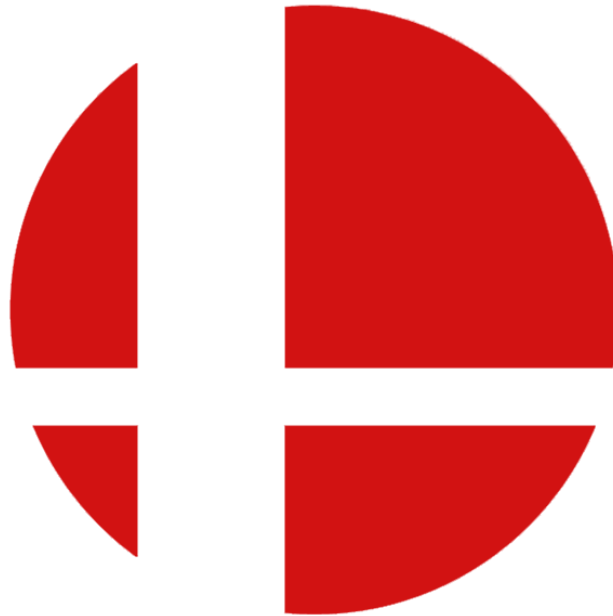Universiteit Utrecht

Playing with the script:
Super Smash Bros. Melee

From a casual game to a competitive game

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Abstract

This thesis studies the interaction between developers and players outside of game design. It does so by using the concept of 'playing with the script'. René Glas' *Battlefields of Negotiations* (2013) studies the interaction between those two stakeholders for a networked game. In Glas' case of *World of Warcraft*, it is networked play, meaning that the developer (Blizzard) has control over the game's servers and thus can implement the results of negotiations by changing the rules continuously. Playing with the script can be seen as an addition to 'battlefields of negotiation', and explains the negotiations outside of the game's structure for a non-networked game and how these negotiations affect the game series' continuum. Using a frame analysis, this thesis explores the interaction between Nintendo and the players of the game *Super Smash Bros. Melee* as participatory culture. The latter is possible by going back and forth between the script inscribed in the object by developers and its displacement by the users, in which the community behind the game, 'the smashers', transformed the casual nature of the game into a competitive one.

Acknowledgments

It took a while to realize this New Media and Digital Culture master thesis for Utrecht University. Not only during, but also before the time of writing I have been helped and influenced by a couple of people. Without them, this thesis would have looked completely different, or would not even exist. Without the shared passion of play that I have experienced throughout the years of friendship with some companions, I could not even begin to imagine how fundamentally fun (pun unintended) it is to play. Without the opportunity and knowledge Utrecht University gave me, I could not have known the area of 'playing' and being part of a community is worth studying, can be studied, and *should* be studied.

I would like to thank Dennis Kerckhaert for introducing me to *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, probably more than ten years ago. Dennis also influenced my overall taste for games, as we played games together quite often, be it on the GameCube or on the PC. I am equally thankful to Bas van Houwelingen, with whom I shared a lot of hours playing (my) *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* on (his) Nintendo Wii. I was oblivious to the fact there was so much more to the *Super Smash Bros.* series, were it not for Niels Keetels, my internship supervisor at the HKU in Hilversum. Not only was Niels contagiously enthusiastic about gaming and game development, he also introduced me to *The Smash Brothers* documentary, which was of critical importance when deciding from what perspective I would like to study an object for my thesis.

I am grateful for having the support and critical eyes of Joost Raessens during the period of my whole master program. His enthusiasm for and knowledge of Game and Play studies made me want to pursue a study in this area. My interest for developer and player relations is mainly fueled by René Glas, who has been of unimaginable help for firstly providing me with a framework, which without, this thesis would have made little sense. More importantly, my gratitude for providing detailed feedback on numerous thesis versions. Many thanks to Stefan Werning, for steering the thesis in the proper direction and for the help in the later stages of my thesis.

I greatly appreciate the help of my fellow master students, in particular Emma Norton, Stephanie de Smale and Niels van der Gift. They have been a great help in proofreading my earlier versions. I seriously cannot thank Noor Said-Abdessameud and Roos Verkade enough for proofreading my final version, and for giving precise and richly detailed last-minute feedback. Last but not least, I want to thank my parents and brother for supporting me and letting me combine two of my passions: research and gaming.

Contents

1 Introduction

"This is about a game that was never designed to be played at a competitive level. […] When *Smash Brothers Melee* was released, it was intended to be a party game, something your family could play together. Something designed for the casual gamer. […] Despite the insistence that it should be a casual experience, a few players saw it as much more than that, and they took it to another level" (*The Smash Brothers*, East Point Pictures 2013).

Super Smash Bros. Melee (Nintendo 2001) is a fighting game for the now ancient feeling Nintendo GameCube console. Since the release of the game and console in the same year, Nintendo has released two more consoles, the Wii in 2006 and the Wii U in 2012, and two new games in the *Super Smash Bros*. series, *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* in 2008 and *Super Smash Bros. for Wii U & 3DS* in 2014. Although the GameCube may have run its course, the console is still being used in a remarkable way, such as for competitive tournaments on a local and international stage. GameCube's best selling game is still being played competitively at the biggest international tournaments such as the Major League Gaming (MLG) alongside popular games such as *StarCraft II* (Blizzard Entertainment 2010) and *Call of Duty: Ghosts* (Infinity Ward 2013).[1]

How come this game is still played professionally, on an international level, on an unpopular console with no online connectivity that saw its production being discontinued in 2007?[2] It can be argued that it has got everything to do with the loyal community that keeps this game alive. That is why this thesis is positioned in the research area of participatory culture (Raessens 2005; Jenkins 2006; Taylor 2006; Schäfer 2011). My study is about how a specific participatory culture, the community surrounding *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, engages with the game and makes it its own. The community behind *Super Smash Bros. Melee* (SSBM or *Melee*) significantly changed the way the game is played. The original game of the series (*Super Smash Bros.* (1999)) was targeted at the home console player, who would play alone or with up to three friends.[3] Because of the community

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[1] "At Long Last, Nintendo Proclaims: Let the Brawls Begin on Wii!" *Nintendo*. 2014. Nintendo of America Inc. Archived at <http://archive.today/w7CC>; "MLG Championship Anaheim." *MLG*. 2014. Major League Gaming, Inc. <http://www.majorleaguegaming.com/competitions/66>.

[2] "Nintendo GameCube is number 16." *IGN*. 2014. IGN Entertainment, Inc.<http://www.ign.com/top-25-consoles/16.html>.

[3] Ramsay, Randolph et. al. "Super Smash Bros. 15th Anniversary Retrospective." *Gamespot*. 2014. CBS Interactive Inc. <http://www.gamespot.com/articles/super-smash-bros-15th-anniversary-retrospective/1100-6419581/>.

however, it transcended the home, and went from local tournaments to international tournaments as an e-sport.

My research question for this thesis is: In which way do players of *Super Smash Bros. Melee* negotiate with the developers outside the game's design, thereby affecting the script of the game? To be able to answer this question, I will study the interaction between the game's developers and its players. By interaction, I mean the negotiations that are taking place regarding the game itself , what constitutes the game and what kind of game it should be. In others words, the 'script' of the game, as it shall be explained in more detail in chapter two. The rules of the game are not only made by the developer, but are constantly negotiated by the players, who form their own rules within the design of the game. How this playful interaction with the rules is then negotiated by the game developer and what it results in, is something I would like to study. In my analysis I will answer the following sub questions: how was the game intended to be played? Through what kind of development or type of play has this changed? What demonstrates the negotiations between developers and players about how the game should be played? And lastly, what are the consequences of these negotiations for the continuum of the game series?

In this thesis, I study the negotiations taking place between the developer and players by first analyzing Rene Glas' concept 'battlefields of negotiation'. Although the battlefields of negotiation as a concept to study the interaction between developers and players is very useful, as it explains where and how these interactions happen, it is applied to networked play. Networked play means that play is mediated through an internet connection, and it refers to persistent virtual worlds (Pearce 2011, 17), which are synchronous shared spaces affording social interaction (18). Networked play is controlled by developers who own the servers which enable these virtual worlds. They can accordingly intervene and *continuously* change the rules through game updates. With this thesis I will show where and how interaction happens between developers and players in a non-networked (or non-persistent) video game, and how this interaction leads to *continual* interventions by developers. This *continuum* as significant detail will be explained later on in the introduction.

To this end, the concept of the 'script' (Akrich 1992; Latour 1992) will be used. Developers of technology inscribe a certain vision into their product on how they think the technology should be used. This is called the script. In the case of *Super Smash Bros.*, the designer Masahiro Sakurai intended the game to be a casual game, rather than a competitive game. Of course, fighting games, such as *Melee*, are naturally competitive as the player has to compete with other characters.

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However, I distinguish between the inside nature of the game, which is competitive, and the outside nature of the game, which is supposed to be casual. Casual in this sense refers to games that are easily accessible and are for players who desire 'quick fun' (Juul 20120). In the introductory quote, this distinction is also being made. The community behind *Melee* changed how it is played, from a casual game to a competitive game. Sakurai names the competitive scene which made *Melee* into another sort of game he envisioned, a "passionate group of sort of maniac players [sic]". He wants to "avoid a situation" where the game is only designed for that small group.[4] To study how the players or community behind *Melee* made this game into a competitive game, I would like to use the concept of 'playing with the script', which I will explain in further detail in the second chapter. This concept can be seen as an addition to the battlefields of negotiation concept, as both concepts study the interaction between developers and players and explain how the continuum of the product is established.

Playing with the script happens as a consequence when the software or hardware of game technology affect emerging play practices (such as tournaments or e-sports) and consequently disappoint users who try to fit the technology with their emerging play practices. The negotiations of these practices between developers of the technology and its users can lead to an adaptation of hardware and/or software of the technology, signaling the playing with the script. One of the examples of playing with the script, which is the formation of 'offline' tournaments, will be analyzed in this thesis' case study. Here, the hardware (the GameCube) did not allow for online connectivity, so players had to organize tournaments locally. In my case study I argue that this emerging practice was being negotiated by the developer Sakurai, by mainly adapting the software (*Super Smash Bros. Brawl*), to dissuade competitive play that is exhibited on those tournaments, and on the contrary stimulate casual play. The consequent negotiations between developer and players and possible adaptations of hardware and/or software establishes the continuum of a game series.

1.1 Methodology

As stated above, hardware and software affect how emerging play practices evolve. Technology is therefore part of a network of relations that influence the way technology is used and conceived.

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[4] Schreirer, Jason. "An In-Depth Chat With The Genius Behind Super Smash Bros." *Kotaku.* 2014. Gawker Media. <http://kotaku.com/an-in-depth-chat-with-the-genius-behind-super-smash-bro-530744390>.

This analysis lends aspects from French sociologist Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (ANT). This theory, or rather method (Latour 2005, 17), explains how networks consisting of materials (objects) and semiotics (concepts or paradigms) form an apparently coherent whole. It looks at the interactions between those different elements and tries to understand how each element in the network contributes to the becoming of the studied object. ANT assumes that in this network, there is no difference between human actors and non-human actors, and that they are defined by the relationship they have with each other in the network. It assigns equal agency to both human actors (developers and players) and non-human actors (hardware and software) and are equally important as nodes in their shared network. When 'something' happens, it is not only the result of an act by one sole actor, but it is a result from all interactions between the actors in the network. In my case I study the relationship between both developer and players, as well as their relationship with the material (hardware and software), which is all part of one network. However, as criticized by Amsterdamska (1990) and Bloor (1999), ANT remains very descriptive and, as a social theory, fails to explain why social processes happen and which actors are important within a network or not, as opposed to every actor being equal. That is why I am also interested in *why* this network exists in such a way, and I attempt to explain these relations.

I would like to analyze how *Melee* is conceived by the human actors (from now on called stakeholders, as both developers and players have a stake in what the game should be), and how this network of relations influence the forming of the object or series as a whole, or rather the continuum. I will analyze why there are negotiations between stakeholders and how these negotiations have consequences for the continuum of the game series, so to show which actors have agency. For this, I will conduct a specific form of discourse analysis, which is called frame analysis (Goffman 1974; Snow et. al. 1986). As discourse analysis, I study the "situated meaning" (Gee 2010, 65) of what is said in a specific context. A frame analysis gives me the opportunity to study how both players and developer interpret *Melee* as a game. Frame analysis can lay bare the differences between both stakeholders on how they experience the game, and how these differences can cause tension between both parties that are resolved in a specific way. As said before, its developer sees *Melee* as a casual game, and his intention was to make it so. The analysis will show, however, that the players frame the game as an e-sport or competitive game. This consequently leads to "misframings" (Goffman, 308), or as I would like to call it, a misalignment of frames.[5]

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[5] Snow et. al. calls "frame alignment […] a necessary condition for […] participation" (1986, 464). When this is not

Frame analysis is mostly used to explain the processes of social movement (Snow & Benford 1988), and show how frame alignment can gather support for a movement. As limitation, however, it does not explain *why* a particular framing happens. As I am interested in both how and why a network exists and influences each node therein, frame analysis is not enough to explain the 'why' when analyzing frame misalignment. By using the concept of playing with the script, I hope to describe and explain why the initially casual game *Super Smash Bros. Melee* transformed into an e-sport. Through playing with the script, there is a "frame transformation" (Snow et. al., 473), which means that an already meaningful framework (e-sports) is being used for the non-fitting framework (casual), so that it "radically reconstitutes what it is for participants that is going on" (Goffman, 45). I refer to actor-network theory since it acknowledges that it is not solely the developer who decides what the game is and how it is played. Players, but also the GameCube as hardware and the rules of the game as software, which will be discussed in chapter two and three, define what the game is and how it is played.

1.2 Structure

This first chapter explained as an introduction why and how I want to study the interaction between developers and players in the game *Super Smash Bros. Melee.* The second chapter of this thesis is the literature review that gives the research question context by positioning it into a theoretical framework. The interaction between developers and players and its consequences for the game design is something that has already been studied from various perspectives (Kline et. al. 2003; Taylor 2006; Humphreys 2005 & 2008; Glas 2013). In *Battlefields of Negotiation* (2013), René Glas places the players that actively interact with the rules of the game in the context of participatory culture (Raessens 2005; Jenkins 2006; Taylor 2006; Schäfer 2011). The battlefield of negotiation is all about the control or ownership of the game. Both stakeholders, the players and the developers, want to have their own ideal version of the game. The ensuing negotiations between different opinions on how the game should look like is fought on multiple levels. Changes that are being made within these multiple levels happen through updating the game, which Blizzard (the developers) controls via its own networked servers.

The reason why I particularly wanted to analyze Glas' battlefields of negotiation is because it is a useful way of looking at the processes taking place that can gradually change the game, in his

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met, so when frame participation is not reached, there is misalignment.

case, the online game *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment 2004). Through interaction, a game gets either adapted through game updates to feedback received from the players, or the players are on their turn controlled by the developers. I will argue that playing with the script accounts for non-networked video games, where feedback or discussion does not take place in the same way. Both concepts do however explain how the 'continuum' of a product is made or in some cases preserved. I use the Latin word 'continuum', which is the neuter form of continuus, and literally means 'to hold together'. It stands for a *continuous* series, or a whole. Continuous would indicate that its noun is seemingly without break or interruption (as with *World of Warcraft* being viewed as a whole). However, 'continual' stems from the same Latin adjective, which refers to repeated actions, rather than uninterrupted. It is in this way I use the term continuum for the series of *Super Smash Bros.*, as there is a clear interruption in the form of each new game iteration within the series. Each game can be viewed as a *temporal continuation*. While Glas studies the freedom of play "*within* the rules the platform owners have created [emphasis added]" (Balkin 2006, 87), I do so outside of the control mechanisms that is the platform. Furthermore, the context in which the game is situated and the nature of its 'emergent' (Pearce 2011) character will be explained through the practices of tournaments and e-sports (Rambusch et. al. 2007; Jakobsson 2007; Taylor 2012).

Chapter three consists of a case to study the concept of 'playing with the script'. The community is the driving force behind the rule making outside of the game and is responsible for how the game is played. This chapter discusses how the game was featured within (local) tournaments. Because there was no online connectivity on the GameCube, players had to meet physically and play together on one console. The game became more popular, and with the rise of e-sports, *Melee* became featured in international gaming tournaments. The reaction of Nintendo, the publisher of the game series, to all of this will be studied in an iconic case: the streaming blockage of Evo 2013. The immediate backlash on this event by the community caused Nintendo to reconsider their intentions for the *Super Smash Bros.* series and thus influenced its continuum. In my analysis I will focus on how the community behind the game *Super Smash Bros. Melee* frames the game and how the developer frames the game, and how a misalignment of frames is occuring. I argue that there is a frame transformation (Snow et. al. 1986, 473) through transformative play (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 301) by playing with the script.

Lastly, chapter four will conclude the thesis and reflect on the interaction between the developers and players of the game *Super Smash Bros. Melee*. I will briefly reflect on Nintendo's further intention for the *Super Smash Bros.* series by looking to the newest game in the series and I

will conclude that there is a sense of continuum, which is influenced by players playing with the script and the consequent interaction with the developers of the game. Based on the case study on the streaming blockage during the world's biggest fighting game tournament Evo 2013, I will show how players are playing with the script by making the game their own and organizing local tournaments, which led to the game becoming an e-sport. The study of *Melee* as an e-sport is again situated in the area of participatory culture. It shows how this specific group of people raised the game as an e-sport, contrary to the intentions of Nintendo.

2 Negotiating the script

This literature review chapter will set out the theoretical framework in which I will embed my case study. First, the concept of the battlefields of negotiation (Glas 2013) is explained in chapter 2.1 'Negotiations inside the game'. Here it is made clear why this concept is relevant to the study of the game *Super Smash Bros. Melee*. Although they are differ by nature, it becomes apparent that there are similarities between both Glas' game *World of Warcraft* and my case study game *Melee*. These similarities will be found in the interaction between developers and players and how the continuum of the series is influenced by both stakeholders. In chapter 2.2 'The script', I would like to provide an alternative framework to study the interaction between the developer and the players situated outside of the game, with the help of the script. This will explain the intentions a designer puts into the design of his game. Chapter 2.3 'Playing with the script' shows how a gaming community plays with the rules of the game, when they make their own tournaments and are responsible for creating different sorts of game play (Rambusch et al. 2007), by effectively 'playing' with the intentions the designer puts into its product.

For this, I will be zooming in on a local Swedish gaming community using game researcher Mikael Jakobsson's (2007) study on the local gaming scene in Sweden, where specific tournaments are being held that deviate from the way *Melee* is normally played. As we will see in chapter three, eventually this type of deviated play, or playing with the script, caused *Melee* to turn into an e-sport. I discuss the phenomenon that is e-sports and the broader development of the professionalization of games as sports shortly with the help of T.L. Taylor's *Raising the Stakes* (2012) in this theoretical chapter's 2.4 'Emerging culture: e-sports'. Here, e-sports will be portrayed as a specific result of emergent play; of playing with the script.

This framework's focus is on the community behind the game. The 'participatory culture' (Jenkins 2006) is the central perspective which connects both Glas' concept and playing with the

script. Consumers do not only passively engage with media, but they do so interactively. They create their own content that is in line with the medium they are interacting with. The case analysis I will conduct in the third chapter will show that the community behind *Super Smash Bros. Melee* is mainly responsible for how the game is played, and that there is an active negotiation not only in the alignment of frames going on, but also in both software and hardware adaptation taking place between developers and players, just as with *World of Warcraft*. Continuum of the script happens online through the battlefields of negotiation, and offline when players play with the script.

2.1 Negotiations inside the game

This thesis studies a perspective which focuses on the interaction between developers and players *outside* of the game. While negotiations about the game *Super Smash Bros.* are still focused on the content that is inside the game, they are happening outside of the game design (Salen & Zimmerman 2004; Juul 2005), and results are evident only after each new iteration of the game's franchise. This is different from games where negotiations and consequent results are *continuously* being updated, like *World of Warcraft*. New media and game studies scholar Rene Glas' battlefields of negotiation concept (2013) extensively explains how and where negotiations are taking place on the different platforms of the game *World of Warcraft*.

Negotiations between developers and players are very much concentrated on the 'ownership' of the game. Who decides how to play the game? Both stakeholders have their own view on how the game should be played. There are almost endless possible ways a game can be played, especially in the case of WoW (*World of Warcraft*), because it is a Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG). I will explain later why that is significant. The way the developer, Blizzard, wants WoW to be played often differs on many levels, compared to how the players may want to play it. Glas argues that negotiations between those two stakeholders over what the game is, are fought through four main perspectives: game play, game design, game contract and game culture (Glas 2013, 17-18).

To compare both games and find differences for where and how negotiations take place, I need to explain the four perspectives in relation to the game design. To tell something about these main viewpoints on games, Glas explains what kind of game WoW is to their players, or how the game design makes the game a 'game'. He takes game designer Jesper Juul's classic game model:

A rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels emotionally attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are negotiatable (Juul 2005: 36).

Glas argues that for MMORPG's it is hard to get to a definite quantifiable outcome, because it is not clear when the game ends. When following game design researcher Gonzalo Frasca's (2007) point on this matter, it is up to the players on how much value they assign to certain outcomes of the game's goals (such as leveling, quests etc.). While WoW may offer all players the same quests, it is up to the players to choose from them, and make their own game out of it. This is relevant in comparison to a game like *Super Smash Bros.*, since a quantifiable outcome is much more concrete in this game. The rule is to survive the fight, while knocking your enemies off the stage. These (operational) rules will be discussed to a larger extent later.

Game design gives birth to different possible play forms. The game design as a "rigid structure" actually enables play, as players can move freely within this design (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 304). A game can offer certain goals, so that play becomes 'instrumental' or playing with a purpose. In a virtual world where one can roam freely, such as *World of Warcraft*, there is also more room for 'free play' (Iser 1993). The difference between the role playing game type and SSBM's fighter/brawler game type is that the former offers a bigger possibility of movement between the types of instrumental play and free play. MMORPG's are by nature more story driven (role playing) than fighter games, while fighter games, as mentioned above, are more instrumental in that the quantifiable outcome is clear: you win or you are knocked out. This difference already points towards how movement between instrumental play and free play is more limited for *Super Smash Bros. Melee* than for *World of Warcraft*.

Game design is one way to make limitations to the extent of possible play forms. But there are also other external rules that prescribe how a game is intended to be played, such as social and contractual rules. These rules are what Glas calls the game's contract (Glas, 30). Although the breaking of rules of the game in design terms (using illegal software to play with an advantage) is easier to condemn, social norms and rules are established by a constant negotiation between players themselves, and between developers and players. Glas distinguishes between two types of contract: the legal documents that players have to sign in order to play (the End-User Licence Agreement and the Terms of Use (33)) and the codes of practice, that are mainly established by the community. The former are far more binding: when breaking the legal rules, players can be prosecuted, while the

latter are socially negotiable (Humphreys 2005; Glas 2013, 34). Even though social rules can be negotiated outside the game design, for instance on online forums where the game community gathers, the ramifications of these discussions are expressed and dealt with *within* the same game design.

The last perspective where Glas identifies negotiations are being made is play as participation (Glas, 37). This very much concerns the game culture surrounding the game because it is this bond that can elevate the game's popularity. This ties back to participatory culture (Jenkins 2006; Taylor 2006), in which Glas' theory is also embedded. Players contribute to the creation of the game, and the understanding of what games are through play (Raessens 2005). The negotiations between the community and the developers on what 'makes the game a game' results in a delicate struggle for agency. On the one hand, players act as 'content creators', creating fan fiction or dedicated websites, so that the specific game increasingly becomes a product of a much wider community than only the "paid corporate employees", now mainly existing of "unpaid creators, test subjects, expert informants, and voluntary labour" (Kline et. al. 2003: 201).[6] On the other hand, there is still the developer (in WoW's case, Blizzard) that tries to protect its right of production and distribution. This last level of negotiation is something that will return in my case on Nintendo's struggle to retain control over its copyrights.

Both stakeholders (players and developers) have their own preferred version of the game. As a result, negotiations about agency over the game are taking place on what Glas calls "a battlefield of negotiation" (2013, 41). Some forms of play are hardly negotiated by developers. For example, the divergent form of free play called role playing, where one does not follow instrumental rules in order to finish quests, but instead just roams the world and forms his or her own social clubs to set goals. Other forms of play, on the contrary, are actively negotiated, such as exchanging virtual money collected in the game for real money (42). This form of participatory culture indeed happens outside of the game as well, and is thus sometimes hard for Blizzard to control.

Blizzard has the means to assert ownership over its product (or rather, service) directly and continuously. They control the servers, giving them the power to allow or deny entrance to players. What is more, they can even alter the rules of the game. Through online game updates or patches

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[6] Though, in this sense, not everyone is a content creator, see Nielsen (2006). However, in the 'virtual game worlds' everyone creates materials which can be used by other players (Humphreys 2005, 71).

they can alter the game design, and by changing the legal contract, which they can do at any given time, Blizzard has control over a big part of the game contract. In the case of *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, Nintendo does not have these mechanisms and thus cannot assert its direct control over the game, giving more agency to the gaming culture that changes the game not through game design, but through game play and codes of practices. Blizzard, however, must be careful to retain the support of its players, and cannot simply misuse its power, for fear of alienating its community.

Nintendo faces the same problems, as both games are made as a "fixed synthetic world", which are "defined primarily by the world's designers, who have absolute control over narratives, game mechanics, rewards and penalties, world rules, and geographical and architectural design", as opposed to a "co-created world", in which its content is primarily created by the players (Pearce 2011, 31). Though, in the case of *Super Smash Bros.*, control exercised over its game is *continual* rather than *continuous*, by implementing new iterations every few years instead of updating the game regularly. *World of Warcraft* is never completely finished because of the possibility of game patches updated through the internet, making the game permanently in beta (Neff & Stark 2003). While *Super Smash Bros. Melee* is a finished product, the continuum of the game is expressed in the different iterations of the series. This difference in nature signals a gap in theory in the way a game is envisioned and maintained. The way Nintendo controls its franchise is fundamentally different from the way Blizzard deals with this, and therefore I would like to propose to use the concept of the script to better explain, in a more general manner, how intentions of developers are designed into the game, and how players interact with it.

2.2 The script

Designers of technology make a product with a certain intention built into it. In the case of *World of Warcraft*, the designers have an idea of how the game should look and how it should be played. They can alter its design afterwards, in dialogue with players, through game updates. Blizzard has the power over the amount of freedom players have when interacting with the game through their control mechanisms, making sure their intentions regarding the game are assured.

For a finished product however, it is hard for the designer to have agency over the intentions of the product. The uses of a technological artifact are determined by its users, and new products of

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the same technology get accustomed to the uses and social codes of the users by its designers.[7] However, negotiations are taking place between the users and designers. In this thesis, I would like to narrow this down to games as technology, when studying the negotiations between developers and players. As shown above, the battlefields of negotiation are fought through four perspectives (game play, game design, game contract and game culture (Glas 2013, 17-18)) and these perspectives are applicable to games that are online and permanently in beta, but also to games that are played offline as a finished product. However, how and where these negotiations are fought differ depending on the nature of the game (networked vs non-networked). That is why I propose to use the term 'playing with the script' to describe the interaction between technology (games) and users (players) and the consequent negotiations between developers and players and how this all influences the continuum of the developer's intellectual property.[8]

Therefore, I would like to turn to sociologist Madeleine Akrich's (1992) de-scription of technical objects, and by extension, of video game technology as a whole. Bruno Latour (1992) and Peter-Paul Verbeek (2006), both philosophers of technology, also write about the script in technology. However, Latour mainly talks about the relation between humans and non-humans, as he does with ANT, and how technology delegates humans, while Verbeek uses the notion of the script in combination with moral design, as technology influences people's behavior. Neither Verbeek nor Latour go into sufficient detail regarding the concept of the script itself, but instead focus on its consequences. Latour does offer an interesting analogy of the script that is useful to better understand the concept: the script can be compared to a theatrical script, wherein the actor plays along a prescribed script, and the stage setting (or the tools) delegates how the actor should follow the script.

In this thesis, the script concept is used as an 'intention-based' theory, which means that through the script in design, a certain intention is built into the product. The script theory is related to other intention-based theories such as the theory of affordances (Gibson 1977; Norman 1998) and

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[7] For an interesting social history on the use of the telephone from the end of the 19th century until the 1940's, that shows how the telephone's intention differed from the usage over time (formal conversations towards gossiping), see Fischer (1992).

[8] Intellectual property (IP) in the context of games refers to the individual franchise or the series of a game. It is used to describe a game or game series that is unique through its game mechanics and game narrative, simply said. *World of Warcraft* is an IP as franchise, and so is *Super Smash Bros.* as a game series.

appropriation (Schäfer 2009). Like Verbeek (2006) discusses, certain design decisions *afford* different kinds of behavior. Although the psychologist James Gibson coins the term 'affordances' in the context of the relation between the animal and its environment, the term can be used to describe the physical properties of an object (or environments) and how it "provides" for certain actions (Gibson, 127). Most (computer) technology affords modification, so that users can appropriate it to their needs. Media scholar Mirko Schäfer (2009) explains how the file-sharing application Napster appropriates the affordances of both the computer (store data) and the internet (distribute data). The theory of affordances will prove useful when analyzing how for instance the GameCube *affords* certain types of play, discussed later on in chapter three. We do have to keep in mind that these intention-based theories address the possible use and modification of (physical) objects, while the script concept is more applicable to describe the relationship between the intended design of technology and the actual use of the technology through user interaction with the technology.

Akrich argues that the materials used in technologies can predetermine or predict how a technology will be used, because materials allow for a specific kind of use. According to the related actor-network theory (Latour 2005), both technologies and users influence each other and are part of the same network. Both humans and non-humans (technology) are actors in the construction of networks, such as society (Akrich 1992, 206). To study this, Akrich poses two questions: to what extent does the composition of a technical object constrain 'actants' (both who act and behave) in the way they relate to one another, and to what extent are they able to shape each other, and the various ways in which the object may be used? "Once considered in this way, the boundary between the inside and the outside of an object comes to be seen as a *consequence* of such interaction rather than something that determines it" (ibid, emphasis in original).

This means that the interaction with the object very much determines what the object itself is, rather than something else predetermining it. However, designers can instill a specific use of the object into its design. They "inscribe" a certain vision into the object of how they think "morality, technology, science, and economy will evolve" (Akrich 208). This is what Akrich calls a "script" (ibid). The script is the innovator's (or designer's) beliefs on the relationship between the object and its surrounding actors (users, for instance) inscribed into the technology.

According to Akrich, if we want to study the relationship between the object and the surrounding actors, thus studying the script, we have to:

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> […] follow the negotiations between the innovator and potential users and […] study the way in which the results of such negotiations are translated into technological form. […] [W]e have to go back and forth continually between the designer and the user, between the designer's projected user and the real user, *between the world inscribed in the object* and *the world described by its displacement* (Akrich 208-209, emphasis in original).

This means that certain usages of the technology that are inscribed into it can be adopted by the potential users, but moreover, certain usages that are not inscribed will be highlighted, through its displacement of the technology or the adaptation of other usages not intended by the designer.

To illustrate this, Akrich provides us with an example. Akrich calls the control of the behavior of the users via the technology "moral delegation" (Akrich 216). She highlights the role of the electricity meter in the Ivory Coast in 1985. As it creates a network of actors, it also defines the relationship between the producer and consumer. The meter measures if the contract between the two stakeholders is honored. When the meter signifies a decrease in the 'rate of return', an indication that the ratio energy given/energy paid for is skewed, it can mean that either there is an increase of illicit connections, or it is the work of corrupt employees. Either way, it measures illicit behavior. However, it cannot do anything against this behavior. An additional regulator was needed on the meter, to cut off the current. This method of regulation is designed to 'groom' the user (218). Users were displeased with the arbitrary current cut-offs, and reported the problem to the electrician, who on his term became irritated by the many calls he got on irregular times, causing him to install a fuse to bypass the regulator.

In this case, we see a poor relationship between the designer and the user, as "[t]he industrialists tended to argue that if it didn't work (technically), this was because it had been misused (socially). The users […] argued that if it didn't work socially, this was because it had been misconceived technically" (Akrich 220). The non-human (electricity regulator) regulates the behavior of the human through prescription (can only use electricity for so long) (Latour 1992, 232), and its displacement (inserting a fuse to bypass the prescription) highlights the negotiation with the script. Thus, studying the script helps to expose the (lack of) relationship between the designer and the user of technology.

2.3 Playing with the script

In the case of Glas' battlefields of negotiation (2013), control over the game design is in the hands of Blizzard, the developers of *World of Warcraft*. Blizzard has the capacity to use control mechanisms, such as their servers, to change the game through online game updates. The outcome of the symbolically used 'battles' are implemented differently than other, non-networked games, as in my case *Super Smash Bros*. Even though the 'where' (game play, game design, game contract and game culture (Glas 2013, 17-18)) does not necessarily have to differ, the 'how' does differ. Therefore, I prefer to use the concept 'playing with the script'. I use the term 'playing', because as established earlier, play is made possible by the game design through interaction with the rules of the game. Playing with the rules is exactly what happens when interacting with the script of the technology. When playing a game, one explores the "space of possibility created from the system's structure" (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 300).

Why is play significant when studying the negotiations between developers and players of the script? The script concept (Akrich 1992) allows for a wider interpretation of the interactivity between designer and user, as it studies the use and (dis)placement of the technology and how both human and non-human (actants) shape the way a technology is adapted. The adaptation of games as technology happens through play. Through play, players interact with the inner essence of the game, the rules of the game, known as 'game play' (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 299). 'To play' is also to test out the rules of the game or the structure, and to push it into ways where non-intended new forms of play are gradually being accepted as the way a game is played. This is called transformative play (301). The way in which *Super Smash Bros. Melee* is played can be called transformative. As stated in the opening quote in the introduction, the game was originally intended to be played at home. This form of game play was transformed as it 'transcended' the home environment and was eventually played on an international stage. As there is no online functionality on the GameCube, players have to be physically present. Here, the non-human (technology) prescribes the behavior of the human (player) (Latour 1992, 323; Latour 2005). The transformative character is that the player (because of the emergent culture) plays it in a way other than it was intended by the designer.

By playing the game in another way, it transforms the game. It changes the essence of the game, that is the rules of the game (Salen & Zimmerman, 297). So, transformative play is related to playing with the rules of the game. What are those rules then, and in what sense do players play

with them? Game designers Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman distinguish between three levels of game rules: constituative rules, operational rules and implicit rules. I have used these rules before and will use them again later on in my analysis of the emerging character of the smasher community.

The "constituative rules [sic]" are "the underlying formal structures" (138) of the game, and are hardcoded into the game. These are the algorithms and computational foundations of the game ('when clicking on a button on the controller, do this in game'). These rules stay the same when players are playing against each other in *Super Smash Bros. Melee* and are mostly not tampered with, because they are hardly accessible. Apart from games like *World of Warcraft*, these rules do not get changed by the developers, as they cannot update the game once in a while because it is played offline and it is a finished product. They can be changed during the continuum of a game series, however. Implicit rules are the so-called 'unwritten rules', rules that indicate how one should behave when playing the game. It is the culture surrounding the game that establishes these rules. Operational rules can be understood as the rules that are 'written down' when explaining the rules of the game. This thesis shows that these rules are emergent and highly differ from location to location, and are influenced by the local, as well the national gaming culture (Rambusch et. al. 2007). The operational rules make different forms of play possible. 'Anti-smashers' may have different operational rules than smashers, as I will show next with an example of the 'Random Smash tournament' in the local Swedish game culture (Jakobsson 2007).

To better understand the community behind the game, that would nurture the game's competitive character, effectively changing the continuum of the series, I will first turn towards a study conducted by Mikael Jakobsson (2007) of a local community of 'smashers' in Sweden. In *Playing with the Rules* (2007), Mälmo University's game researcher Mikael Jakobsson discusses the social and cultural aspects of the formation of rules. He does this by analyzing a console game club of *Super Smash Bros. Melee*. Although Jakobsson studies a social group that is located specifically in Sweden, as opposed to the scene I will mainly study, which is the United States' national community, it nevertheless offers insights into the diversity of the 'smashers' community (391).

Jakobsson signals a polarization within the console game club, dividing it into "smashers" and "anti-smashers" (Jakobsson, 390). Smashers are the ones that are most dedicated to the game itself. To them, the game "is their discipline" (ibid). They see it as their sport, a connection I will

explore further in the next section when talking about e-sports. In the United States scene, 'smashers' are the one who identify themselves as competitive players. Anti-smashers are the ones that play the game in various forms of play, signaling a more casual stance towards the game. Jakobsson participated in a 'Random Smash' tournament, where certain formal game rules were randomly decided, making the game highly imbalanced, and even incorporating a game of 'musical chairs' into the tournament game.

This polarization even within a particular game community is interesting, when talking about (competitive) game cultures in general, as it shows that there is much depth in the social structures in gaming culture. Even though, in popular view, gaming culture may seem just as a homogeneous culture, for insiders it is no surprise that there is much difference between PC gamers and console gamers, and even between console gamers (Xbox and Nintendo's Gamecube/Wii) tastes and subcategories differ. Thus also among players of *Melee*, the game is played differently. This shows that "gamer culture is multi-faceted" (Jakobsson, 390).

What I found interesting is how the formal rules of the game (or game mechanics) are used to create different forms of play. The constituative rules of the game (Salen & Zimmerman 2004) are being deployed in a certain way, so that new game play will give an advantage over the opponent one is facing in *Melee*. Instead of combo's (like in most fighting games), the *Super Smash Bros.* series use simple one-button mechanics that have the same results for each character. That does not mean that with these simple mechanics intricate moves cannot be done. In the smashers community, it is a highly regarded feat to come up with a new 'move'. Even though the constituative rules are the same for all players who play *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, by playing around with these rules new 'moves' can be discovered and used so that it gives the player an edge in the competition, provided the new move is worth using. One example of the play with constituative rules is the exploitation of a mechanical glitch called *wavedashing* (Jakobsson, 389),[9] which has various usages in the game, such as dodging attacks.

Playing with the rules can therefore be productive, especially when shared widely. The new moves, along with other useful information that the community came up with, are gathered at the

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[9] "Re: Evolution of the Smash Game by 'SmashBroPro'." *Smashboards*. 2014. Xyelot LLC. <http://smashboards.com/threads/evolution-of-the-smash-game.59214/#post-1084815>.

Smashboards, in something called 'the Compendium of Knowledge'.[10] In this compendium, a lot of information is gathered regarding fundamental rules of the game, tutorials, technical data of the game ('Gameplay Mechanics'), moves, frame data, historical data about *Smash* and other discussions. According to media scholar Henry Jenkins (2006, 134), this community of knowledge is based on fan-based politics. This is part of the participatory culture, which means that consumers do not only passively engage with media, but they do so interactively, creating their own content that is in line with the medium they are interacting with. As Jenkins points out, participatory culture is enabled through new technologies that can store media content (in this case, Smashboards); promoting of the subculture discourse of Do-It-Yourself attitude (e.g. the smash community that is documenting the scene) and also the horizontal integration of media businesses that stimulate the distribution of "images, ideas and narratives" (such as YouTube, and later on Twitch) (Jenkins, 135-136).

Participatory culture harnesses collective intelligence. Collective intelligence makes the community more productive, as it "enables the group to act upon a broader range of expertise" (Jenkins, 139), without the need for every member of that community to know it all by himself. The result of collective intelligence, in the case of the Smashboards, is the surpassing of knowledge the original designer and developers had regarding the rules of the game (Jakobsson, 391). This participatory culture also enables the formation of operational and implicit rules that are not hardcoded into the game by the designer, and cannot be controlled by the designer. I will return to subject of the formation of operational rules in the third chapter, when talking about the smash tournaments rules. Next, I will discuss an emergent culture of people who play with the rules of the game to create their own form of play.

2.4 Emerging culture: e-sports

To situate the transformative developments within the smash scene regarding national tournaments and its rules in a broader context as emerging culture, I would like to give a broader view of the competitive play of console or PC games, when discussing e-sports in general. When discussing e-sports in the context of *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, I contextualize e-sports in the area of participatory culture, by discussing *Melee*'s transformative character because of its emerging

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[10] "2014 SSBM Compendium of Knowledge." Post by 'Stratocaster'. *Smashboards*. 2014. Xyelot LLC. <http://smashboards.com/threads/2014-ssbm-compendium-of-knowledge-updated-1-2-14.339520/>.

culture. By providing a different view from a shared scene, that of competitive shooters, light can be shed on the overall development of the professionalization of (online) games as a sport in general. In the case study of Rambusch et. al (2007), game play is explained as situational when discussing the First Person Shooter (FPS) *Counter Strike* (Valve Corporation 1999), which is a similar finding as the discussion about different forms of game play within the smash community, when comparing American East Coast game play with West Coast game play which will be discussed later on.

Rambusch et. al.'s article (2007) portrays how gameplay is affected by more aspects than only in-game aspects. Gameplay is influenced by cultural, cognitive, economical and technological factors (157). The article distinguishes between two ways of understanding gameplay. On the one hand, there is the physical and motorial 'handling of the game', so in what way do the players press the buttons and in what does this result? On the other hand, there are "player's meaning-making activities" (ibid), which explains how a player understands the game "in terms of how the game is to be played, their role in the game and the culture around the game" (ibid). The player's meaning-making activities have very much to do with the formation of frames (Snow et. al. 1986), as frames serve to organize experiences and guide action, and help players to identify occurrences (464). For instance, players gather together when forming "clans" (Rambusch et. al., 160). This is a way of group identification and serves as a frame to understand their place in the game environment, which is being part of a team and in which each player has a particular role to play.

Rambusch et. al. interviewed thirty-four clan members on the World Cyber Games tournament, featuring *Counter Strike*. As a result, they distinguish between four analytical perspectives on *Counter Strike* gameplay: player actions during play; interactions within and between teams; players and fans on the Internet, and the Counter-strike gaming scene (Rambusch et. al., 159). Player actions during play is concerned with the transformative nature of play. First, it is played individually, mainly for fun, but gradually it is about team play and fitting oneself in a clan. Gradually, the game is taken more seriously (160). The interaction within and between teams is about the sharing of knowledge of skills. Learning from other teams in the region during tournaments is one way to gain more experience as a player. Teams that do not have the opportunity to practice against other teams physically, tend to develop more slowly. This is called the network effect (161). Players and fans on the internet also play a huge role in the game play of *Counter*

Strike. Like Smashboards, the Swedish fan site Fragbite shares tactics and how-to videos, and offers a place to form a community.[11] The gaming scene perspective explains that game play is influenced through cultural and infrastructural relations. Top teams tend to practice against other top teams according to specific geographical regions: this is because when playing over the internet, a low-ping rate is crucial.[12]

The reason why I zoom into *Counter Strike*'s gameplay perspectives is because both *Counter Strike* and *Super Smash Bros.* seem to have had a similar development: from being a game that is mostly (intended) to be played for fun, to an increasing professionalization, where the competitive scene and international interest in the game constantly grew. This is due to an emerging culture within gaming that sees gaming not only as a paidic form of play, but as something productive where money can be earned through play. When I talk about culture in this context, I refer to what anthropologists use for this term, which is "a social construction of shared meanings" (Pearce 2011, 52). This is reached through shared language and symbols, understood and used by collectives within the culture (Hine 2000). An emergent culture can "self- organize in ways that cannot be predicted by their underlying structures or rule sets [i.e. their shared meanings], nor by the individual behavior of agents within the system" (Bar-Yam 1997). In any way, emergence signals *change*. Emergence can be stimulated by "networked social systems", such as the Smashboards forums for the smash culture, where "feedback can be a powerful engine for large scale social emergence" (Pearce, 45).

The emergent culture in this thesis is linked with the general professionalization of computer and console games. Sociologist T.L. Taylor documents this development in her book *Raising the Stakes* (2012), in which she conducts ethnographic research by following, interviewing, photographing and documenting various stakeholders, from players to organizers, during e-sport tournaments ranging from 2003 to 2011.[13] Taylor describes a shift taking place within computer and console gaming. The e-sports scene is rapidly changing, because the nature of 'gaming' is itself

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[11] *Fragbite.* 2014. Fragbite. <http://fragbite.se/>.

[12] This refers to the network latency between the players. A low-ping rate allows for smoother gameplay because data packages are downloaded faster, causing less 'lag'.

[13] Although, she omits the use of the word ethnography, as she continuously felt as an outsider, not being a sports fan or a FPS fan, for instance (Taylor, 29).

changing. Computer gaming is increasingly seen as something mainstream, instead of "just for geeks" (Taylor, 29). She links this transformation of frames (Snow et. al. 1986) to the changing conception of games being for leisure to something that can be played as a competitive sport where money can be earned. Different stakeholders are part of this transformation. As with the case of *Super Smash Bros.,* the artifact of games in e-sports "is subject to complex social processes that mediate its competitive use" (239). The community around a game creates rule systems and play norms that affords competitive play on a high level.

The e-sports industry also grows financially (more sponsors, bigger overall prize money); legally (issues with intellectual property, which will be studied later with the case of the streaming blockage) and institutionally (organization-wise and increasing media coverage). A lot of this has got to do with the fact that gamers and players in e-sports tournaments want to break out of the niche subculture they are in, and want to become mainstream. However, this can cause tensions between not only the players (who might not want to lose the authenticity of a subculture (Taylor, 243)), but also between developers and e-sport organizers. Maybe a developer does not want to be recognized in the mainstream as a competitive e-sport game, when it frames its own games as being casual.

This chapter explained how the script concept is useful when studying the interaction between the human (player) and the non-human (technology), and the human's adaptation or displacement of the technology, and how the technology shapes the way the human interacts with it (Latour 2005). A designer inscribes a certain vision into the technology, and it is this script that the consumer interacts with (Akrich 1992). Therefore, interaction between developer and player, in the case of games, happens when players 'play with the script'. Playing with the script influences the continuum of the product, be it as a series or franchise, when players interact and displace the script, and in turn developers have to adapt to the transformation of play. This will be analyzed in the next chapter.

Furthermore, this chapter introduced the context these interactions are taking place in. Through the participatory character of the *Super Smash Bros. Melee* scene (Jenkins 2006), 'smashers' come up with their own operational rules (Salen & Zimmerman 2004) that fit their frame of what the game should be. This could also lead to deviating forms of play (Jakobsson 2007) and an emergent culture (Pearce 2011), where players position themselves as being an e-sporter (Rambusch et. al. 2007; Taylor 2012). This development or change in frames will be studied particularly in the following chapter.

3 From casual to competitive

In this chapter I would like to analyze the interaction between the developer and players of the game *Super Smash Bros. Melee* through the use of a frame analysis (Goffman 1974; Snow et. al. 1986). With the use of a frame analysis I am able to analyze how Nintendo, and the designer Masahiro Sakurai in particular, frames the *Super Smash Bros.* series, and lay bare their design intentions for the series. At the same time, I analyze why the community through playing with the script frames the game differently and how their frames signal a misalignment of frames in comparison with the designer of the game's frame. "Frame" here is borrowed from sociologist Erving Goffman (1974, 21), which indicates a "schemata of interpretation that enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large" (Snow et. al. 1986, 464).

I would like to study Nintendo's reaction in a case that portrays the negotiations between the developer/publisher (Nintendo) and its players (smashers) when Nintendo decided to prohibit the right to stream the *Melee* matches that took place on the e-sport tournament Evo 2013. The analysis is structured in such a way, that before arriving at this particular case, I need to analyze how the community is playing with the script by focusing on the development of its competitive scene, by using historical data gathered from forum posts and interviews, so as to reconstruct the events that led to the iconic case of the streaming blockage of Evo 2013, and *Melee* becoming an e-Sport in a broader sense. This means that the game is part of a broader network consisting of actors, both human and non-human, who all have an influence on how the game is conceived and consequently played. The context provided shows that the relation between developer and players cannot be studied without considering emerging play practices such as e-sports, or even the history of the game's technology (both hardware and software). This indicates that these events are all part of one network, as is argued by Latour's actor-network theory (2005).

The name of this chapter, 'From casual to competitive', signals a shift in frames. This shift happened, not because the game itself changed, but the 'outside' of the game changed. Because of the community's participatory character they were playing with the script of the game, thus 'transforming' the game's frame through "transformative play" (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 301). As will be clear from the analysis I will conduct in this chapter, Nintendo and Sakurai with his *Super Smash Bros.* series wants to appeal to a wide variety of gamers, and wants to tap into the market of 'casual players'.

According to Jesper Juul (2012, 28), casual players are commonly described as "players who are not so interested in 'graphics' as such, who have little knowledge of video game conventions and are therefore easily intimidated, and who desire 'quick fun'." The focus on easily accessible fun is important for casual game design, as Nintendo of America chief Reginald Fils-Aime says about the Nintendo Wii: "Our visuals for Wii will look fantastic, but in the end, prettier pictures will not bring new gamers and casual gamers into this industry" (ibid). Casual is mostly associated with "dumbing down" of games (Juul, 26). It is because of this frame that many passionate or "core" gamers (28) tend to dissociate themselves from these type of games. As will be analyzed in this coming chapter, many felt that with the more casual game *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*, Sakurai alienated the more competitive players. The way Nintendo reacts on the "frame transformation" (Snow et. al. 1986, 473) that happened while players were playing with the script will be analyzed in this chapter.

In chapter 3.1 'The script: Super Smash Bros. Melee' I will explain how the game series was developed and I will talk shortly about its design intentions and its script, which I return later to in the analysis. Chapter 3.2 'Emergence through playing with the script: Tournaments' will study the game's transformation from a casual game into a competitive game with its own established rules, that is being played on international tournaments conform the emergent culture of e-sports. This section serves as a lead up and will gradually result in the analysis of the streaming blockage case, discussed in chapter 3.3 'Developer and player negotiation: Streaming blockage', which demonstrates the negotiations between developer and players in an iconic case. Most of my sub research questions will be answered in this section. Finally, chapter 3.4 'Game changing consequences' shows how Nintendo reacted to the misalignment of frames analyzed in this third chapter in a technical form, by discussing the games that are released after *Melee*: *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*, and *Super Smash Bros. for the Wii U* (Nintendo 2014), which is released in time of writing this thesis.

3.1 The script: Super Smash Bros. Melee

To understand the script of the *Super Smash Bro.* series, it might be a good idea to delve into its history of development. The first *Super Smash Bros.* game was released in 1999 for the Nintendo 64. The designer, Masahiro Sakurai, wanted to make an original 3D fighting game, as he knew most

2D fighting games were generic and did not do well in the market.[14] Although he feared he would not get permission from Nintendo, he wanted to put Nintendo characters against each other, to set up the right atmosphere for the game, so that the game had some narrative support. For an arcade game, it could be acceptable to have abstract characters. For the home console however, Sakurai wanted to give it some character development. Before pitching the idea to Nintendo, he made sure the game was well balanced. He choose to put characters against each other that were recognizable and well known, namely Mario, Donkey Kong, Samus, and Fox. Nintendo approved of the idea. Among those who approved was future Nintendo boss Satoru Iwata, who would co-develop future releases of the *Super Smash Bros.* series as well.

Super Smash Bros. is a fighting game series where the player has to smash his or her opponent off the stage. Damage, represented by a percentage, can be aggregated through hitting the opponent with attacks. The percentage, which can exceed 100%, indicates how far a player can be smashed away, i.e. the higher the percentage, the farther the player can be smashed away. The stage is not an enclosed area, to allow players to smash each other off the stage. There are no intricate button combinations to memorize, as each character uses the same buttons for attacking, moving, dodging, blocking, grabbing, throwing and jumping.[15] To make things more interesting, 'battle items' can (randomly) spawn. Those are items that can be used by players to help them attack the opponent. Those basic rules of the game gave ample room for the players to create their own game play.

As GameCube's best selling game and second installment in the series, *Super Smash Bros. Melee* had naturally built up a community of players. However, the GameCube did not supported online play, so players were 'restricted' to their local environment, if they would want to play against other players, instead of the computer-controlled characters (CPU's). This first enscription by designers through technology really determined how *Melee* was played, and how consequently local communities formed. This development led to a transformation of frames, as the hardware did not align with the frame the players would consequently form of the game. "Frames function to

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[14] Iwata, Satoru. "Dragon King: The Fighting Game." *Iwata Asks.* 2014. Nintendo.
<http://iwataasks.nintendo.com/interviews/#/wii/ssbb/6/0>.

[15] In *Edge* #271, Sakurai found complicated controls and intricate combo's "the greatest shortcoming of fighting games at present." This was for him the reason to keep the game design simpler.

organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective" (Snow et. al. 1986, 464), and to that end, players organized local tournaments to align their experience of the game with another existing frame, that of a competitive sport.

Local tournaments were being held more frequently over the years, which caused SSBM eventually joining several nationwide competitions, such as the US official national professional league, Major League Gaming (MLG) and the biggest fighting game tournament in the world, Evolution Championship Series (Evo).[16] First, however, 'smashers' (as competitive *Super Smash Bros.* players call themselves) united on the internet, on the forums called Smashboards.[17] This source is also where I found most links to historical events that are not only documented throughout several news outlets, but also throughout fan made pages. In a way, this forum structured my analysis by providing the chronology of the smash community. On the Smashboards, players could see which tournament was held where, and this contributed to the growth of the attendance during tournaments, plus the boards also helped set up tournaments elsewhere. In the next section, the development from local to international tournaments will be studied, along with a frame analysis that explains how the players formed a frame for the game that fits with the e-sport frame discussed in chapter 2.

3.2 Emergence through playing with the script: Tournaments

This section explains how this emergent culture with its own emergent rules came to be. How did local play culture develop into e-sports and how were game rules established? As *Melee* grew in popularity, tournaments were being organized throughout the country. In the beginning they were quite insignificant, and prize money was not involved. The competitive scene started to mainly emerge in both coastal areas of the United States. In the case of the East Coast, there is some documentation on the emerging tournaments and the formation of 'crews' (teams consisting of competitive smashers) around Maryland, Virginia and the Washington D.C. area.[18] The term 'crew' used in tournaments functions as a way to identify the players involved and feel part of a specific

[16] *MLG*. 2014. Major League Gaming, Inc. <http://www.majorleaguegaming.com/>.

Evo Championship Series. 2014. Evo & Shoryuken. <http://evo.shoryuken.com/>.

[17] *Smashboards Forums*. 2014. Xyelot LLC. <http://smashboards.com/forums/>.

[18] "Re: Evolution of the Smash Game by 'AlphaZealot'." *Smashboards*. 2014. Xyelot LLC. <http://smashboards.com/threads/evolution-of-the-smash-game.59214/#post-1085552>.

group of players in which each player has a specific rule, just like what the formation of 'clans' (Rambusch et. al. 2007, 160) did for the player's meaning-making activities in *Counter Strike*. I argue that this specific framing early on in the young competitive scene of *Melee* already situated the game as a competitive game, not only as game design, but also culturally. This framing lends itself well for the transformation to the e-sport framing.

Around the second half of the year 2002 tournaments were held that attracted less than 50 people. More than a year later, in January 2004, the east coast held its biggest tournament yet, Game Over, that even featured players from outside the area, most notably from the other side of the country, the West Coast. The smash community in the East Coast was already in decline by that time, while the West Coast was flourishing. The competitive scene of *Melee* was revolutionized in 2002 in South-California, the West Coast. An underground tournament called Tournament Go (TG) was held by Matt Deezie, now considered to be the founding father of the *Super Smash Bros. Melee* competitive scene. Deezie organized and held TG at his own home. It is important to note that most of these players were college students, and it is mostly this group of players that identify themselves as 'smashers', with a competitive mindset. Through the Smash World Forums (later known as the Smashboards), players in the area took notice of his tournament and decided to come. Because of its success, Deezie could organize more TG's. In January 2003, TG4 was organized, which attracted around 100 competitors, among them a smasher that later became the best smasher in the world for a while, Ken Hoang. Although Deezie retired from organizing tournaments in 2004, *Super Smash Bros. Melee* was picked up that summer by the national Major League Gaming (MLG) organization, which not only gave the game its recognition as a legitimate competitive fighting game and bigger prize money, but also made frame alignment with the e-sport framework possible for the players, making their experiences more "meaningful" (Snow et. al. 1986, 464) through association with this frame, as their perception of the game aligned with the frame of e-sports.

So, how were the operational rules of the game established then? When TG5 was organized around August 2003, the rivalry between the West Coast and the East Coast came to a pivotal point. The best player of each coast was present at that tournament. For the West Coast, Ken was present, and a player named Azen represented the East Coast. It was a solid victory for the West Coast, as the top 3 only included West Coast players, and Azen ended fourth. However, TG5 had operational rules that were not common in the East Coast. The East Coast favored as little randomness in the game as possible, while TG5 supported the use of random spawned items. Game Over (held in the

East Coast) was organized as a consequence of what happened at TG5.

Most tournaments had their own operational rules. However, to decide on a national level which player would be the best, official tournament rules had to be established, so every tournament could be compared on a national level. TG6, which was held a year later, was the first international tournament, as it also invited one of the best Japanese *Melee* players. Although it was a tournament held in the West Coast, operational rules indicated that no items may be used, merging East Coast operational rules with West Coast operational rules.

When *Melee* entered the MLG roster, it did so with a comparable rule set to the one TG6 had shown, most importantly featuring no-items and 4 stocks (lives), as main rules.[19] Although, to this day rules still vary from tournament to tournament, over the years an organizing body was formed that establishes a rule set that is accepted by the community, and is thus by and large used by most national tournaments. This organizing body is called the Smash Back Room, and consists of three separate bodies that help establish rule sets for *Melee*, *Brawl* (the Unity Ruleset is widely accepted) and for the original *Super Smash Bros.* Only important members of the Smashboards that have organized (underground) tournaments before are part of the Smash Back Room, most notably among them 'AlphaZealot', who has organized MLG tournaments. Around 2011, a Melee rule set had been established and remains under constant discussion, while being updated from time to time.[20] That being said, differences in rules for each tournament (for instance, MLG as opposed to Evo) are minimal, and only differ very lightly.

3.3 Developer and player negotiation: Streaming blockage

Nintendo did not share the same frame with the players of the game *Super Smash Bros. Melee,* who identified themselves as 'smashers'. The negotiation between the developer and its players outside of the game and its misalignment of frames is exemplified in something I have been referring to throughout the thesis, namely the streaming blockage of the Evolution Championship Series' (Evo)

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[19] Womack, Barrett. "Crafting Super Smash Bros. 4's Competitive Ruleset." *Redbull eSports*. September 10th, 2014. Redbull. <http://www.redbull.com/us/en/esports/stories/1331677770533/crafting-super-smash-bros.-4-s-competitive-ruleset>.

[20] "Tentative: MBR Official Ruleset for 2012." Post by 'Cactuar'. *SmashBoards*. 2014. Xyelot LLC. <http://smashboards.com/threads/tentative-mbr-official-ruleset-for-2012.313252/>; "Smashboards Melee Ruleset." *SmashBoards*. 2014. Xyelot LLC. <http://smashboards.com/rulesets/melee/>.

tournament of *Super Smash Bros. Melee* in 2013. This section discusses the pivotal moment in which the negotiation between developers and players outside of the game become apparent. Fans became outraged when Nintendo of America decided to block the online streaming of the tournament, on the grounds of intellectual property. Fans took to social media to vent their anger and questioned Nintendo's decision, and even set up a petition to ask Nintendo to reconsider their decision.[21] Just a few hours later, Nintendo revoked its earlier statement, and allowed Evo to stream the *Melee* tournament. One of the organizers of Evo admitted in an interview a few days later that Nintendo initially wanted to pull *Melee* from the tournament all together, and later settled on 'only' blocking the streaming of the event.[22] What led to this decision? I argue in this section that the misalignment of frames is the foundation of the issue that led Nintendo into this PR disaster.

Just at its popularity peak, *Melee* attracted a lot of attention in the professional gaming scene. In 2006, Ken was beaten by PC Chris (a rising star) at the season opening of the MLG league at the MLG tournament in New York, who received $10,000 in prize money. In the same year the newest edition in the *Super Smash Bros.* series was announced as well. In 2008, when *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* came out, there was waning attention for *Melee*, and very few tournaments were held. The attention shifted towards *Brawl*, something Nintendo hoped for, as it would stimulate players to buy its new product and technology (its newer console, the Nintendo Wii). *Melee* had to fight back for attention in the coming years.

Enter 2012. In October that year, the Evo fighting game tournament was looking for an 8th and final game to add to its roster. They set up a donation drive for breast cancer research, and the community that backed a specific game that collected and donated the most money by the end of January 2013 would be added to the roster.[23] A few weeks before the deadline a few games competed for the last spot on the Evo roster, most notably *Skullgirls* (Konami 2012) and *Super Smash Bros. Melee*. *Brawl* was also part of the drive, but was not as successful as *Melee*. Thanks to a notable last day fund raising effort by the smash community, *Melee* secured the spot, raising close

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[21] Keach, Michael. "Allow Super Smash Bros. Melee to be streamed at EVO 2013." *Change.org*. 2014. Change.org Inc. <https://www.change.org/petitions/nintendo-of-america-allow-super-smash-bros-melee-to-be-streamed-at-evo-2013-2>.

[22] "Live On Three E166." *OneMoreGameTV*. 2014. Twitch Interactive, Inc. <http://www.twitch.tv/onemoregametv/b/428679055?t=1h16m>.

[23] "Evo 2013 Details!" Blog by 'Inkblot'. *SRK*. 2013. Shoryuken. <http://shoryuken.com/2013/01/08/evo-2013-details-game-lineup-get-your-game-to-evo-and-road-to-evo-events/>.

to $95,000 for breast cancer research.[24]

The 'hype' was huge, as the community pulled through and got *Melee* back at its spot at Evo where it has last been on six years prior. Even Ken, who retired from the scene in 2008, got back in 2012 and was going to perform at this tournament which would be held in July 2013.[25] But then, three days before the tournament would start, Nintendo of America ordered Evo not to stream *Melee* during the event.[26] The backlash of the community was intense, with front page coverage on Reddit, trending topics on Twitter and thirty odd gaming-related news outlets reporting the news.[27] Within five hours, Nintendo of America revoked its earlier order, and decided to let Evo stream the event.[28] With over 130,000 people watching, it became the biggest fighting game stream at that moment, and with close to 700 entrants, it became the largest turnout in *Melee*'s tournament history.[29]

Although it is not clear to this day why this peculiar event happened, I argue in this following paragraph there are several possible reasons why it did happen, or why Nintendo would want to block the streaming of their product's content. In light of earlier copyright enforcements Nintendo made that year, it would be logical to assume they continued this line of action in the case of the Evo streaming case. Around May 2013, the 'Let's Play' YouTuber Zack Scott reported that Nintendo started claiming revenue on videos featuring Nintendo's products, by putting up ads

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[24] "Fighting Game Fans Raise over $225,000 for Breast Cancer Research." Blog by 'Inkblot'. *SRK*. 2013. Shoryuken. <http://shoryuken.com/2013/02/01/fighting-game-fans-raise-over-225000-for-breast-cancer-research-smash-wins/>.

[25] "Chat with Survivor finalist Ken Hoang." *ESPN Sportsnation*. 2014. ESPN Internet Ventures. <http://espn.go.com/sportsnation/chat/_/id/24213>.

[26] Totilo, Stephen. "Nintendo Won't Let Top Fighting Game Tournament Stream Smash Bros." *Kotaku.* 2014. Gawker Media. <http://kotaku.com/nintendo-wont-let-top-fighting-game-tournament-stream-s-724293474>.

[27] "Melee in 2013: Year in Review." Blog by 'Juggleguy'. *Melee It On Me.* 2014. Wordpress. <http://meleeiton.me/2013/12/31/melee-in-2013-year-in-review/>.

[28] "Update: Smash is Back!! Changes to Evo 2013 Smash Schedule." Blog by 'Inkblot'. *SRK*. 2013. Shoryuken. <http://shoryuken.com/2013/07/09/changes-to-evo-2013-smash-schedule/>.

[29] Plunkett, Luke. "Smash Bros. Survives Ban, Becomes Biggest Fighting Stream In History." *Kotaku.* 2014. Gawker Media. <http://kotaku.com/smash-bros-survives-ban-becomes-biggest-stream-in-his-781318536>.

before, in or after a video.[30] Since February the same year, Nintendo was registered as a YouTube partner, thus logging its copyright content in the database of YouTube, so that YouTube can check whether there is a 'content ID match' in videos. If so, advertisement will be placed in the videos, controlling and monetizing the video, instead of the 'creator' of the video.

Another legitimate reason could be that Nintendo's legal department was responsible for the blockage of the streaming, because they were merely following legal guidelines concerning the protection of their copyrighted material. The Evo organizers got in contact with the legal department of Nintendo when they demanded that *Melee* should be taken out the tournament as a whole. Only after 'wigwamming' their way through the conversation with the Evo organizers did Nintendo (read: the legal department) agree to only block the streaming.[31] That decision got revoked after a few hours by Nintendo. An explanation could be that the previous decision reached "the higher echelons" of Nintendo only afterwards, and so the legal department would be overruled by someone higher on the company's metaphorical ladder.

If we would look at the statements of Masahiro Sakurai, the game designer of the *Super Smash Bros.* series, about his own series, we can discover his intentions for the design of the game, or in other words, we can discover its script. Following this, it appears that Nintendo does not want the series to be associated with a lively competitive scene. The company has a target audience consisting partly of children, and adults who buy the games for their children. Associate with a scene where money is being made off characters fighting each other, and this may send out the wrong message to potential customers. Also, Sakurai remarked it was important for Nintendo to maintain the *Super Smash Bros.* series as a "'rough' party game in which anyone can play without feeling too much pressure over winning or losing" (Brown 2014). Nintendo has been accused by several fans of the series of "alienating the competitive *Smash Bros.* scene". For example, by introducing a 'tripping' mechanism in *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*, *Melee*'s successor, which would undermine competitive game play.[32] The main concept behind the *Super Smash Bros.* series, or

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[30] Cheong, Ian Miles. "Nintendo Flexing Copyright Clout on YouTube Let's Play Channels." *Game Front.* 2012. Game Front. <http://www.gamefront.com/nintendo-flexing-copyright-clout-on-youtube-lets-play-channels/>.

[31] Plunkett, Luke. "EVO Co-Founder: Nintendo Wanted Smash Bros. Pulled From Tournament." *Kotaku.* 2014. Gawker Media. <http://kotaku.com/nintendo-wanted-smash-bros-pulled-from-worlds-biggest-740918828>.

[32] "Re: Actually, Nintendo Wanted Smash Bros. Out Of EVO Tourney Entirely, Which Is Really Stupid by 'S.T. Stone'." *techdirt.* 2014. Floor64. <https://www.techdirt.com/articles/20130711/06053023763/actually-nintendo-wanted-

rather script, is that "people unfamiliar to gaming could come to enjoy it just as much as everyone else within the first ten minutes of play".[33]

Sakurai names the competitive scene which made *Melee* into another sort of game he envisioned, a "passionate group of sort of maniac players [sic]". He wants to "avoid a situation" where the game is only designed for that small group.[34] Here, Sakurai refers to the players who are at their peak of the game's performance level, when answering game journalist Jason Schreier's question on whether he takes feedback from high-level competitive players. He depicts this group with the identity of "maniac players" and he says of them they are "a very small […] group", suggesting those players are marginally important. In an interview with *Edge* (Brown 2014), Sakurai admitted to personally regretting *Melee*'s game mechanics, as they made the game "less accessible for novel players", which was the aim for the *Super Smash Bros.* series. To Sakurai, the casual player is the target player, and he prefers not to alienate this group for the sake of the smaller, competitive group. He even went so far to say that if *Smash* would be directed towards competitive players, it would not have a future.[35] Nintendo does not want to amplify (Snow et. al. 1986, 469) the competitive gaming frame, but rather wants to extent its frame, which I will analyze in section 3.4 on the script playing consequences.

Here, it is important to note that the 'smashers' or 'the very small group of maniac players' are indeed a minority within the overall demography of *Super Smash Bros.* players. They are however a vocal minority, having established a community consisting of mostly college students

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smash-bros-out-evo-tourney-entirely-which-is-really-stupid.shtml#c54>.

It should be noted that the article from TechDirt is written in a subjective and accusative manner, using terms such as "insane" and "stupid" when remarking on the streaming blockage. Therefore, it also provokes accusative comments.

[33] Iwata, Satoru. "For First-time Gamers." *Iwata Asks.* 2014. Nintendo. <http://iwataasks.nintendo.com/interviews/#/wii/ssbb/1/1>.

[34] Schreirer, Jason. "An In-Depth Chat With The Genius Behind Super Smash Bros." *Kotaku.* 2014. Gawker Media. <http://kotaku.com/an-in-depth-chat-with-the-genius-behind-super-smash-bro-530744390>.

[35] Bogos, Steven. "Competitive Players Alone Cannot Sustain Smash Bros., Says Sakurai." *The Escapist Magazine.* January 2nd, 2015. <http://www.escapistmagazine.com/news/view/139273-Smash-Bros-Director-Says-Competitive-Players-Cant-Sustain-The-Game>.

traveling from one tournament to the other.[36] A possible reason why there is such a difference between the casual players, for which the *Super Smash Bros.* series is intended, and the competitive players, who feel alienated, is that the game is intentionally very accessible for first time players or casual players. Some of those casual players turn into competitive players only later on. This is mostly not the case for e-sport games such as *Call of Duty* or *Hearthstone* (Blizzard Entertainment 2014), where the focus of game play is on skills, reaction time, and deep understanding of the game rules.

To answer the sub research question 'How was the game intended to be played?', this extension of the frame into a casual game frame reveals the original idea of Sakurai, and how he envisioned the game's relationship with the users. The case described above is a perfect example of the interaction between the developers and the players of a game through the notion of playing with the script. Sakurai's intention was to create a game series that everyone, from first time players to 'hardcore' gamers could enjoy. This meant that designing a game that was aimed for competitive play was undesirable. However, a small but very vocal group of consumers using the technology (the smashers) used the game in another way than was intended, namely as a competitive game, therefore playing with the intended game play or the script. The emerging e-sports culture frame of the community did not align with the original frame of the developer, indirectly causing the case analyzed in this section, answering both the sub research questions of what caused this change, and how are the negotiations and the consequences made visible.

To study the script of the game *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, I have gone "back and forth continually between the designer and the user, between the designer's projected user and the real user, *between the world inscribed in the object* and *the world described by its displacement*" (Akrich 1992, 208-209, emphasis in original). The negotiations about the world inscribed in the object, which is the script of the game, is seen in the various cases where Nintendo tries to defend its 'object', and its intended use. Nintendo wanted *Melee* to pull out of the Evo tournament, arguably because it wanted to protect its product from being a game just for the "passionate group of sort of maniac players [sic]" and it did not fit their frame in which 'outside' competitiveness does

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[36] Bailey, Kat. "The Rise of Nintendo's Curiously Divisive Competitive Communities." *US Gamer*. October 22nd, 2014. <http://www.usgamer.net/articles/the-rise-of-nintendos-curiously-divisive-competitive-communities>; In the documentary *The Smash Brothers* (East Point Pictures 2013), most interviews are recorded in student dorms or on college campus, with (ex)students reflecting on their college life.

not have a place.[37] This is as a reaction to the displacement of the technology by the users, who turned it into a competitive game, played from local to international tournaments.

As on 'the battlefields of negotiation' (Glas 2013), the negotiations that are taking place show that ultimately the players decide how the game is played. This is because "the very nature of a game can change without changing the core rules" (Jakobsson 2007, 392). In the case of a networked game, where developers do have control over the game because they own the servers and can update the game, it is possible to change the constituative rules of the game and maintain continuum through continuous adapting of the script. However, as I have shown with a game like *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, continuous updating is not possible. Rather, Nintendo maintains its continuum by adapting its script continually, through the release of different installments in the series, which will be analyzed in the next section.

In the last section of this chapter, I am going to "follow the negotiations between the innovator and […] users and […] study the way in which the results of such negotiations are translated into technological form" (Akrich 1992, 208), so that we can see the consequences of playing with the script when the developer changes its technology to fit their frame, in the case of a non-networked game (series). The next section will shortly discuss the third installment of the *Super Smash Bros.* series, and shall look at what changed and how this affected game play, consequently the *Super Smash* scene and ultimately the series' continuum. Furthermore, the upcoming fourth installment in the *Super Smash Bros.* series, which are released for the Wii U and 3DS (both newer consoles of Nintendo), are going to be discussed and this section will analyze how Nintendo translated the negotiations about its products, *Melee* and *Brawl*, into the newer product and supporting hardware.

3.4 Game changing consequences

This section shows how playing with the script has game changing consequences. It analyzes how Nintendo reacts to its frame misalignment with the *Melee* community, and how Nintendo not only verbally but also technologically frames its *Super Smash Bros.* series. First, I will analyze the fundamental differences between *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*, released on the Nintendo Wii, and *Melee*. The Nintendo Wii supported online connectivity, so with *Brawl* it was possible to fight in

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[37] Schreirer, Jason. "An In-Depth Chat With The Genius Behind Super Smash Bros." *Kotaku.* 2014. Gawker Media. <http://kotaku.com/an-in-depth-chat-with-the-genius-behind-super-smash-bro-530744390>.

online matches. However, this never took off, as Nintendo discourages the existence of tier listing, as it did not design that into the game. Therefore, tournaments are still the norm for deciding the best players. Afterwards, I argue that each new release in the *Super Smash Bros.* series is a *temporal continuity* of the script, in which the results of the negotiations between the developer and players are more evident because of its continual character, rather than a networked continuous character of a game, such as *World of Warcraft*.

At the time of writing, Nintendo just published its newest iteration in the series, *Super Smash Bros. for the Wii U.* As the results of the negotiations of the script are not yet completely clear, I cannot give a thorough analysis on the changes made to both the hardware and the software. For example, on the 10th of June, 2014, the newest *Super Smash Bros.* for the Wii U was shown on the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3), an event where the biggest game developers give conferences and show their to-be-released products. This game is a (temporal) part of the series' continuum and thus a result from negotiations of the script of the *Super Smash Bros.* series as a whole, and *Melee* is an important and much debated game in this series.

The biggest difference between *Brawl* and *Melee* lies in the game physics, or the constituative rules of the game. Generally, *Brawl* plays slower than *Melee*.[38] Certain moves that favored competitive play were removed, such as 'L-canceling' and aforementioned 'wavedashing'.[39] This made *Melee* superior to *Brawl* for competitive play, and was therefore logically better supported by the competitive community. These changes that were made to *Brawl* seem to support Sakurai's initial idea that *Super Smash Bros.* should be a game for everyone, referring to the 'new' casual gamers, and not just for the 'small group' of competitive players. The Nintendo Wii wanted to tap into the target group of casual gamers, a group that had not received any attention from the other console developers before, such as Microsoft and Sony. The changes being made to the software however seemed to alienate the competitive scene.

What Nintendo did with the Wii and with *Brawl* fits with their wish for "frame extension" (Snow et. al. 1986, 472). Frame extension is an attempt "to enlarge its adherent pool by portraying its objectives or activities as attending to or being congruent with the values or interests of potential adherents" (ibid). This means that Nintendo tried to include any type of players, so as to enlarge

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[38] "Gravity." *Smashpedia.* 2014. Wikia Games. <http://supersmashbros.wikia.com/wiki/Gravity>.

[39] "L-canceling." *Smashpedia.* 2014. Wikia Games. <http://supersmashbros.wikia.com/wiki/L-cancel>.

their market. These desires often come into conflict with players with emergent gameplay, as emergence is unexpected and plays no part in the expectations of maintaining a high profit for business (Taylor 2002). As explained in the beginning of this chapter, Nintendo wanted to attract the new, casual gamers to their products. One of the characteristics of casual games is that they are less intimidating, so it is for players "who desire 'quick fun'" (Juul 2012, 28). Sakurai himself believed that "easily enjoyable games would become the next big thing" when thinking about the conceptualization of the Nintendo Wii.[40] One of the main elements of casual game design is 'usability' or compatibility, which is "the similarity between the physical action of the user and the action performed on the domain objects" (34). Mimetic interface games such as *Wii Sports* (Nintendo 2006) have a high degree of compatibility, and these games were partly made to attract newer players to *Brawl*.

This however alienated the so called 'core' players of *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, who were initially looking forward to *Brawl*. Although *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* did very well in sales,[41] the *Super Smash* community as a whole reacted with a lukewarm response, mainly because it was less fit for competitive play than *Melee*. After an initial decrease in popularity after the release of *Brawl*, *Melee* picked up popularity once again, and was featured on Apex 2013 and Evo 2013, and returned to MLG in 2014. To Nintendo, this shows that *Melee* is still popular for its game mechanics, as the community displaced the technology (Akrich 1992) of *Brawl*. By playing with *Melee*'s script, Nintendo now reconsiders some basic elements in the *Super Smash Bros.* series, by adjusting game mechanics in *Super Smash Bros. for Wii U*.[42]

It must be noted that *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* is still popular, and is also played in a competitive setting, mostly within the bigger tournaments *Melee* is also featured in. However, if we look at how Nintendo "translated" the changes "in its technical form" (Akrich, 208) for the Wii U, it looks like Nintendo is shifting back towards the support of *Melee*'s game play. As for game play, the tripping mechanism (which I talked about before) is not coming back in the new game. The

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[40] Iwata, Satoru. "As If It Was the Last In the Series." *Iwata Asks.* 2014. Nintendo. <http://iwataasks.nintendo.com/interviews/#/wii/ssbb/1/0>.

[41] "Top Selling Software Sales Unites – Wii Software." *Nintendo.* 2014. Nintendo. <http://www.nintendo.co.jp/ir/en/sales/software/wii.html>.

[42] At the time of writing, *Super Smash Bros. for the Wii U* has just been released.

speed of the game will be somewhat between that of *Melee* and *Brawl*,[43] as an attempt to satisfy both competitive players and casual players, and because they do not need to "accommodate that many new players like [they] did last time [with *Brawl*]".[44] Plus, *Brawl*'s Final Smash element, that gives less skilled players an advantage as this move directly KO's an opponent, can be turned off before a match starts. Thus, the game play seems to *afford* competitive game play again.

Most remarkably, Nintendo announced to offer a GameCube controller adapter for the Wii U, so *Super Smash Bros.* can be played with a GameCube controller, which is widely used for *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, as the game can only be played on a GameCube.[45] This means that Nintendo recognizes its competitive community, and acknowledges them by supporting their favorite controller to play *Super Smash Bros for Wii U*.[46] This product has been used in an invitational tournament, which Nintendo organized on the E3 (!).[47] The recognition was welcome, as the competitive scene of *Super Smash Bros.* created a "resilient mentality that it would only succeed on its own" over the years, as they were shunned by not only Nintendo, but also other fighting game tournaments who saw the game as a "kids game".[48]

Thus it seems there is an attempt by Nintendo for frame alignment through their upcoming game *Super Smash Bros. for Wii U*. Although Sakurai wanted *Super Smash Bros.* to be for the casual or family player, something you could easily pick up and play, the community behind the

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[43] Sakurai noted in the interview published in *Edge* (Brown 2014) that "the popularity of *Melee* rested fundamentally on the game's speed."

[44] Schreirer, Jason. "An In-Depth Chat With The Genius Behind Super Smash Bros." *Kotaku.* 2014. Gawker Media. <http://kotaku.com/an-in-depth-chat-with-the-genius-behind-super-smash-bro-530744390>.

[45] "Play Nintendo - Super Smash Bros. Invitational @ E3 2014." *Nintendo*. 2014. Youtube, LLC. <http://youtu.be/eMQySEjyCUw>; Schreirer, Jason. "Nintendo Made A GameCube Controller Adapter For Wii U." *Kotaku.* 2014. Gawker Media. <http://kotaku.com/nintendo-made-a-gamecube-controller-adapter-for-wii-u-1583342868>.

[46] "Today was a huge day for us, Nintendo, and Smash Brothers." Post by 'Itsaxelol'. *SmashBoards*. 2014. Xyelot LLC. <http://smashboards.com/threads/today-was-a-huge-day-for-us-nintendo-and-smash-brothers.356766/>.

[47] This is quite unique, as Nintendo has never organized a competitive tournament before.

[48] Bailey, Kat. "The Rise of Nintendo's Curiously Divisive Competitive Communities." *US Gamer.* October 22nd, 2014. <http://www.usgamer.net/articles/the-rise-of-nintendos-curiously-divisive-competitive-communities>.

series, specifically that of *Melee*, turned it into a game that was played on a competitive level. This caused a misalignment of frames between the way Nintendo framed the game, and the way the smashers saw the game. Because the smashers played with the script of the game, interaction happened outside of the game between the two stakeholders, which are the community and the developer, focusing on the frame of the game: what is the game, how should it be played and who has agency concerning these two questions.

These interactions about what the game constitutes between developer and player influenced the continuum of the game series. In the case of Rene Glas' battlefields of negotiation (2013), the interactions in- and outside the game's design resulted in game updates. Changes to the script of a networked game, such as *World of Warcraft*, happen continuously through game updates. In the case of a game series, such as *Super Smash Bros.*, the script is being changed through continual iterations, which makes each game a temporal continuity of the script. However, now that the *Super Smash Bros. for Wii U* is networked, in the form of DLC's (Downloadable Content), the script can be changed or updated continuously as well. For example, *Melee* has a character tier listing, which indicate which character is 'best' or most popular, because the constituative rules of the game could not be changed. With the introduction of downloadable content, Nintendo can 'balance' certain characters and influencing gameplay. How this will affect the continuum of the series as well as the temporal continuity of the script is yet to be seen.

4 Conclusion

This thesis has shown how players of *Super Smash Bros. Melee* affect the script of the game through negotiations as well as where and how these take place between the developers and players of the game, both inside and outside of the technology itself. In the case *of Super Smash Bros. Melee*, designed by Masahiro Sakurai, it is important to note that the designer of technology inscribes a certain vision in its product, regarding the relationship between the technology and the user: this is called the script (Akrich 1992, 208). The consequent negotiation between the developer's intended use of the technology and the displacement by the user of this script and the following actual use of the technology by the users is what I call 'playing with the script'. Consequently, the developer changes and adapts its technology as a result of the negotiations taking place when users play with the script, as seen in the last paragraph of the previous chapter.

Playing with the script as a concept can be seen as an addition to Rene Glas' 'battlefields of negotiation' (2013). Glas argues that negotiations are taking place between the player and the

developer on what the game is or should be, and he identifies four main perspectives that are being negotiated: game play, game design, game contract and game culture (Glas, 17-18). Glas took *World of Warcraft* as example, with Blizzard as developers. *World of Warcraft* can only be accessed online as a networked game, and Blizzard has the control over the game servers, thus having the upper hand in establishing rules concerning these four perspectives. *Super Smash Bros Melee* is played 'offline', with no continuous interference from Nintendo within the game design. The way negotiations are being dealt with differs between networked games and non-networked games. For both, negotiations of the script influence the continuum of the game series or franchise. In *World of Warcraft*'s case, the script can be altered continuously through online game updates. *Super Smash Bros.* has a temporal continuity of the script, by implementing the results of the negotiations with the script in each new game release within the game series.

This research is partly about the community behind a game, and answered my research question by showing that in part players make the game and decide how it is to be played. This shows that developers are not the only actors deciding on what the game constitutes or how it is seen. As argued using the actor-network theory (Latour 2005), technology is built up from different relations between human (developers and players) and non-human (hardware and software) actors. For instance, some players wished to play, competitively, against other people. This was not possible because the hardware did not support online connectivity. Therefore, tournaments were organized. Through later installments (software) made by the developer Masahiro Sakurai (developer) competitive play was discouraged, and so the game changed because of all these relations. The result of the frame analysis method (Goffman 1974; Snow et. al. 1986) explained how there is a misalignment of frames between the community behind *Super Smash Bros. Melee* and its developer, Masahiro Sakurai. The focus of the frame analysis was to *how* frame misalignment happened. This method did not explain why players had a different frame than the developer of the game. By supporting my frame analysis with the concept of 'playing with the script', I hope I have shown what led to the community's transformative play (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 301), through which a 'frame transformation' (Snow et. al., 473) occurred.

Although this research is about the interaction between developers and players in gaming culture, I chose to focus on one object, that is *Super Smash Bros. Melee*. Because of this, I could show a perspective of negotiations taking place between those two stakeholders that has not been studied before (Kline et. al. 2003; Taylor 2006; Humphreys 2005 & 2008; Glas 2013). The theory

discussed in this thesis supports the concept of playing with the script in a way that it matches well with this particular object. Like numerous (semi-) ethnographic researches (Rambusch et. al. 2007; Pearce 2011; Boellstorff et. al. 2012; Glas 2013), through the study of one object, a concept from a different perspective is put forward, so that future research within the same field can use this concept. Because of my choice of method and analysis, I limited myself to the study of one game. The analysis has shown that playing with the script can explain how developer-player interaction influenced this particular game within this particular context, but the concept has not proved its applicability in other cases yet. The method I used in my analysis did not account for 'why' the interaction happened, which makes it a limited method. For *Super Smash Bros Melee*, the analyzed community is a very specific kind of players, mostly consisting young American students. Therefore, further research from an anthropologic perspective might reveal how games relate to culture, or the importance of "situatedness of games as culture" (Lammes 2007, 29). If so, why do smashers consist of a specific demographic, and what does that say of "local culture practices" (ibid)? Although there are some studies focusing on the interaction between developers and players, it is still understudied.[49] It is important to study how play can shape culture in an increasingly playful environment, with play influencing economic markets (Deterding et. al. 2011), education (Zagal 2010), health care (Kato 2010; Schouten et. al. 2014) and culture (Raessens 2006; Dyer 2014). As such, I hope that this thesis about the interaction between developers and players within game culture can contribute to games and play studies.

    Super Smash Bros. Melee was intended to be a party game, one that was to be played with family and friends, casually at home. Through its players, it became a competitive e-sport that is played on an international scene with prizes going over $10,000. Beginning in late 2002, grassroots tournaments were being held for local players who sought each other out, as there was no online connectivity to play against each other. The community itself mostly consisted of college students, though further studies into the demographic of this game's players would be needed. They organized and accommodated their own tournaments, among most notably the Tournament Go competitions, held in California. With the parallel rise of e-sport activities, *Super Smash Bros. Melee* (and *Brawl*) became popular throughout the country as a competitive sport in the mid 2000's,

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[49] There is for instance an interesting article (Paul 2011) about the design choices the developers made for EVE online (CCP Games 2003). Although the game has a steep learning curve, it actually has vibrant community of players.

where the game was not only played casually anymore.

I have demonstrated that Nintendo's original reaction was to adjust its technology to its own wishes, thus largely ignoring the competitive scene. *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* came out in 2008, and was a slower game with adjusted rules, making competitive play harder so that it was discouraged. After an initial setback in popularity for the *Melee* community, they came back into view before 2013. When Nintendo did not want *Melee* on one of the biggest fighting game tournaments (Evo 2013), the backlash of the community was immediate. The moment for Nintendo to see the unwavering support for *Melee* by its players during the streaming blockage event may have been a turning point for Nintendo in (partly) recognizing its diehard competitive community. The *Super Smash Bros.* for the Wii U (and 3DS) seems to acknowledge their fans' wishes while still remaining true to their own intentions. With this case, I have shown that even though the developer creates the game, the players of the game also make the rules. Interaction between developers and gamers affect the continuum of a game series or franchise, when players are playing with the script.

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