dogma of the hetero-norm. Neoliberalism antagonises queers, migrants, feminists, and other 'affect aliens' who resist the illusion of happiness through their fighting of sexism, racism and xenophobia.

Along the same lines of Halberstam's embrace of queer failure, Ahmed argues that it is only through the rejection of happiness that we can explore and experience 'how structures get under our skin' (216) and build resistance strategies. Unhappiness then becomes a tool of political will and freedom, and a starting point to cultivate other types of negative feelings and practices, such as clumsiness, which

enables us to reflect upon our exclusion of fragile bodies that cannot move in ‘straight’ lines.

GRYM embodies queer fragility on several layers, the most obvious being the unstable bodies it choreographs on screen. The fighters’ bodies are often excessive, beautiful, unreliable, fake, deceitful and disappointing. They cannot deviate from the precoded moves that they have been initially given, and yet still manage to execute them in a hypnotic and unsettling manner – it shouldn’t be this easy to perform holds on an opponent, the latter shouldn’t spend so much time crashing on the floor and viewers shouldn’t comment on the fact that a character’s body ‘is so shiny and hot and . . . looks good knocked out’ (*Guys in Trouble* 2016). In this alarming dance of damage, GRYM knocks out conformist desires and impulse, and promotes ‘bad feelings.’ The muscled characters give a performance that is rigid and clumsy, showcasing bodies that are both unbreakable and worthless, puzzling mainstream gamers yet clearly arousing others.

GRYM is a fragile subculture. It has no academic definition, it branches out in many subgenres, and its popularity is not equal on all platforms. Indeed, some GRYM fans on deviant art have more followers than the actual creators of video content, and the Patreon websites of each channel are not as popular as their YouTube versions. The same goes for its audience: anonymous, it is unclear how many actually enjoy the content displayed and are ready to pay to make requests.

As GRYM’s main platform, YouTube plays a part in the community’s effervescence. YouTube is one of the most visited websites on the planet, with more than one billion users (Covington et al. 2016). A broadcast and learning platform, but also a media archive and a social network, it has become a significant site for participatory practices shaping the contemporary media landscape (Burgess and Green 2018, 5). However, the space for community formation that YouTube provides comes with its own limitations. Indeed, being primarily designed for broadcasting videos, YouTube does not allow as many social networking features than Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Interactions are often limited, and rarely exceed two or three exchanges between users (Rotman et al. 2009). Furthermore, YouTube’s layout remains chaotic, particularly in the comment section, which makes the following and moderation on any discussion thread difficult, and facilitates online trolling, abuse, racism, misogyny, and any other forms of hostile online discourse (Strangelove 2010). This has led mainstream media to portray YouTube as a toxic environment in which constructive conversations are made impossible.

As I proofread these lines, one of the channels of this Chapter – GyakuRyonaMale, has been shut down by YouTube (@GyakuRyonaMale 2022), allegedly for ‘nudity,’ and now has to recreate a new channel with new videos. This makes the referencing of a lot of these illustrations frustrating, as most links will not work, but it also reinforces this section’s main statement – GRYM is usually short-lived and difficult to archive.

However, YouTube hasn’t yet reached a point of no-return. It hasn’t been deserted nor lost its edge among young people, contrary to Facebook (Wagner and McLaughlin 2021). In many ways, YouTube hasn’t changed much, except

from the higher quality and widening uploading options, its format has remained the same. While Twitter has been partially taken over by celebrities and right-wing politicians and groups (Milmo 2021), and Facebook has seen a huge rise of ‘boomers’ amongst its users, YouTube remains an eclectic site where complex conversations are impossible. Overall, it is a resilient platform that is less subject to the evolution of its communities, mainly because these communities are primarily constituted elsewhere. In sum, YouTube’s paradox resides in its nature as a solid cyberspace hosting fragile connections.

Means of contact are limited on YouTube – most comments posted on videos are requests or praises of the videos themselves, and the space is not adapted for a more personal message or a question regarding the subculture. It is evident that priority is given to viewers and players who are willing to play with and pay admins to create a new video. At the time of writing, the GRYM subculture is arguably too niche, too fragile, and online content too scarce for a proper community to develop. Conversations below videos illustrate Rotan et al.’s observations in that they are usually brief and disjointed. It is also worth noting that admins (here GyakuRyonaMale admin) often engage unevenly with comments: constructed comments with praise were often answered with a sentence and a smiley, requests were often kindly dismissed or potentially considered, and general questions briefly answered:

Shas’O Swoll 6 years ago

Bane is my favourite character: Regular Bane Regime Bane Knightfall/Wrestler are my least favourite

GyakuRyonaMale

6 years ago

I never select Bane. So I don’t know the name of the costumes.

Shas’O Swoll 6 years ago

@GyakuRyonaMale The one you use in this video is the Knightfall Bane Regime Bane has orange pants and a weird mask on Wreslter bane wears a more normal mask/vest Regular Bane has a black vest and tubes sticking out of him

GyakuRyonaMale

6 years ago

@MO77H3W Ok, so Knightfall is my favorite. ^^ And I don’t like Regime costume.

(GyakuRyonaMale 2014)

Robert Hillman

2 months ago (edited)

Alpha is awesome. Love every inch of Alpha’s hot body as he toys with and destroys the victim’s body. Especially loved the low blow to Alpha’s mighty crouch followed by the attempted bearhug, That was hot. Would love to see more of Alpha in action.

GyakuRyonaMale

2 months ago
:D

(GyakuRyonaMale 2021b)

Juan Ponce

4 years ago
so hot. How do you make these videos?

GyakuRyonaMale

4 years ago

+Juan Ponce I rec video games.

Juan Ponce4 years ago

+GyakuRyonaMale do you know how they make these videos? what software or type of video games?

vicsscissors1 year ago

Is the wrestling move at 4:45 on the WWE2K18? Great action in your vds.

GyakuRyonaMale

1 year ago

I can't say.

(GyakuRyonaMale 2015)

Requests on more recent videos tend to be ignored, mostly because these have to be directed to the admin's Patreon website. Overall, GyakuRyonaMale's admins is evidently reluctant to substantially engage with most comments, probably because of a lack of time and a privileged focus on their Patreon. A similar dynamic operates in the Guys in Trouble and Defeated Men channels, answers are short and follow-up questions often remain unanswered, at the exception of a rare exchange between Defeated Men and Guys in Trouble admins, in which the latter praises the former's video, which leads to a short exchange between the two and one of the only examples of two channel admins publicly 'conversing':

*Guys in Trouble*1 year ago (edited)

No doubt that this is one of the best gyaku ryona video that you can find on You Tube. Congratulations! Beautiful work!!

Defeated Men

1 year ago

Thank you! Your videos are amazing too!

(Defeated Men 2019b)

As hinted at the beginning of this section, these channels' Twitter accounts, Patreons, and Discord channels are not followed as much. Additionally, their popularity outside of YouTube is not proportional – GyakuRyonaMale is less followed on Twitter than Guys in Trouble. Most tweets usually provide links to the videos or

images that have been edited, but receive significantly less reaction, a discrepancy that highlights GRYM's necessary reliance on visual materials.

Mostly, GRYM is not interactive outside of requests and online matches. The created cyberspace is a complex platform where intimate desire and fetish are shared, without enabling strong ties to form. There is almost a paradoxical tension between the peculiarity and intimacy of the image shown, and the physical and emotional gap that remains between its members. As a result, GRYM's online space is volatile and conversations are short:

The Beast from within 7 months ago

Thank you. I thought you left.

Defeated Men from 7 months ago Still around :) Got more vids planned

The Beast from within 7 months ago

Yay

...

OvErWAtcH iS dEaD 7 months ago

Also you're the best gyaku ryona channel. Screw the other guy who can't seem to ever keep his channel for more than a month

Defeated Men 7 months ago Thank you but no need to start drama with other gyaku ryona channels. There's already too few as is.

(Defeated Men 2019a)

The first conversation illustrates recurrent comments from users, sometimes asking if the admin is 'okay,' or noticing a long absence. This is mainly due to the fact that a lot of GRYM channels are temporary, and then deleted because no longer updated, which makes the archiving of GRYM videos even more difficult. Thus, the few gatekeepers of this subculture are both isolated and vulnerable to external constraints, which explains the occasional wish to step back from this time-consuming activity. Viewers are often left in the dark about upcoming updates, since most channels' means of communication are video uploads – admins never film themselves to check in with their subscribers, viewers and followers can only further communication through the release of a new video. In an era when the most insignificant update is advertised and relayed to death, GRYM fashionably goes against the grain by nurturing one-sidedness that ironically reflects the fights it stages.

Every component of the GRYM subculture is fragile. Channels are expected to shut down, marked by a 'queer fatality,' and fragmented social interactions. Admins are also susceptible to stop their activity at any time, contributing to the effervescent nature of their relationship with viewers. The source of erotic pleasure might be cut off without warning and disappear in the dark corners of YouTube in a matter of seconds. The pleasure derived from these videos belongs to the realms and fantasy, impossible to reproduce in our daily lives, or re-enact in the flesh. In sum, GRYM is already broken and fragmented. It is barely a subculture, scattered on different websites with barely any interaction. It stems from problematic aesthetics which have yet to be addressed and navigated more clearly.

Unknown to most, cumbersome to research, and as the next sections show, hated by many, it forms a fragile ensemble of disjointed channels, keeping together a small heterogeneous crowd until the final gong.

Failing Fighting Game Culture

Fighting game culture is now old enough to amass its fair share of rags to riches stories. These are rarely relayed through the traditional media, one must go on dedicated YouTube channels, forum threads, or ask around in game tournaments to learn about them. As a newcomer to this community, I will start this section with two separate tales of famous players who stood out to me for different reasons, and reflect upon the growing complexity of fighting game culture.

The first tale is that of a player called Qudans, who became famous in 2005 for winning EVO, a major Esport tournament, on *Tekken Tekken Tag Tournament* by defeating his opponents mercilessly, one by one. Yet, it is because of his aching wrists that Qudans became a legend: as a result of his intense gaming practice, the champion had to take a break from playing with the usual pro-player pads but still took the crown of the Electric Cancel, another world-famous tournament, with a standard controller. Proving to everyone that he was the best, even with a much less ergonomic pad, Qudans shocked the community in 2007 by retiring from the gaming scene. Living from professional playing was almost impossible at the time, and Qudans decided to go to university and become a social worker.

A few years later, his father passes away and Qudans decides to start playing with his friends again, and then at the Green Arcade – a small and shabby, but legendary arcade room where the best Tekken players in South Korea train after work. To catch up with old rivals and newcomers, but above all the new mechanics implemented by the franchise, Qudans enters five years of intense practice (while working) and qualifies for EVO 2017. He is now considered old in comparison to his competitors and only a few people in the audience recognise him. Against all odds, Qudans wins Evo and returns to the front stage of the fighting scene, confirming his legendary status (TheGreatReview 2019a).

Fighting game tournaments are not without their twists and turns. The year following Qudans' return saw the consecration of an unexpected challenger called Rangchu, who has been playing Tekken for a while, but struggles with vital techniques such as sidestepping and spacing. Wishing to demarcate himself from the crowd, he decides to 'main' Panda, arguably one of the worst characters of the game because of his slow speed and gigantic hit box. Playing an unpopular character, Rangchu is harder to read, which enables him to surprise everyone and make a name for himself, often reaching the quarter finals of several competitions. In 2018, Rangchu, who had still never won any title, is invited to Tekken World Championship thanks to his regular high placement. There, he defeats both tournament favourite 'Knee' and previously mentioned and defending champion Qudans in the finals, an incredible accomplishment. For the first time in Tekken history, the one to beat is a panda (TheGreatReview 2019b).

Grasping the stakes behind each of Qudans, Rangchu and many other world-class players' fight demands and understanding of the tenets of fighting culture game, one actually needs to spend time learning about game mechanics, practice, but also digging into the archives of past tournaments to gain awareness of the power dynamics between world-class players. Growing exponentially, fighting game culture now encompasses more than 30 years of gaming and competition, and is governed by a set of key principles. Todd Harper (2014) identifies three core aspects of competitive play – play practice, normative play and social play.

Play practice refers to 'how games are actually played' (6) – in fighting games, a player is expected to be skilled and competitive, be it 'against the computer or against another person' (14). In tournaments, skills are displayed through the use of special moves, attacks, and defensive acts that are difficult to perform, and by the execution of these moves in difficult circumstances. The same goes when a player executes a simple, but smart, move granting them a win in dire straits. Such display will receive 'accolades and cheering from the crowd' (41), which, above all, reward players for their alertness.

Normative play refers to 'how players feel games should be played,' and to 'social contexts,' 'norms,' 'cultural,' and 'contextual factors that guide thinking about how the ideal experience ought to be' (6). Finally, social play is about 'how players play together,' how it incorporates 'aspects of both play practice and normative play' and how 'they engage in the culture of gameplay together' (6). As such, fighting game culture follows a cycle consisting of players displaying different gameplay styles, which are in turn selected and validated by the audience, and then reproduced and tweaked by players. Never static, it evolves through both its audience and players, and promises many more years of entertainment.

In this context, fighters all share something in common: their fights have been impressive, tense, and accompanied by the screams of the audience. No matter how much new players and game instalments alter social play, their stories need one essential feature – 'drama' (42). In order for a fight to be dramatic, players need to be highly skilled and the resolution unpredictable. In Harper's words, the more 'technical the play, the more fantastic the footwork, and the more close the shave, the greater the crowd's sense of drama and enjoyment' (42). This explains the popularity of balanced fights amongst the community. Fighting is all about the tension, both parties will strive to win until the very end, even when in a bad position.

In comparison, GRYM's reliance on an 'active' character punishing his 'passive' opponent strongly contrasts its dynamism of play with that of a regular fight. GRYM therefore radically destabilises this notion of play practice. GRYM fighters often use the same combination of holds over and over until the opponent's life bar is depleted, in opposition to having both players/characters aiming to win. Given that the moves are often relatively simple, anyone can 'perform' GRYM, upending hierarchical notions of skill and improvement. Consequently, GRYM also runs counter to normative play, as it provides an experience that is at the opposite of 'ideal' for the fighting game community. Along the same lines, these videos promote a form of social play that is dissident and holds an awkward

position within gaming culture. With its many knock-outs, close ups on the fighters' bodies and heavy use of slow-motion, GRYM's first and main queer trait is its celebration of failure through its refusal to assert one fighter's superior skills, and its inevitably disappointing result – a loss, or a hollow win. Indeed, losing on purpose is usually condemned in competitive gaming, and winning against a motionless doll is not worthy of mention. In this way, GRYM embodies a type of failure that is undesirable, a queer failure.

At first glance, however, failure in games seems only natural. It is a core element of most games' mechanics which maintains the necessary balance, in conjunction with success between challenge and entertainment. Jesper Juul (2013, 5) argues that 'players like to fail, but not too much.' According to him, this contradiction stems from the tension between two separate, but also potentially superimposed perspectives on games: 'a goal oriented perspective wherein players want to win, and an aesthetic perspective wherein players prefer games with the right amount of challenge and variation' (Juul 2009). Juul concludes that the most important issue is not the nature of the punishment, but the consequences of the failure. Taking the example of casual games, he explains their success by 'a sparing use of setback punishment,' meaning that players rarely have to replay an entire game sequence in case of failure. Hence, 'players still feel responsible for failing, but they are less likely to feel stuck in the game' and failure is less perceived as an emotionally negative event. Thus, Juul considers failure a necessary counterpart to winning as it needs to create a fragile balance with success in order to secure the entertainment of the player. Yet, he does not read failure as a goal in itself, but only as a consequence.

Standing in dialogue with Juul, Halberstam (2011) argues that success (imposed by ruling groups) is tied up with 'advancement, capital accumulation, family, ethical conduct and hope' (89). On the other hand, he indicates that these objectives are much more difficult to achieve for queer individuals whose modes of common sense are often already perceived as counterhegemonic. They are more at risk (safety, homelessness, mental health, wealth) leading to the 'association of failure with nonconformity, anti-capitalist practices, nonreproductive life styles, negativity, and critique' (89). Thus, Halberstam takes a different approach and argues that failure can be approached as a 'positive' concept regardless of its ties to success. Indeed, he reads failure as a queer art, a 'style' and a 'way of life' (2011, 2) that rejects normative and neoliberal values requiring us to be healthy, wealthy, happy and entertained.

As previously mentioned, Halberstam relates their work to the antisocial turn in queer theory 'as exemplified by the work of Bersani [and] Edelman' (109) but criticises its limited focus and considers Muñoz's work one of the most convincing accounts of queer failure. This is because the latter's concept of a queer utopia promotes the rejection of pragmatism and the refusal of social norms, without dismissing queer figures that might not follow an anti-futuristic gay canon. Overall, Halberstam calls for more political negativity that involves failure, and which promises 'to make a mess, to fuck shit up, to be loud, unruly, impolite, to breed resentment, to bash back, to speak up and out, to disrupt, assassinate, shock, and annihilate' (110). Read from this perspective, failure becomes an escape from

heterosexist discipline and protects us from an orderly, predictable and scripted future. More importantly, Halberstam argues that in several circumstances failing, may in fact offer more ‘creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world’ (2, 3). As such, failure is something queers do well and even embrace, as it promises so much more than grim scenarios of unreachable monetary success.

Drawing upon Halberstam’s queer failure, Bonnie Ruberg (2019) focuses on the role it plays in video games and the gaming community. More specifically, Ruberg reads ‘fun’ as a defining principle of video game as a medium within the community that has long been a guiding principle for game designers (163). Using the example of #GamerGate, they note that central to its discourse is the idea that games need to be fun and should not be ‘subject to socially engaged critique.’ More generally, while fun is subjective, Ruberg contends that it is also ‘cultural, structural, [and] gendered.’ According to them, video games, reflecting society more broadly, tell us to have fun during leisure time (167). This ‘hegemony of play’ and ‘fun’ is dictated by a ‘system of ‘conventional wisdom’ about who plays video games and what players expect from a successful game’ (164).

Consequently, fun silences minorities and promotes isolationist and ‘territorial behaviours from within privileged spaces of the community’ (Ruberg 2015, 115). GRYM doesn’t celebrate failure as the opposite of success. On the contrary, failure becomes the focal point of GRYM videos. It is not a by-product, but the essence of a GRYM fight. The repeated knocks out operate on simultaneous levels; they reject the culture which enables fighting games to thrive, but also epitomise a queer dynamic between the two characters, performing alternative forms of fun.

Queer Active Passivity

Through the lens of queer failure and active passivity, GRYM appears as an aberration to fighting game culture, as it shares and promotes videos in which the same button combinations are entered in a mechanical manner. Devoid of spectacle, these fail to impress. Thwarting expectations, they remain disruptive anomaly amongst the weekly stream of extraordinary tournament fights and queers the power dynamic that is usually expected from fighting games. GRYM rewrites play practice and builds upon a new set of norms with which viewers interact. It mocks and parodies fighting in games through its refusal of key aspects of fighting games – knockouts, perfect wins, skills display, while at the same time stripping away any of the stakes that would make them valuable.

GRYM’s predictable structure emphasises the helplessness and passivity of the victim. No matter what the viewers request, the winner is always the one mentioned in the title. There is nothing to do but watch passively, the fight has already been written. Reminiscing on some of the discussion tackled in Chapter 3, Kyle Bohunicky and Caleb Milligan (2019) explore queer passivity through the subversive concept of lexigraphing, a term that is derived from the ‘lexigraph,’ coined by Garrett Stewart (2007) in its description of paintings of written text that combine the act of looking and reading, and in which lexigraphs ‘do the graphic work of wording’ (330). Bohunicky and Milligan (2019) apply lexigraphing in the context

of gamespace, focusing on walking simulators. They argue that lexigraphing situates itself between the writerly and the readerly.

Players are often put in a writerly relationship with the game text – they alter a precoded product. Mortensen and Jørgensen (2020) stress that all cybertexts are not necessarily video games, they argue that the centrality given to a randomiser (the rolling of a dice, the player's interaction, and so on) makes games overlap with cybertexts. The unpredictability of the human player/reader render games a precoded medium that are only partially pre-determined before interaction (Wirman 2009). As a result, each playthrough gives birth to a unique experience as the set of signs is transformed through the player's reading, and each action forms a plot that will, even in the most linear games, be and feel unique to the observer. Thus, it is understandable why playing has often been approached as active, writerly process.

Nevertheless, games such as walking simulators mostly ask the player to walk and read. Bohunicky and Milligan suggests that this 'collage' (61) of reading material which limits greatly the player's action, cannot be encapsulated by the understanding of play as writing or reading. They read lexigraphing as a hybrid and 'queer strategy of play' in walking simulators that allows for reflection upon in-game actions and their reading/writing ability. Starting with the binary premise that writing is active and reading passive, they present walking simulators as interactive experiences which promote active passivity, understood as 'a state of performing acts commonly considered to be passive, or paradoxically *inactive*' (59). Walking in games positions the player as a 'collector' or 'conduit' rather than 'author' (67), it is both paradoxical and contradictory as it is a doing that rejects gaming as an allegory of our world; as a space for action and production. As argued in Chapter 3, simply walking in video games queers game space. It comes as no surprise that Bohunicky and Milligan also draw on Halberstam's (2011, 129) understanding of passivity as queer resistance, 'one that does not speak in the language of action and momentum but instead articulates itself in terms of evacuation, refusal, passivity, unbecoming, unbeing.'

As the conscious refusal to engage with hegemonic pursuits, active passivity manifests beyond the lexigraphing of walking simulators. Walking in fighting games is often restricted, or part of a strategy such as spacing or dodging. It is therefore difficult to tackle walking in GRYM videos the same ways it is tackled in walking simulators. However, while lexigraphing isn't well suited for a queer analysis of GRYM, active passivity is demonstrated by both sides of the fight staged: the victim stays immobile while the torturer performs the same scripted choreography. The precoded cybertext is read and played, and yet, never fully fulfilled.

Active passivity is at the core of most GRYM videos in which one fighter mechanically 'tortures' his ragdoll opponent. Three of the most popular videos that were posted on the now defunct GyakuRyonaMale channel all showcase King, the wrestler from *Tekken*, performing specific holds on other characters, for a duration varying between 5 and 8 minutes. These videos were all watched more than 25,000 times. The first video, titled 'Tekken 6 – King Bridge on some male

characters – Gyaku Ryona Male on male (gay oriented),’ and the third ‘Tekken 6 – King grabs Jin (VS mode) – Gyaku Ryona Male on male (gay oriented)’ all display the usual game’s features – the life bar, the stop clock, the round announcements and conclusions. The second video ‘Tekken 6 – Octopus & Abdominal stretch on male characters – Gyaku Ryona Male on male (gay oriented),’ as its title indicates, solely concentrates on the replaying of a single grab (the abdominal grab), only once, before switching victims.

These differences slightly matter in terms of the narrative that unfolds, and some might say that the second video immediately skips to the ‘good bits,’ but the disruptive nature of these three videos remains the same – they all focus on a particular move repeatedly throughout the many rounds shown. While these videos cannot be watched anymore, others have tried to reupload, or recreate similar scenario, favouring grabs and holds (RS Male Ryona 2021).

As such, active passivity is showcased on both sides of a GRYM fight. King’s victims are notably passive in their nonsensical stillness. Nothing rational through the normative gaming culture lens justifies letting a character being thrown around, and then broadcasting it on a YouTube channel. The victim’s passivity is too pointless to be shared, too futile to be noticed, and yet, it sits at the centre of GRYM’s dynamics.

The same goes for the torturer with his mechanical and repetitive fighting moves. More robotic than ‘active,’ the torturer mechanically repeats the same moves, a routine which wouldn’t be possible in a regular fight: to be a good player, the best is to be unpredictable, to surprise your opponent so that they cannot foment a counter. This is of course invalidated in GRYM videos, as the opponent is mostly motionless.

The result of this one-sided relationship is uncanny: the variety of narratives and outcomes coded in the game’s cybertext are mostly overlooked as only one issue is possible. GRYM challenges the purpose of fighting games, which have been primarily designed to provide dramatic and tensed moments, and give players a learning curve to become better fighters. Thus, GRYM offers a platform for a gameplay that shouldn’t be. The game’s mechanics are turned upside down and the fight rendered pointless for any common viewer, and yet, the videos last for a minimum of five long minutes. In this, GRYM queers the arena by deconstructing its defining features and reassembling it in an uncanny manner.

Similar to just walking, GRYM’s active passivity queers the game space by entirely dismissing it. Space is often restricted in fighting games and remains secondary, but is still fully part of fighting game mechanics in one way or another. While neutral stages are often chosen in fighting game competition, stage interactions are often an entertaining part of offline playing. For instance, when reaching the limit of a stage characters in 3-D fighting games can be forced to side-step, or even suffer extra damage if projected against it. Stages can also be ‘infinite’ or can implement the dreaded ring outs which occur when a character falls off a stage, and thereby immediately loses the round. Some stages are interactive, include breakable elements and can be divided into several sub-stages. Franchises have adopted different strategies throughout the year, *Street Fighter* has no stage

interactions while *DOA* or *Injustice* have chosen more spectacular paths, putting their characters in increasingly extreme situation, such as falling from one loggia to another in a burning opera house or being captured by a pterodactyl.

GRYM videos rarely show stage interactions. Most of the chosen *Tekken* stages are neutral, and the video is often edited if a character must be moved in a specific position. The focus is clearly on the characters' bodies, and *Defeated Men's* closeups, for instance, relegate the stage to an anecdotal role. Hence, the designed space is 'wasted,' along with the variety of characters' animations. The combinations of pre-determined coding and players' choices are reduced to the minimal – the characters' outfits and the chosen performance of the torturer. Once again, the cybertext isn't really read nor fully written. Through its active passivity, GRYM videos queer the fight, the fighting and the arena of the games it uses as platforms. Subverting the already deviant active passivity of walking simulator by simply not 'doing much' in fighting games, GRYM commits a crime against mainstream gaming culture.

Kinking the Round

At first sight, GRYM represents a sadistic and hypermasculine re-enactment of the punishment of weak masculinity, and possibly perpetuates prejudice and discrimination through the hierarchisation of body image and gender dynamics. In this, GRYM's use of fighting games is reminiscent of many of the narratives displayed in Pro Wrestling and MMA, which both rely on the exacerbation of the gender binary and use imagery and narratives of excessive violence (Brent and Kraska 2013; Downey 2007). Pro Wrestling in particular, presents an apparent lack of rules and resonates with 'idealised visions of gritty, working-class (American) masculinity' (Channon and Matthews 2015, 938), and includes 'dangerous, cruel, and humiliating stunts' that are 'inextricably linked to the "manliness"' (Soulliere 2006, 64) of the wrestlers, who in being so masculine, are 'entitled to destroy anything in their path, whether it is an innocent bystander or private property' (73). In addition to the many debates questioning the definition of legitimate sports, Pro Wrestling situates the audience in a hypermasculine fantasy space where only the strongest prevail.

Characterised by aggressive pre-match interviews, spectacular effects and *mise-en-scene*, televised MMA and Pro Wrestling represent one of the pinnacles of hegemonic masculinity onscreen. Paradoxically, the more obvious the display of muscularity and strength, the more scandalous the slippage into homoeroticism. Sports are inherently homosocial, and primarily rely on the demonstration of self-worth, friendship and recognition between male athletes. This validation process reaches peak homosociality in contact sports, when a fighter's worth and manhood can only be asserted by facing another man. This has led academics (Woods 1987; Pronger 1990) to label fighting sports as an acceptable form of gay foreplay for straight people and fighters as erotic accomplices in an arena where women are absent or relegated to decorative roles. This intense porosity between homosociality and eroticism articulates a general anxiety that remains

characterised by homosexual panic in the current discourse surrounding sports culture (Hammarén and Johansson 2014) which harshly punishes any erotic slippage in an environment loaded with homosocial desire and intimacy.

Echoing Eve Sedgwick's (1990) seminal work on homosociality in English literature, this tension has led queer culture to reclaim contact sports as a primary site of erotica since the early days of the culture industries. For instance, Greco-Roman wrestling has often served as a strong source of inspiration for gay fantasies, such as the statuesque 1940s and 1950s early pornography (Joe 2011), available in physique magazines (also called beefcake magazines), one of the most popular being 'Physique Pictorial,' the title in which Tom of Finland first began publishing his drawings (Hooven 1992). While these digests quickly displayed explicit pictures, erotic wrestling remained a recurring theme (Smurthwaite 2016). The clash of two male bodies, exposed from different angles, was enough to recreate elements of a homoerotic narrative and, ultimately, serves as a foreplay of and/or metaphor for sexual encounters. Censorship, Macarthyism and a post-war anxiety in the United States regarding masculinity and gender roles meant that discussions (not to mention illustrations) of homosexual desire were in danger of being censored – and their producers prosecuted (Grossman 2016). Thus, the slippage between homosociality and homoeroticism – between sport and sex – worked both ways, allowing gay men to eroticise that which was ostensibly straight, while allowing the producers to maintain a veneer of heteromascularity in the eyes of the censors.

As one of the many digital successors of the physique pictorials, GRYM is far from being the most popular subgenre to focus on fighting sports. The internet has enabled the start of an implicit dialogue between new forms of contact sports and queer erotica. The emergence of squash matches in Pro Wrestling coincided with the explosion of internet pornography (Joe 2011) and new wrestling videos were produced to cater to viewers with a taste for erotic wrestling. This new wave of cyber eroticism led to the creation of Yahoo groups and social networks (meetfighter.com, globalfight.com and bearhugger.net) that enable members to discuss, share content and also meet to organise bouts themselves. At the more commercial end of the cyber erotic spectrum, erotic channels such as BGEast and porn channels such as Naked Kombat offer viewers long and sweaty bouts in which wrestlers score points by performing holds, humiliating their opponent by groping and spanking them. At the end of a Naked Kombat match, the fighter who earns the most points 'owns' the loser and does whatever he wishes with him. Most of the time, and conforming to dominant narratives of gay male pornography (in which 'tops' are considered more masculine and 'manly' than 'bottoms') this involves penetrating the 'loser' anally. While Naked Kombat does not include squash matches *per se*, it displays several one-sided fights, making the audience wonder whether wrestlers really fight for domination or thoroughly enjoy the role they have been given at the beginning.

These one-sided fights are comparable to Pro Wrestling 'Squash Matches,' which are unbalanced Pro Wrestling matches in which one performer dominates the other and quickly defeats him with virtually no resistance. Squash Matches

became increasingly popular in Pro Wrestling at the beginning of the 1990s. They are often short, and it is common practice for the winner – the heel – to spend some time torturing the loser – the jobber – and performing increasingly humiliating moves. Most of the time, a squash match either sheds a positive light on the heel, or reinforces his position as a villain, by presenting him as invincible. Heels in squash matches are often established wrestlers and use these instances as opportunities to create and perform signature moves.

Websites such as Naked Kombat openly associate the rhetoric of the Squash Match with sex and re-enact a hierarchy of gender norms that can be traced back to Greco-Roman Antiquity. Indeed, directly associating the outcome of the fight with sex echoes the rigid and engendered ‘social hierarchy in which the penetrating phallus¹ functioned as the primary signifier of cultural privilege and power’ in Greco-Roman Antiquity (Vorster 2006, 436). Back then, each sexual contact was said to signify and reinforce the male hierarchy in the mode of domination and submission, ‘requiring activeness for the penetrating phallus, passivity for the penetrated’ (447). Antiques representing men fighting and wrestling can, for example, be read as metaphors for, and illustrations of, such a hierarchy.

This is evident in GRYM, which often seem to allude to that penetrative hierarchy. In ‘Bass in action! Dead Or alive 6 - Gay/Male on male fighting’ (Gyaku Ryona Male 2022) the emphasis is put on Bass’s signature piledriver. After having grabbed his opponent’s waist in the air, Bass smashes him to the ground, leaving him face down, arse up. The video consists in a succession of piledrivers and similar holds. The video unsurprisingly heavily relies on wrestling aesthetics: both characters ‘are’ Bass with different outfits, and the stage is a wrestling ring. Once the video is finished, the winning Bass (an impressive five rounds to nil) points to the sky, after having relentlessly smashed his opponent to the ground, and grabbed in almost all the possible ways. He and his defeated alter ego become penetrator and penetrated.

There is, however, one significant difference between online wrestling porn and GRYM – the former usually provide some sort of graphic sexual climax while the latter denies it. Despite their occasional display of both smooth and hairy chests, GRYM videos lack explicit and graphic images, and are likely to frustrate and disappoint aficionados of contemporary gay erotica and pornography. Unsurprisingly, GRYM isn’t part of ‘mainstream’ gay or even animated/computerised erotica as its failing extends to its libidinality, it is devoid of any of its canonical traits, such as ‘cum shot[s]’ (Day 2009, 3) or the ‘penetration of feminised orifices by masculinised penises, fingers, tongues, and other objects’ (1). GRYM might be better understood as a queering of pornography and erotica, it severely lacks a climax and explores ‘ambiguous’ (Hernandez and Tester 2004, 2) ways of representing sexual acts. It is ‘situated in the spaces where sex scenes twist, alter, and remove elements essential to the formulas of the mainstream’ (3).

Hidden in plain sight, GRYM’s ‘sexual’ content recalls Krzywinska’s (2012) argument about the ‘misappearance of sex’ in video games according to which sex acts are often relegated to cutscenes which strongly lack realism, often leading to disappointment. Consequently, Krzywinska argues that we should not only

consider ‘traditional’ representations and narratives of sex, but also investigates how game mechanics can be read as sex. She addresses the erotic dimension of play through philosopher Jean-François Lyotard’s (1974) term of ‘libidinal economy.’ Defining it as ‘the psychic and emotional energy produced by drives’ (2012, 113), Krzywinska focuses on the ‘relationship between the player and the game’ and how ‘game designers deploy a large variety of devices to please, tease, and excite the player.’ Starting from this concept, Krzywinska studies the ways in which games can be libidinal. She points out that actions in games only become meaningful and ‘potent’ through the gamers’ ‘imagination.’ Taking the example of the erotic potential of Altair’s physique in *Assassin’s Creed²* (Ubisoft Montréal 2007), Krzywinska argues that Altair’s assassination scenes can be read as erotic instances. With his feline agility, jumping from one roof to another, but also ‘steadily weighted,’ he is ‘exotic and distanced’ and only ‘briefly ours to hold.’ Relying on the scenes’ aesthetics, Krzywinska suggests that there is something sensual and sexual in the penetration of Altair’s blade and the meticulous closing of his victim’s eyes.

On a similar note, GRYM’s uncanniness also applies to its erotic content. *Defeated Men’s* videos, which are easily the most erotically driven of the three channels with their many close-ups and removal of gameplay features draw attention to the limits of the game’s graphics, by accidentally allowing viewers to witness visual glitches. As such, in ‘[Gyaku Ryona | Male Ryona] Heihachi KO’d By Enemies – Tekken 7,’ body parts are often superimposed – Hwoarang’s foot in Heihachi’s face, Lars’ hand ‘in’ Heihachi’s throat and so on. Although potentially sexy, viewers are undeniably transported to another realm in which pixels interpenetrate in sometimes disturbing ways.

GRYM’s game mechanics can be read as sex. (Hyper)muscular characters fuel the player’s imagination, following a powerful and erotic choreography and using their bodies coming into contact to serve a sadomasochistic fetish. Similar to Altair, the controlled character (or the opponent) is literally and figuratively ours (or the computer’s) to hold. With its absence of literal sexual content, GRYM moves away from ‘acceptable’ game sex, it is not ‘wrapped in the silks of romance’ and ‘activity motivator’ (117), nor praise a conventionally satisfying ending.

GRYM’s failure to be fun and competitive extends to the core of its subversive nature – eroticism. Despite their display of conventional body types, GRYM’s YouTube videos stage queer sex. They are bizarre, boring, and bewildering. They oppose both heteronormative and homonormative expectations, combining failure and eroticism, and celebrate the undesirable. And yet, GRYM manages to hit a sweet spot amongst a small, but growing population of internet users, and thrive on fragile foundations.

Concluding Thoughts – Queer Labour, Monetisation, and Interactions

GRYM can be identified as a site of ludic kink which involves diverse manifestations of queer failure – from the promotion of weak masculinity to the cultivation

of loss, and from the lack of skilful playing to the lack of a substantial or cohesive community. It also touches upon tensions between the practical requirements of directly participating in a niche subculture that is barely surviving online, and other life commitments, highlighting the fragility of online culture in and for the margins. Most visibly, it embodies an alternative yet public vision of sex and eroticism that pushes the boundaries of queer desire, and flusters many queer viewers (but isn't that the point of queer sex?). Repeating the words of Ruberg mentioned in this book's introduction according to which all games are fair territory for exploring queerly, I add that all games are fair fighting pits to think eros differently.

Many other aspects of GRYM have been necessarily left unaddressed in this chapter. For example, mixed *Gyaku Ryona*, or 'lesbian' *Gyaku Ryona* is also relevant to this discussion, but the overall gender dynamics are different, and the disturbance does not operate in the same manner. For instance, the hypersexualisation of women in fighting games is an additional obstacle to the disruptive potential to the reading of GRYW (*Gyaku Ryona* Women) as immediately queer, yet there is undeniably potential to advocate for queer desire, notably through the reliance of 'FemDom' aesthetics. Furthermore, there is room for non-binary and queer identities in GRY(Q?) videos, despite the lack of representation in current fighting games, as mods, character creation modes and *mugen* allow for them to be represented.

Another aspect is the work put into the design and production of GRYM videos. The ones selected for this chapter only use light mods to reinforce the fight's erotic dimension, such as the implementation of new 'outfits,' the removal of clothes from characters, or the addition of 'sexy' underwear. Still, queer modders directly contribute to queerness in gaming, 'both narratively and mechanically' (Welch 2018) and express a wish to extend their vision on a given title.

As Galloway (2014) argues, modding becomes political when it resists the 'powerful normative or normalizing processes' embodied by video games, which are ultimately 'embedded with ideological forces [as they are] products themselves of capitalist enterprise,' changing their algorithms and structure, modding can, therefore, become a political practice and a reappropriation of 'physical capitalistic space' (Lauteria 2012). As such, modders engage in activities that are transformative, sometimes serve the interests of games' developers and editors, but are rarely taken seriously (De Kosnik 2013). Just like transformative writing, modding is an 'affectively necessary labour,' which celebrates a future-oriented act, pushes for more diverse productions, as they reimagine, reinterpret and rewrite the original material, just like fan-fiction writers.

Queer modding in GRYM videos is more or less discrete, *GyakuRyonaMale* barely use any mods or change the visual settings of the *Tekken* games, while *Defeated Men* put a lot of work in their editing (*Defeated Men* 2019c) and use various mods, such as a Free Camera Mod. As the name suggests, a free camera enables you to change the angle of a game, and explore the space that was initially forbidden to players, in this case, the stage and point of view of a fight. Returning to this chapter's argument about GRYM's bizarre eroticism, *Defeated Men*'s

videos are unusual to say the least, as it consists in showing a pixelated body in underwear being abused, from a first-person point of view, and many different angles. And yet, against all odds, these queer mods contribute to the diversification of erotic entertainments, and on a publicly accessible platform.

What is more, is that queer modding is a form of affective labour. It is indeed no secret that GRYM channels admins enjoy the process and content of the videos they make, GyakuRyonaMale's admin, for instance, openly indicates in the channel's description that he 'love[s] to be victim of grabs/throws/hug in fighting games.' Libidinally tied to their creation, modders illustrate the ephemerality of the delicate balance between queer labour and practical constraints. Indeed, this queer enterprise comes at a cost as maintaining a channel can be time-consuming. One way to remedy this is to start a Patreon, a membership platform that enables users to support artists and makers by paying a certain amount of money in exchange of an original production. At the moderate cost of \$5 per month, Defeated Men allowed its users to request one video monthly. Unfortunately, this didn't prevent the channel from being inactive, as its admin posted on his Patreon website that he would stop making videos for personal reasons. Resorting to Patreon introduces a new dynamic in GRYM which makes it comparable to DIY queer culture, events and performances, in which monetisation and queerness meet, despite being at opposite ends, because for the show to go on, some material practicalities are necessary.

This poses relevant questions regarding the boundaries, practice and observation of live playing between members of the community. As an observer of this niche group, I didn't have nor sought access to behind-the-scenes moments between GRYM players. For instance, the creator of one of the biggest GRYM YouTube channels openly invites people to add them on the Playstation Network in order to 'play' online. Matches can be recorded and made available for everyone, if both players wish. In this instance, Gay Ryona becomes the means for two players to consume this fetish at the same time in a different location, almost becoming a surrogate for a sexual intercourse. Here, the erotic contract between the two users is undeniable, and the selected fighting game becomes a means for this to be played out. Additionally, it is not impossible that some players deliberately enjoy the GRYM dynamics of unilateral loss while playing online, with or without being aware of this subcommunity. This would entail an entirely different set of disturbances in the fighting game community: we could even think of it as a way to protest.

A more thorough study of GRYM players' self-defined sexual orientation, fetish and fantasy could also lead to relevant discussions. As aforementioned, wrestling aesthetics can be dangerously permeable. It is not uncommon to cross Pro-Wrestling fans who have a *keen* interest in seeing wrestlers trapped in holds. What is more, 'real-life' GRYM fights do exist, a few social media websites such as *Global Fight* or increasingly popular *Meetfighters*, internet users around erotic wrestling. Having personally partaken in some of the forum discussions, but also met with some of the other users, I can confidently say that it is quite common for two members or more to organise a 'squash match,' or a 'give and take session,'

where roles are swapped in turns. Less choreographed and pristine than GRYM videos, these encounters can take a strong erotic turn, through a ‘naked round,’ the punishment of the loser, or a succession of victory poses. Sex is possible. Even better, it is often unclear whether ‘sex’ has happened or not.

I have referred to GRYM as a subculture, a small community, and a genre, but I probably shouldn’t have. GRYM is more of a libidinal leitmotif, a template that can be found on many platforms. It is a prime illustration of video game *détournement*, which creates, in typical queer fashion, effervescent space and time, where rules of play, but also interpersonal and sociological habits and customs, are in constant state of flux. The games are muddled, fragmented, erratic, spasmodic. They appeal to a few, disgust others, amuse most: GRYM is a kink. Kinky gaming reflects upon our understandings and misunderstandings of sex. It highlights how unsexy video games with sexual content can be and unearths the unsuspected pleasures they hide when we play them so wrong.

Notes

- 1 Here phallus and penis should be distinguished. While the same referent is at stake, the phallus, according to Halperin (2003) ‘betokens not a specific item of the male anatomy simpliciter but that same item taken under the description of a cultural signifier’ (164).
- 2 A game in which one must play an assassin called Altair who is repeatedly asked to kill specific people in the Holy Land during the Third Crusade.

Bibliography

- Ahmed, S. (2010) *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Available at: www.dukeupress.edu/the-promise-of-happiness (Accessed: 25 November 2021).
- Ahmed, S. (2014) ‘Fragility,’ *feministkilljoys*. Available at: <https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/06/14/fragility/> (Accessed: 25 November 2021).
- Bohunicky, K. and Milligan, C.A. (2019) ‘Reading, writing, lexicographing: Active passivity as queer play in walking simulators,’ *Press Start*, 5(2), p. 21.
- Brent, J.J. and Kraska, P.B. (2013) ‘“Fighting is the most real and honest thing”: Violence and the civilization/barbarism dialectic,’ *The British Journal of Criminology*, 53(3), pp. 357–377. doi:10.1093/bjc/azt001.
- Burgess, J. and Green, J. (2018) *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. Available at: www.wiley.com/en-gb/YouTube%3A+Online+Video+and+Participatory+Culture%2C+2nd+Edition-p-9780745660196 (Accessed: 25 November 2021).
- Channon, A. and Matthews, C.R. (2015) ‘“It is what it is”: Masculinity, homosexuality, and inclusive discourse in mixed martial arts,’ *Journal of Homosexuality*, 62(7), pp. 936–956. doi:10.1080/00918369.2015.1008280.
- Covington, P., Adams, J. and Sargin, E. (2016) ‘Deep neural networks for YouTube recommendations,’ in *Proceedings of the 10th ACM Conference on Recommender Systems. RecSys’16: Tenth ACM Conference on Recommender Systems*. Boston, MA: ACM, pp. 191–198. doi:10.1145/2959100.2959190.
- Day, A. (2009) ‘Feminism and pornography after the sex wars: Diversifying pornography’. Available at: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/61k265vv> (Accessed: 25 November 2021).

- De Kosnik, A. (2013) 'Fandom as free labor,' in Scholz, T. (ed.) *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Defeated Men (2019a) '[Gyaku Ryona | Male Ryona] Jin Kazama defeated by opponents (Jin x Jin),' *Tekken 7*. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=uhSoK5j_3qk&has_verified=1 (Accessed: 24 November 2021).
- Defeated Men (2019b) '[Gyaku Ryona | Male Ryona] king dominates Jin Kazama,' *Tekken 7*. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=eBUYGcI8laE&t=317s&has_verified=1 (Accessed: 23 November 2021).
- Defeated Men (2019c) '[Gyaku Ryona | Male Ryona] Heihachi KO'd by enemies,' *Tekken 7*. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=_WjfhgWgCEQ (Accessed: 23 November 2021).
- Downey, G. (2007) 'Producing pain: Techniques and technologies in no-holds-barred fighting,' *Social Studies of Science*, 37(2), pp. 201–226. doi:10.1177/0306312706072174.
- Galloway, A. (2014) 'Counter-gaming'. Available at: <http://cultureandcommunication.org/galloway/counter-gaming> (Accessed: 25 November 2021).
- Grossman, S. (2016) 'Masculinity, anxiety, and fear of the other in the age of Trump,' *Othering & Belonging Institute*. Available at: <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/masculinity-anxiety-and-fear-other-age-trump> (Accessed: 25 November 2021).
- Guys in Trouble (2016) 'Necalli Dominates All Male Characters - Street Fighter V - Necalli Win Pose'. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGbnyi3Lxj8> (Accessed: 5 April 2022).
- GyakuRyonaMale (2013) 'Tekken tag 2 – King: Special finish move (item move : belt) – Gyaku Ryona Male on male'. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=kkRtiCNV2U4 (Accessed: 22 November 2021).
- GyakuRyonaMale (2014) 'Injustice – Bane : 'Break the bat' & level transition on Batman (several costumes)'. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-oxhhBkR2s (Accessed: 18 November 2021).
- GyakuRyonaMale (2015) 'Smackdown vs raw 2010 – ballbusting on Cody Rhodes – Gyaku Ryona male on male (gay oriented)'. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=7qZYxvG-3Gc (Accessed: 23 November 2021).
- GyakuRyonaMale (2021a) 'PATREON REQUEST : Heihachi grabs King – Gyaku Ryona/ Male Ryona'. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=gq1J1SIVxos (Accessed: 18 November 2021).
- GyakuRyonaMale (2021b) 'WWE 2K20 – You will tap out for the Alpha – Gyaku Ryona/ Male Ryona'. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ac0Pqi_meak (Accessed: 23 November 2021).
- Gyaku Ryona Male (2022) 'Bass in action! Dead Or alive 6 - Gay/Male on male fighting'. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmsT2vor0j8> (Accessed: 5 April 2022).
- @GyakuRyonaMale (2022) 'Ban from youtube ! There is so my 1st video,' *Twitter*. Available at: <https://twitter.com/GyakuRyonaMale/status/1505174226755629056> (Accessed: 5 April 2022).
- Halberstam, J. (2011) *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Halperin, D.M. (2003) 'The normalization of queer theory,' *Journal of Homosexuality*, 45(2–4), pp. 339–343. doi:10.1300/J082v45n02_17.
- Hammarén, N. and Johansson, T. (2014) 'Homosociality: In between power and intimacy,' *SAGE Open*, 4(1). doi:10.1177/2158244013518057.
- Harper, T. (2014) *The Culture of Digital Fighting Games: Performance and Practice*. New York, NY: Routledge. Available at: www.routledge.com/The-Culture-of-Digital-Fighting-Games-Performance-and-Practice/Harper/p/book/9781138710115 (Accessed: 19 November 2021).

- Hernandez, M. and Tester, G. (2004) 'A work in progress: Doing gender and race in queer pornography,' in *American Sociological Association Annual Meeting*, San Francisco, CA.
- Hooven, V. II (1992) 'About Tom of Finland,' *Tom of Finland Foundation*. Available at: www.tomoffinland.org/about-tom-of-finland/ (Accessed: 25 November 2021).
- Joe (2011) 'History of gay porn, part I,' *The Closet Professor*, 7 September. Available at: <https://closetprofessor.com/2011/09/07/history-of-gay-porn-part-i/> (Accessed: 25 November 2021).
- Juul, J. (2009) 'Fear of failing? The many meanings of difficulty in video games,' in *The Video Game Theory Reader 2*. New York, NY: Routledge. Available at: www.jesperjuul.net/text/fearoffailing/ (Accessed: 19 November 2021).
- Juul, J. (2013) *The Art of Failure: An Essay on the Pain of Playing Video Games*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press (Playful Thinking).
- Krzywinska, T. (2012) 'The strange case of the disappearance of sex in videogames,' in Unger, A. and Fromme, J. (eds) *Computer Games and New Media Cultures: A Handbook of Digital Games Studies*. Heidelberg: Springer. Available at: <http://voyager.falmouth.ac.uk/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=366149> (Accessed: 25 November 2021).
- Lauteria, E. (2012) 'Ga(y)mer theory: Queer modding as resistance,' *Reconstruction*, 2(12).
- Liotard, J.-F. (1974) *Economie Libidinale*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.
- McLelland, M. (2005) 'The world of Yaoi: The internet, censorship and the global "boys love" fandom,' *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 23(1), pp. 61–77. doi:10.1080/13200968.2005.10854344.
- Merriam-Webster (2021) 'Definition of LEXIGRAPHY'. Available at: www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lexigraphy (Accessed: 19 November 2021).
- Milmo, D. (2021) 'Twitter admits bias in algorithm for rightwing politicians and news outlets,' *The Guardian*, 22 October. Available at: www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/oct/22/twitter-admits-bias-in-algorithm-for-rightwing-politicians-and-news-outlets (Accessed: 23 November 2021).
- Mizoguchi, A. (2003) 'Male-male romance by and for women in Japan: A history and the subgenres of "Yaoi" fictions,' *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal*, (25), pp. 49–75.
- Mortensen, T. and Jørgensen, K. (2020) *The Paradox of Transgression in Games*. London: Routledge.
- Pronger, B. (1990) *The Arena of Masculinity*. New York, NY: St Martin's Press. Available at: <https://us.macmillan.com/books/9781429934992/thearenaofmasculinity> (Accessed: 25 November 2021).
- Rotman, D., Goldbeck, J. and Preece, J. (2009) 'The community is where the rapport is – on sense and structure in the YouTube community,' in *Proceeding of the Fourth International Conference on Communities and Technologies. C&T'09*.
- RS Male Ryona (2021) '(Bara KumaRyona) King's bridge on shirtless Hwoarang. (male ryona/gyaku ryona)'. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYXEXvQ_uXU (Accessed: 5 April 2022).
- Ruberg, B. (2015) 'No fun: The queer potential of video games that annoy, anger, disappoint, sadden, and hurt,' *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 2(2), p. 108. doi:10.14321/qed.2.2.0108.
- Ruberg, B. (2019) *Video Games Have Always Been Queer*. New York, NY: NYU Press.
- Sanwa, M. (2013) 本当に正しいフェティシズム性的嗜好大事典 [*Honto ni Tadashi Fetishizumu Seiteki Shiko Daijiten*] [*Really Right Fetish: A Taste of Large Dictionary*] (in Japanese). Print Magazine, May 10, 2019.
- Sedgwick, E. (1990) *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

- shamsh.phi (2012) 'Ryona: Fetishism Cancer of fighting game,' *8WAYRUN.COM*. Available at: <https://8wayrun.com/threads/ryona-fetishism-cancer-of-fighting-game.14987/> (Accessed: 5 April 2022).
- Smurthwaite, J. (2016) 'Francis Bacon's private wrestling match,' *Jack Smurthwaite*, 10 March. Available at: <https://jacksmurthwaite.me/2016/03/10/francis-bacons-private-wrestling-match/> (Accessed: 22 November 2021).
- Soulliere, D.M. (2006) 'Wrestling with masculinity: Messages about manhood in the WWE,' *Sex Roles*, 55(1), pp. 1–11. doi:10.1007/s11199-006-9055-6.
- Stewart, G. (2007) 'Lector/spector: Borges and the bibliobjet,' *Variaciones Borges*, (24).
- Strangelove, M. (2010) *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- TheGreatReview (2019a) 'Chronique La Gazette de l'eSport : La Gazette de l'eSport du 15 octobre : Qudans, le retour du roi,' *Jeuxvideo.com*. Available at: www.jeuxvideo.com/videos/chroniques/1124728/la-gazette-de-l-esport-du-15-octobre-qudans-le-retour-du-roi.htm (Accessed: 18 November 2021).
- TheGreatReview (2019b) 'Chronique La Gazette de l'eSport : La Gazette de l'eSport du 5 novembre : L'homme qui a triomphé des dieux de Tekken avec l'un des pires personnages,' *Jeuxvideo.com*. Available at: www.jeuxvideo.com/videos/chroniques/1137171/la-gazette-de-l-esport-du-5-novembre-l-homme-qui-a-triomphe-des-dieux-de-tekken-avec-l-un-des-pires-personnages.htm (Accessed: 18 November 2021).
- Vorster, J.N. (2006) 'The making of male same-sex in the Graeco-Roman World and its implications for the interpretation of biblical discourses: Perspectives on "homosexuality and the Bible",' *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa*, 93(1), pp. 432–454. doi:10.10520/EJC100797.
- Wagner, K. and McLaughlin, D. (2021) 'Facebook, alarmed by teen usage drop, left investors in the dark,' *Bloomberg.com*, 25 October. Available at: www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-25/facebook-files-show-growth-struggles-as-young-users-in-u-s-decline (Accessed: 23 November 2021).
- Welch, T. (2018) 'The affectively necessary labour of queer mods,' *Game Studies*, 18(3). Available at: <http://gamestudies.org/1803/articles/welch> (Accessed: 25 November 2021).
- Wirman, H. (2009) 'On productivity and game fandom,' *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 3. doi:10.3983/twc.2009.0145.
- Woods, G. (1987) *Articulate Flesh*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Available at: <https://yalebooks.co.uk/display.asp?K=9780300047523> (Accessed: 25 November 2021).

Ludography

Assassin's Creed (2007) Ubisoft Montréal, Ubisoft.