"Melee is Broken": Super Smash Bros. Melee: An Interdisciplinary Esports Ethnography

Abbie ·spoopy' Rappaport

A Thesis

In

the Department

of

Humanities

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

F or the Degree of Master of Arts (Individualized Program)

at Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

May 2020

CONCORDIA UNN ERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

This is to ce1tify that the thesis prepared

By: Abbie 'spoopy' Rappaport

Entitled: Melee is Broken!": Super Smash Bros. Melee: An Interdisciplinary Esports Ethnography

and submitted in prutial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Individualized Masters (INDI MA)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standru·ds with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

Rachel Berger Chair

Darren Wershler

Examiner

Bart Simon

Examiner

Pippin Barr

Thesis Supervisor(s)

Darren Wershler, Bart Simon, Pippin Barr

Approved by

Rachel Berger Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Effrosyni Diamantoudi, Dean,

Date

Abstract

"Melee is Broken": Super Smash Bros. Melee: An Interdisciplinary Esports Ethnography

Abbie 'spoopy' Rappaport

This work presents a qualitative analysis of the esports community that plays and watches *Super Smash Bros.* Melee *(SSBM)* , a platform-based fighting game released for the Nintendo GameCube in 2001. *SSBM* is unusual as an esport for the way that it is built on a grass-roots foundation shaped by players (rather than the game's developers) and is contingent on the continued use of residual media objects, specifically the CRT television, Nintendo GameCube and Wii console coupled with the restraints of analog signal processing. *SSBM players* show particular dedication to dominant community practices like strict tournament rules and settings, shared use of dialect/nomenclatures, mode of play and so on, which are derived from, embedded in, and reinforced by specific hardware and software objects. Competitive *SSBM* is salient case study for how a community of users can disrupt hardware and software developers' initial ambitions for their products. The scene's subversion of Nintendo's intention for *SSBM* to be a casual party game (akin to their family-friendly *Mario Patty* series) demonstrates how players can develop agonistic relationships to corporate power by developing their own community protocols out of the affordances and constraints of the material objects. This thesis operates as an accessible bridge between academia and the *SSBM* esports community. Methodologically, I draw on auto-ethnography,networked community resources, and media archaeology. Accompanying the written work are various illustrations and designs that appeal to visual communities, offer alternative methods for narration, and contribute to an interdisciplinary understanding of the argument through research-creation. Ultimately, this thesis weaves together scholarly research methods with creative practices to argue for *SSBMs* unusual position as an esport structured by its players rather than its developers, and rooted in ostensibly obsolete hardware.

Acknowledgnents

This work was developed for my Individualized Masters at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec. I would like to begin by acknowledging that Concordia University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'keha:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather today. Tiohtia:ke/Montreal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community. Thank you to my advisors Dr. Darren Wershler, Dr. *Bart* Simon, Dr. Rilla Khaled and Dr. Pippin Barr. Thank you to everyone at the Milieux Institute for Arts Culture and Technology for giving me a space to belong in my Masters as a member of Media History Research Centre. I am grateful for the research assistant position at the Residual Media Depot for the opportunities and work I was able to conduct in such a special space (https://residualmedia.netQ. Thank you to my esteemed colleagues and friends Alex Custodio and Michael Iantomo for supporting me and helping me immensely complete this work. A huge shoutout to my family for their infinite support and love, always. Shoutout to all my gamers and "homies" for everlasting friendship. Finally, thank you to SSBMfor years of competition, excitement and epic gameplay. Here's to many more.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Images without sources lists are my own.
Figures at the end of the text.

I. Introduction

Historically, Nintendo's reaction to SSBMs growth as an esport has been antagonistic; this adversity between the game's players and its developers runs contrary to most esports, which are designed specifically for competition. When Nintendo released *Super Smash* Bros. *Melee* in 2001, they intended for it to be a casual, family-friendly party game. In a recent interview, Masahiro Sakurai, the game's director, stated that the way North American SSBMplayers use the game today does not align with the series' philosophy, nor is it consistent with Nintendo's broader philosophy, which sees games as designed for play rather than competition (Doolan, 2018). Until the Apex esports tournament in 2014. Nintendo actively denied any form of support to competitive SSBMplayers.

The other key element of SSBMplay that sets it apart from other esports is players' continued reliance on hardware objects from the early 2000s, namely the cathode-ray tube (CRT) television, specific gaming consoles, and the accompanying GameCube personal controllers. At release, SSBMrequired a Nintendo GameCube and its attending power and RCA cables, a game disc, a GameCube controller, and a CRT television. Melee players still use this setup today, albeit with several community-built add-ons and modifications. Media scholar Raymond Williams in his analysis of culture explains that meanings and values are kept alive by individuals, social inheritances, and embodiment that are proven as universal in a culture when learned (Williams, 1961). Thus, the SSBM community breathes new life into ostensibly "dead" media objects because of their reliance on the affordances of these particular tools.

Consequently, I argue that the competitive SSBM community is unusual due to its attachment to a narrative built and framed by players (rather than the developers) and its continued relationship to residual hardware. The community's subversion of Nintendo's intentions for the game is a useful study in the context of esports media history because of how

the community continues to operate within the constraints of residual media and tools available to realize the competitive scene.

Community discourse reveals ideology, principles and the canon of SSBM. Discourse is commonly understood as what is said by a given group about their experiences and feelings. However, it is crucial to also analyse what is left out or removed from discussion. The impossibility of writing about or discussing certain aspects of the community can show where power is embedded or hidden. In my analysis I make careful choices about what to discuss and what to omit, to offer disruption the many power dynamics at play in the larger SSBM community. Limitations on access of information. like for inner tournament workings, programming code, contracts and content can disclose and identify players as experts, while othering people as outsiders. Obfuscating information is a tool used by many expert modders and players for SSBM as a means to achieve their version of optimized gameplay and to retain power in the SSBM community. This is possibly because of the tension between the community and the game's developer, Nintendo, whose vision opposes the most common ideologies for competitive play, rulesets and styles shared by the SSBM community. Trade secrets are only circulated among experts. Scandals are often overlooked or set aside in community discourse in favour of more readily accepted subject for discussion like gameplay. As a scholar and artist, as well as a community member, I strive to respect the community at large but also to produce honest work. I argue it is important to reflect on situated power in the community and address gaps in discourse to map the assemblage of cultural technique (see technique section) to see how power can be reformed to improve accessibility and decrease gatekeeping for SSBM.

My ongoing participation in the community. combined with my artistic practice, academic experience and queer identity allows me to write from a position that is both critical of and sensitive to the nuances of competitive SSBM. The aim of this thesis is to produce a cohesive study of SSBM culture through interdisciplinary research. The competitive scene's subversion of Nintendo's conceptualization of SSBMas a party game demonstrates the way that players have

developed agonistic relationships to power in conversation with the hardware and software's material affordances and constraints. I bridge my background in fine arts, with my *SSBM* experience and research to create a work that does not uncritically celebrate *SSBM* but rather documents and critiques the community's ongoing development.

II. Method

This study employs qualitative research methods, such as ethnography, auto-ethnography, media archeology, and research-creation. I begin with the following broad research question: what is North American *SSBM* esports culture? To uncover this culture, I take the community's material objects as my point of departure, performing an analysis of *SSBM s* hardware and software objects. My approach draws on media-archaeological methods to perform a robust analysis of the hardware's specifications, affordances, and constraints. The primary mode of media archaeology method is the imperative to study a given media non-linearly, analysing objects in play as an amalgamation, rather than a timeline. Studying *SSBM* as a constellation of hardware maps the links and relationships of objects to objects and objects to people which always reveals some ideological factors in play.

Following this material analysis, I look at community discourse around these materials, performing a qualitative analysis of the community's vocabulary. The salient terms I study include: lag, CRT, broken, balanced, johns, campy, aggressive, neutral, ruleset and gender. I scrape and search these buzz-words on *SSBM* Twitter, with a focus on verified and popular community members. This data analysis reveals different ideologies at play in the community and points to sources of power embed in the discourse around *SSBM's* material underpinnings.

The community developed their own intended uses for the media and hardware for SSBM- with specific purposes and goals for each object. Media theorist Siegfried Zielinski argues that media artifacts are mechanisms for demonstrating perception (Zeilinski, 2006). Artifacts like *SSBM s* hardware show how communities develop agonistically to Nintendo.

Community discourse directly influences community practice. By analyzing not only community techniques but also the way community members *discuss* such techniques, we can trace the embodied practices that coalesce to create SSBM culture.

Given that the SSBM community holds to its grassroots narrative, it is imperative that scholars use the tools that players spent years developing in an effort to understand the culture that both gave rise to and emerged from said tools. To that end, I consult the most popular and widely accepted online text-based resources for SSBM: Melee it on Me (MIOM), Smash Wiki, Meleeli brary.com, and *SmashBoards.* As community projects, these sources are crucial for understanding community discourse, practices and techniques. In addition to written text, I refer to key video resources, such as popular YouTube channel SSBMTutorials and the (in)famous Smash Brothers Documentary (2013). I treat any other popular video with 25,000 views or more as a viable reference for community discourse.

I couple these sources with my own personal experience as a lifetime gamer. I have been an active participant in the SSBM esports community since early 2015. I have attended tournaments of all scales and have travelled around North America to attend tournaments and events. I have experience running (tournament organizing, or TO-ing), creating artwork and designs for events, volunteering and competing at various SSBMtournaments. I attend at least two majors (largest scale tournament, upwards of 2000 entries) annually. Reflecting on and sharing personal experiences from over five years of participation are crucial and pose helpful examples in my work.

However, my experience of SSBM is largely based on being a fan of the game. Creating work as a fan can eclipse critique and critical thought in favour of fandom and love. Video game and media scholar Ian Bogost notes that there is risk in writing and critiquing one's own tastes, the most obvious potential downside being engulfed by like-minded ideas, and not creating any new content. Bogost discusses the notion of an aca-fan, a role I have asserted myself as, "a hybrid of academic and fan critics that acknowledges and interweaves both intellectual and

emotional cultural engagements" (ibid, 2010). Bogost encourages aca-fans to not ignore the discomforts they may find in their beloved topic of study, in order to create more cohesive and well-rounded work, not just praise, something this works seeks to achieve.

I pair my academic methods with my artistic practise to produce an interdisciplinary research object. My art practice emerges out of experiences with the materiality and tactility of SSBM. As an artist, it is important to me that my research extends beyond mere textual analysis to question the materials, images, and discourse of SSBM culture through research-creation. In so doing, I not only bring a new perspective to the study of esports, but also produce an interdisciplinary work that is approachable and that invites deeper sensory engagement.

Because SSBM is deeply rooted in specific material hardware, I draw my theoretical framework primarily from media archaeology. Broadly, media archaeology is a approach to media objects and history that analyzes, reveals, and dissects the layers of a constellation of media]. Under this umbrella, Jussi Parrika and Thomas Apperley (2015) posit that art and critical design practices are useful methods for interrogating and dissecting uniformity of a platform. I implement my art work appropriately with a correlating section of writing to employ visual-based speculation coexisting with the writing. Moreover, Thomas Elsasesser's study of media archeology as symptom suggests that media archeology can allow scholars to shift from traditional linear storytelling to instead uncover patterns in media history (ibid. 2016). The individuality of the work uncovers patterns detailing the need for extreme distinction in the study groups rooted in residual media. For instance, many gamers globally have had access to SSBM, but it is the particularized and precise use of SSBM that differentiate community. Media archeology can present new futures based in fluid, temporal and spatial analyses of a given medium. The non-linear approach to hardware study is crucial here because competitive SSBM culture presents a narrative that breaks free from the continuity that Nintendo sought for the game. Today, as a networked community, the communal space (or non-space) of competitive SSBM often feels ephemeral because of its global distribution. Thus, it is useful for this study to

look at competitive SSBM as an amalgamation. Media archeology is a fitting research tool because of my ongoing imperative to grow personal collections and reorganize the spaces they occupy constantly.

Finally, I have organized the textual analysis and research-creation work into book format. I have a background in book/print making and believe it is an effective way to present information, while directing a specific reader experience that I feel sometimes is lacking in academic texts, from my perspective as a visual learner. Intertwining my art practise with academic writing not only benefits the visual learner but also infuses my own individuality and aspects of auto-ethnography into the text. The artwork allows for wider interpretation or thought than the directness of text alone. The combination of textual analysis and research creation results in a form of esports research presentation that is intimate and innovative. Esports often favours slick, professional coverage endorsed by large companies. Using research-creation techniques in my work addresses what has not been said for SSBM, such a the sense of individuality required to compete, the performative aspects of competing and the weight of the (inter)actions outside of play. A lot of the documentation about SSBM currently is focused primarily on recounting history or discussions of gameplay, while this work adds the discussion of community practise and the techniques and protocols that happen away from the screen. My research creation seeks to add notions or feelings that are omitted in analysis, such as highlighting special players, playstyles or abstractions of SSBM ideology in order to ignite broader speculation about this unusual community. Using research creation continues to contribute to the escape from linear storying telling in favour of an analysis of coexisting dynamics.

Prologue: Collective Nostalgia

See Figure I

The rise of esports and professional gaming is now a fixture of Western society (Yao, 2018). In 2019, *SSBM* celebrated its 18th birthday, the age many acknowledge as the start of adulthood. Today, competitive *SSBM* is an illustrious, intense and global community with several different ideological frameworks in play. Adulthood doesn't just start; one must experience fundamental challenges and growth to reach maturity. This section traces the *SSBM s* maturity into adulthood to suggest the ability [of the community] to respond to the contemporary [esports] environment. Melee's maturity is actualized through player discourse and technique.

Many *SSBM* players regard the era of the game's genesis as a simpler time. The game's infancy was an exciting time. The cast of characters in *SSBM* more than doubled the amount from its predecessor, continuing the combination of vastly different franchises into one. A lot of the elements of the game were cute so that they would appeal to children, like the virtual collectables, battle items, music, and stage design.

Equally important was the inclusion of a cast of beloved Nintendo characters from across over a dozen series. In Mio Bryce's (2008) study of cuteness as a communication device, they explain that Japanese cuteness often exhibits strong fluid hybridity, encompassing many visual themes or motifs into one image or work, and is exhibited in the diversity of gameplay and iconography in *SSBM.* Moreover, Bryce continues to describe that cuteness manifests from incompleteness; The game can only become "complete" by the means of participation. Ultimately, Bryce states that often 'cuteness' means childlike, and children were Nintendo's intended audience for the game.

The target audience of *SSBM* was children, like most games of decade. The cartoon stylization of the game coupled with the inclusion of many recognizable Nintendo characters like Mario or Link, made the game accessible to youth. Many competitive players and *SSBM*

enthusiasts acquired the game during their childhood or adolescence. As these players grew up, they aged SSBM with them. The maturity of the game, coupled with its reuse of residual hardware, inspires nostalgia in many players. When compared to many contemporary high definition AAA games, the cute and chunky aesthetics of SSBM set the game apart from dominant esports iconography and perception.

Artist's Statement: Basement Melee

See *Figures II, III, IV*
To pay homage to *Melee' s* grassroots beginnings, I have created a maquette of the typical gaming space. The work's small scale references the game's use of cuteness as a communication tool. The entire sculpture rests on a cloud-like structure, to represent the game's foundation in dreamlike nostalgia. Nostalgia is critiqued by Svetlana Boym (2007) as a longing for past place or time. As SSBM and esports become increasingly popular, more complicated and troubling situations arise simply (but not solely) because of the community's growing scale. Before I dive into my analysis, I want to take a moment to feel nostalgic for the game's beginnings in the family home, at a friend's house, after school. I have a longing for a simpler time before players began to discover SSBMs its competitive potential. Many competitive players have been playing since the game was released.

Media historian Wolfgang Ernst notes that media can act as a storage technology. Technology can hold symbolic temporal order, memory and feeling which is relived (in part) through the (re)use of the technology required (Ernst, 2013). SSBM represents the collapse of narrative and of nostalgia into a singular form, which is shown in the singularity of this artwork.

III. ***Hardware*** & ***Software***

What is *SSBM?*

In 2001, Nintendo released *Super* Smash Bros. *Melee (SSBM)*for the GameCube, the second installment of beloved platform fighting game series *Super* Smash *Bros.* (SSBJ. The game features a cast of 25 characters from a variety of Nintendo franchises, including the 12 original cast members as well as 13 newcomers. SSBM gameplay differs from canonical fighting games like *Street Fighter* or *Mortal Kombat* because the gameplay objective is to knock opponents out of the boundaries of the stage, rather than deplete their health bar to zero. As well, the variety of featured Nintendo characters are from their own franchise, contrary to most fighting games of the early millennia where the cast was created for fighting gameplay. Each battle takes place on a variety of stages shaped according to the properties and ambience of each franchise. Stages have platforms, some which move or transform, that add new levels to battle. Unique to the Smash series, character's damage taken is measured by percentage. Damage dealt to opponents increases their percentage. The higher one's percentage, the further they get knocked back. When a character is forced off the stage, it results in a loss of a life. It is worth noting that the game features its own gravity system as well as set and different weights for each character. Finally, unlike other fighting games, where moves are defined by set combinations of button inputs, moves for SSBM are formed with single button presses, often with a directional input.

This unique form of gameplay provides players with the opportunity for new game plans that are entirely based on tricking their opponent offstage, and keeping them there. This is called edge-guarding, and it is a crucial technique for SSBM competitive play.

SSBM s battle functions serve as the core of the game. In addition to this, SSBM presented new features -- gameplay modes and collectables -- unseen in its predecessor. Although they were included in SSB, SSBM added new hazards, or items, available to gameplay. Items in gameplay have a range of effects, such as inflicting damage or restoring

health. Moreover, other new features included the ability to adjust damage ratios, coin matches (a mode where players must collect the most "money" possible, where each confirmed hit results in coins flying out of the character who takes damage), and a tournament mode. Distinct single-player gameplay modes featured a series of challenges, boss battles and minigames. Finally, *SSBM* also required that the player complete several of these challenges in order to unlock an additional hidden 11 characters and 11 stages, without which the game is incomplete. As well, players can collect 293 unlockable trophies, but they serve little-to-no purpose in gameplay.

Competitive SSBM format is always 1v1 (singles) or 2v2 (doubles/teams) and uses very few of the new features. This subversion of Nintendo's addition of more casual, collectable and fun elements of play reveals community beliefs. In earlier days of competitive *SSBM,* players turned to popular forum *SmashBoards* (https://SmashBoards.com/) to unite over the subversion of the casual aspects of the game, using this forum as a hub to form the rules and ideologies that are honoured today.

I have fond memories of playing with my brother and friends on a small CRT, resting on a couch in our parents' basement. Looking back, I remember playing through adventure and classic mode, the single player featuring battles to traverse including the infamous boss, *Masterhand,* striving to get as many completion trophies as possible, while discovering how to unlock more characters. The game was easy to love, primarily because nostalgia was infused into the game's conception. The inclusion of iconic Nintendo characters from long-running franchises made the game accessible to a variety of fanbases, with more characters than ever before. I have distinct memories of leaving the GameCube on all night, watching its bright orange light shine in the darkness of the basement, to unlock the final character of the cast. This was a simpler time, before the rise and popularization of esports, when rivalries and competition only spanned from classmates to close family members. My love and nostalgia for *SSBM* aligns with Boym's dual definitions of nostalgia. Primarily, of restorative nostalgia, that being a

prolonged sense of longing, as mentioned above. Today, I argue that *SSBM* as an esport succeeds in part by the players' and my own reflective nostalgia for the game. This type of nostalgia brings something from the past to the present (Boym, 2007). I would argue that many *SSBM* players base some part of their dedication to the game from a collective shared fantasy of the game as a serious esport rooted in their past experiences with the game.

As years passed, my love for video games and their culture grew strong. I have my brother to thank, who started competing in *Smash64, SSBM s* predecessor, for introducing me to the esports scene. I attended my first event, Enthusiast, Gaming Live (EGL), in 2015 with him and some mutual friends and immediately became hooked. After spending many years traversing MMORPG worlds, and concealing my passion for games and their community, seeing a community like the ones I invested time in online actualized in an event was enlightening. I have attended a variety of *SSBM* events on all scales since, including travelling to a handful of "majors" (the largest scale tournament for *SSB),* regionals, monthly and weekly events. I have participated in the community not only as a competitor, but tournament organizer, volunteer, artisUcreator and now as an academic.

Adversarial Esports Shaped by its Players

Super Smash Bros. Melee is useful for thinking through the relationships between materiality, embodiment, tinkering, and esports. The competitive *SSBM* community mandates the use of three essential but dated hardware objects: the cathode-ray tube (CRT) television, the GameCube, or a Nintendo Wii that has been modified at the software level (softmodded), and the GameCube controller. Players' strict adherence to these three central hardware objects has led to the development of specific tinkering and modding practises, which is very limited in other esports communities. *SSBM s* use of outdated hardware speaks to a reactivation and transformation of residual media. Media scholar Charles Acland notes that the affordance of the internet, which is plays a crucial role in a networked community like *SSBM,* causes a process

where new media comes to enclose the old. SSBM inherently encloses the old because of its age, but is revived as new media because of ongoing player dedication. (Acland, 3-5, 2007). These tools take on an important role, despite most contemporary videogame players' interest in newer, more powerful technologies.

When players choose what game to play, they implicitly agree to use a specific set of hardware objects, and they obey tacit community made rules for them, which in turn dictate how their body acts during acts of competitive play. As Alex Custodio (2020) argues in a forthcoming publication, the embodied experience of engaging with gaming hardware is fundamental to the way people actively engage with/as objects. In the case of SSBM, players are expected to learn, understand and acquire a variety of practises and materials. Engaging in these material practices is a means of joining the community of competitive play, which maintains its continuity through the reuse and adaptation of residual hardware. These practices are inextricable from community capital, and through participation, align peoples' identities as SSBM players.

At a competitive level, SSBM is the one of few games where the developers have not changed, altered, or patched the original software since its release. This orients SSBM players towards a a distinct set of residual hardware objects. This hardware's affordances and constraints contribute to a unique corporeal experience for players. Esports scholar TL Taylor explains the two results of studying the relationship of material esports to bodies in terms of "the ways the corporal body plays an active role in skilled performance and the assemblage of that skill and expertise as produced through a network of bodies and technology" (ibid, p.37). The way players acquire, use, tinker with, and honour this hardware orients them within the SSBM community.

See *Figures I II* - These illustrations show the materiality of SSBM as well as the history of video connections that preceded it. The timeline of signal processing is significant as SSBM rests in the middle of the timeline. Most other esports are digitally processed, so understanding

the "forgotten " signal processing history is crucial in seeing the lengths *SSBM* players traverse to play.

What Lag is for *SSBM:* The CRT Debate

The CRT television is at the heart of the competitive Melee experience. The game was released before liquid crystal display (LCD) televisions became popularized in domestic spaces (around 2007 according to Beach). CRT televisions are built to display high-contrast video and can only receive analog signals, which is what most gaming consoles were designed to output in the early 2000s. Melee players use CRT televisions [in part because that's what was most available when the game first came out] because they have the shortest lag and run a crispy (nearly) 60 frames per second. Lag here is the time between a player's input on a controller and when the corresponding in-game action occurs on the screen. Competitive *SSBM* players are sensitive to lag, as their in-game movements have small margins for error. Certain techniques require frame-sensitive button inputs. A single frame can be the deciding factor between triumph or defeat. Studies conducted by contributors at *Melee it On Me* (Laferriere, 2014), a popular community blog, show that flat screens can add anywhere from 42-151 milliseconds of lag and can also risk a button input lag of 2-9 frames. This difference is pivotal for players, as some attacks can make contact or expose their hitbox, the area where damage can be dealt (opposite: hurtbox, space where character is vulnerable to be hit) for only one frame.

Because of these factors, the CRT has established itself as the optimal display for *SSBM.* However, as CRT televisions are no longer in production, (ceased in 2008, [Smith, 2017]) they have become increasingly difficult to acquire and maintain. As CRTs have become increasingly troublesome to acquire, players began to develop different additions or dongles to add to an LCD set up to cut down the input lag, attempting to recreate the feel of playing on a CRT. Projects like EON's collaboration with Dan "Citrus300psi" Kunz, that help reduce lag such as the *EON GCHD Mk-II,* an adapter made to replace the composite cables with standard HDMI

out, which aim to deliver native 480p. This adapter is pricey (upwards of $150 USO) and can only be acquired through online sources.

Adherence and Love for the CRT

SSBM events, from a *Smash* fest in someone's basement to national tournaments, indurate the CRT as eternal. Acquiring a CRT is a fundamental part of the *SSBM* player experience. The search spans thrift shops, parents' basement and online shopping markets. The search for the correct hardware can be difficult but also enticing in its challenges; the harder the objects are to find, the more a player may want them. As well, the ritual of finding one's hardware can be viewed as a right-of-passage by many *SSBM* players. Players unite over pictures of broken CRTs on the side of a road that circulate on social media. Some players keep a small CRT in the trunks of their cars, not knowing when they might need it. Players board international flights, clenching their CRT on their lap to ensure they have a set-up in their hotel room at an event. On a broader scale, gaming event companies collect and store a number of these chunky televisions to supply to events and attempt to standardize (and monetize the rentals of) competition hardware. Players create set-ups like Takuto "S-Royal" Maeuchi's Melee Machine (see Figure III and IV) made for playing Melee anywhere, anytime. The spectacle of a large-scale tournament is as much about the image of bright, coarse televisions and the sound of their high-pitched rings as it is about play itself. The adherence to the CRT television is strict but the standard exists out of a nostalgic fondness for the game's beginnings. The reliance on residual media sets *SSBM* apart from other esports displays that use the newest monitors, PC builds and systems.

Reframing the Debate: Software Issue

See Figure V

As defined previously, playing *SSBM* on anything but a CRT television causes a delay between input and action on screen. While many players frame this issue as rooted in signal processing,

one player directs attention to a different source of the issue. Instead of framing the lag issue as a problem with LCD televisions, one player, Aziz "Hax$" Al-Yami, redirected players' attention to a different source of lag: an supposed (as it may not been seen as a "problem" by other players who think the game is already "perfect") issue within the SSBM s software code. Hax$ enlisted the help of signal processing guru, David "Kadano" Schmid, who used an oscilloscope to test lag on a variety of displays. Dissatisfied with the results of tests performed with highly subjective variables, Hax$ and Kadano dove into the game's software code. They found that, although the GameCube runs at 59.94 Hz, SSBM s code runs at 60 Hz. This discrepancy causes a desynchronization between the console and the game engine (Al-Yami, 2019). Medders such as Achilles, Dan Salvato, and tauKhan have rewritten some of the game's code to "fix" this desync, which Hax$ identifies as a "mistake." (ibid. 2019). Hax and company's ideology, and the softmod that resulted from it, are both new, and not adopted widely by the community. These players' pursuit for lag-less play is an example of the process by which community opinions become naturalized into the community discourse. There is no right or wrong in regards to the argument of lag. There is only the presentation of power, based in the same shared fundamental material origin. The true source of the lag debate is derived from competition and love for SSBM. While love and competition may intertwine, they are not always directly correlated, which results in a range of opinions on issues like input lag. The chart below by Kadano shows the extent that of precision valued by SSBM players. Their competitive drive forces them to create conditions for the most precise gameplay possible, but unlike players of more recent games, they are forced to adapt to the constraints of game software and hardware from 2001.

2 Consoles, 1 Experience

Ever since Nintendo stopped manufacturing the GameCube, finding the console with a copy of the game disc became relatively expensive and difficult (around $70 CON on Ebay). provided

playe rs are willing to infringe on copyright and use an unauthorized ROM copied from a legally purchased disc, The Wii provides a cheap solution, without sacrificing the 480p progressive scan that SSBM requires. The Wii's ability to run GameCube discs natively and its inclusion of four GameCube controller ports, coupled with two USS-ports and one SD card slot created an opportunity for programmers. Various software mods have been developed to emulate games and systems prior to the Wii. Today, a physical copy of SSBM will set players back around 70 or 80 dollars. As Melee's popularity ascended, the demand for the game grew too much for many stubborn players to commit to paying for a copy of the game. Today, running *SSBM s* software on a Wii runs the same frame rate as the GameCube copy as long as players are using a CRT display. Thus, *SSBM* players began to develop, share and circulate information on software mods to ensure quicker access to the game. The tools and guides to this specific Wii-modding practice are readily available online and the practice itself does not require any programming knowledge. *SSBM* players value the GameCube and Wii equally. Players claim that that the 2 consoles produce the same authentic hardware experience, despite the differences between GameCube and Wii. This is unusual as many popular esports today are cross-platform, generally PC and console, there is an ongoing battle about which is platform "better" or more "correct" in play. It may be difficult, however, to compare PC and console gaming because they each have unique controller builds, but each player will adhere to the platform they feel is the most "correct", and generally esports players adhere to a singular platform and build for play.

The Controller: Extending the Body in Play

The GameCube controller, with its distinct shape and double analog stick, is players' favoured controller not just for competitive SSBM, but the entire *Smash Bros.* franchise. The *SSBM* community lauds the controller's shape and button layout ("mapping"), praising both its ergonomics and quick rumble response. Not all players choose to play with rumble response on, but those who do will have quick haptic feedback in combination with the already standard audio

and visual queues that help them gauge their gameplay choices. The controller has a sturdy foundation for SSBM, but, because of the game's reliance on precision, *Me/ee* players have turned to different grips, hardware mods, and even additional softmods to perfect and optimize their control. There are three generations of board designs inside the GameCube controller, but only the third board , the T3 released in 2008 that includes a tighter analog stick box to prevent a feeling of looseness or lack of directional control, is widely accepted as the most responsive and optimal as a starting controller base (Meyers, 2017). After the release of popular developer and *SmashBoards* contributor Magus' code to display controller data in 2015, Kadano compiled a cohesive list of controller mods, the latest version can be found at http://kadano.net/SSBM/GCC/. It was after the circulation of this list that controller mods became extremely desirable, if not tacitly identified as mandatory (Funes, 2018).

Today, many community members exclusively modify GameCube controllers. Their practises are labour intensive, intricate, and require some engineering knowledge. These practices include filing small notches around the analog joystick to make easy access angles for recovery options (see Technique section) as well as more advanced in-game techniques like shield dropping (see *Hidden Competitive Potential: The Beginnings* section). Some players opt to remove the resistant springs in their trigger buttons to increase the speed that they can put out their power shield. Each controller will always be unique to the player using it (See Figure VI). Esports scholar T.L. Taylor states, "for expert play to be achieved, the nuanced circuit between corporeality and virtually must be completed" (ibid, p.43). That is, players must feel as though they are connected with their controller and the game, as if it is a part of their bodies. I have heard many players utter the mantra that nothing matters except for one's focus on the four corners of the screen; they insist "becoming one with the machine" is the best way to achieve optimal play. Many players opt to have more than one controller fit for competition, in case one is lost or damaged. It is uncommon to see players share controllers, because

tournaments not only require players to bring their own controller (BYOC) but also because each player has their own specialized controllers designed around their playstyle.

Embodied Play: Adapting Body to Hardware

Players adjust their body to fit the shape of the controller. Most players hold the controller with a standard grip: the controller resting in their palms with one thumb on each side of the controller grips. Some players, including myself, grip the controller the way one grips a fight stick pad, with their index fingers (rather than the thumbs) on top of the buttons. It may look awkward, but for certain characters, this grip allows the player to input button combinations more quickly. For example, many players who play Princess Peach, learn to use a different grip, called "claw" or "half-claw" style. Peach's most unique function is her ability to float, which requires that the player press and hold the jump button (either X or Y). Playing claw or half claw allows players to rest multiple fingers not only on the jump (float) button, but also on other buttons. Some players do not even play with their hands, often for accessibility issues or to relieve hand pain. One player, Char "Charmizelle" Elizabeth Mizelle, plays with her feet (See Figure VII). A famous player from Japan, Rudolph, organizes three chairs in a row to play on his hands and knees, simply because he favours this position. Players adjust their bodies for the platform of the controller for their best self-optimized playstyle, ability and performance.

Snapback and UCF

Not every controller is perfect. There are several guides online that explain testing methods for physical issues exclusive to a controller, like snapback. Snapback is when the analog stick vibrates after a "flick" input (Basset, 2016). A controller's snapback is indirectly linked to its dashback, a software phenomenon. As described by *Melee It on Me,* dashback is "[the] first frame of pushing backward, the game registers a half press, you will get stuck in the turn animation for 5-9 frames (depending on character) before you can start your backward dash"

(ibid.). At its core, a snapback issue is when a loose joystick causes a controller to read inputs that have not been executed. Understanding this link between hardware and software is important because it dictates whether a controller is in the top tier. Less than 40% of controllers are in the top-tier, and are therefore obsolete in competition (ibid.).

Accordingly, a software mod developed by Dan Salvato and team (Twitter: @UCF_*SSBM},* to fix, standardize, and regulate dashback, shield rolls and drops for *SSBM.* UCF, or universal controller fix, is a piece of software that allows all Melee players to feel as though they have a higher-tier controller by mending these discrepancies. UCF addresses the in/availability of controllers and levels the playing field for the competitive setting (Salvato n.d.). Downloading and sharing UCF with a USB is simple, as it runs when inserted into a software-modded Wii. As well, there are also GameCube memory cards in production with UCF attached to the game's software. After Nintendo got word of this, they told Smashers they were not allowed to add UCF to the game's software, especially in a competitive setting, because it was viewed by Nintendo as an "unfair advantage" that fosters the competition they sought to stop for *SSBM* (Kahn, 2018). With this, players developed a hardware mod using an Arduino, a custom build often called a "Dween", that is inserted into all four GameCube controller ports, which adds UCF to gameplay directly through the controller's connection. Some larger tournaments have used the Arduino add-ons while others I have attended seem to add UCF to the game in a less "official" or obfuscated manner.

Controversially, many players began to install Arduinos into their controllers to achieve frame-perfect inputs. Arduino-modded controllers and other forms of tool-assisted-speedrunning (TAS_techniques) are illegal in tournaments, yet there are little no ways of regulating this that I could imagine, except for asking players to unscrew and open their controllers. This is one of the few modes of cheating available to *SSBM* and could easily be happening at tournaments with few ways of detecting it. Players are improving rapidly, with player skillfulness approaching that of a machine.

Controllers, But Make it Fashion!

In addition to modifying controllers for performance, many modders also alter their controllers to better suit their aesthetic. Discussing materiality, Matthew Kirschenbaum's (2008, pp. 10-11) states that "materiality rests upon the principle of individualization." He explains that no two physical objects are the same by nature of the way that our bodies experience them. Two players might be given the same controller, but their feelings and experiences of that controller, or of any hardware for that matter, are based on their individuality and bodies. Controller mods may include the use of custom shells, buttons, and wires, as well as other added decorations. Having a unique or stylized controller is common and is a way of expressing one's passion and dedication not only to their personal hardware but also to their personalized experience of *SSBM.* The controller is the player's direct and explicit connection to the game. The aesthetics of one's controller often signify their alignment in a given community, fandom or parts of their identity they wish to highlight through aesthetics and/or mods. The controller becomes an extension of the senses. If the controller does not feel "right" along the lines of button pressure and joystick sensitivity, players might drop out of tournaments.

Frankenstein Controller: Artist's Statement

See Figures VII, IX, X
Here is the Frankenstein controller, circa 2015. It is made from a GameCube controller top shell with attempted shield drop notches. This shell was terribly and unevenly notched, making it useless to a competitive *SSBM* player. In the earliest days of controller mods, many referred to their controller modding practise(s) as "Frankensteining" their controller. The earliest controller mods were unorthodox experiments, and often left players with hideous results. There was little regulation or universalized practices. Most controller projects reflect themes of the Frankenstein story like the pursuit of (dangerous) knowledge and sublime nature.

In regards to their hardware, Melee players are constantly in search of means to optimize and push their limits in play. The process of controller modding can be dangerous because it often involves sharp tools and soldering irons. It is relatively easy to ruin a controller, which can place a financial drain on the modder, given how expensive the controllers have become (a new boxed controller on Amazon costs in the $120 dollar range, used prices vary depending on condition). The quest for sublime nature exists in players' unrestrained emotional experience, which can offer spiritual renewal. Each modded controller offers an subjective experience that may allow a player to rejuvenate their play. Often, when players are stuck in a rut, they turn to incorporatingadditional hardware or controller mods coupled with the foundational tools for *SSBM* to optimize their play. Sometimes, a newly modded controller can play a significant role in a player's success.

IV. Discourse

Where and How Discourse Forms

Discourse is the language and attitudes used to convey knowledge and alignment with the game and community. It creates context, determining what it is possible to say (or not say) about a particular subject in a particular time and place. Michel Foucault's approach to

discourse analysis places an extreme emphasis on power relations. Discourse used by a community as well as what is omitted governs a social body, like SSBM (2013). In addition, Janice Radway's notions of interpretive community, which builds on Foucauldian discourse analysis, shows a strong correlation between the formulation of meanings and the individual's situation. This is to say that opinions and ideas in a given community are not without influence of a person's background or personal experiences. Radway's analysis centralizes romance readers as her subject, but the same framework can be applied to study SSBM. She writes, "the reader who controls the reading process, not the text...[readers] conceive of "production" or "construction" as opposed to...consumption" (Radway, 52-54). This exert shows that reading, or here gaming, as an active production activity, where knowledge and ideas are actively being created in use. The act of gaming or playing SSBM is an ever-changing process for each player as personal codes and cultural contexts indefinitely effect interpretation. Applying this understanding of the modes of cultural formulation to SSBM shows the foundations of SSBM culture as inextricably connected to its players. I draw on Foucault's stress on power relations in discourse with Radway's method of analysis that emphasizes the (singular and plural) "reading" (gaming) process as a site of production, because it discusses the importance of social and material situation to interpretive communities. It is crucial to note that interpretative communities, while they may share the same fundamental base, often include a variety of opinions. Radway continues, "interpretive communities may not simply differ over what to do with metaphors [tools in game] ...they may disagree even more fundamentally over the nature and purpose of reading [playing SSBM] itself' (ibid. 53). The characteristics of Radway's analysis of interpretive communities are arguably the foundation of SSBM, where valid games are premised on in-person play and particular hardware configurations.

Radway studied romance readers of the late twentieth century and their communal engagement with the romance novel. Radway's work calls for ethnographic studies of different kinds of [literate] behavior, attempting to think about how people operate, use and circulate

around printed matter. Primarily, Radway stipulates an analysis of the interaction and relationships between reader and text. Here, the interpretive community I study is SSBM players, a relationship between player and game. Consequently, Radway asserts that the meaning of a text is a result of complex and temporally evolving structures and interactions between a fixed text and a socially situated reader [player] (ibid. 54-55). This is to say that game developers' and Nintendo's reluctancy to update or change SSBM, coupled with the player in contemporary [Western] society creates a subversive discourse, dominated by SSBM players. It is important, as Radway suggests, not to focus solely on the player's relationship with the game, since doing so risks overlooking key desires and challenges (ibid. 56).

The key component missing in Radway's structure for my analysis of SSBM is the context of the online community. While an individual player's relationship to the game can be instructive about community values and ideology, it lacks the depth and nuance that a study of community culture and participation online can generate. This is not a fault in Radway's work as she wrote and revolutionized the concept of an interpretive community in a time before the internet.

I also leverage Mizuko Ito's concepts around the participatory culture of individualization in networked communities, as they are highly relevant in the case of how media-based communities unite over shared practices and participation. Ito writes, "by examining participation we see our relationship to 'content'.. . as a part of shared practice and cultural belonging, not a process of individual 'internalization"' (Ito, 2017). The SSBM player population have shaped their identities and careers from their active participation in the community's network. Many have scaffolded careers as players, content creators, and organizers, which are both unconventional and fully self-supporting. The grassroots nature of SSBM influences the feeling of a shared practice because its members have built and determined its network.

Discourse Lexicon Reveals Inner Workings for *SSBM*

After players have internalized *SSBM* discourse produces their vernacular and positions the players as subjects. The dialect reveals patterns in identity performance that subject players as a part of this particular community. *SSBM* players created a lexicon that expresses communal or differing opinions on the same fundamental hardware and software origins but are tough to trace because each player is different. Moreover, discourse can function as a mechanism of regulation. The obvious counterpoint to "broken" is "balanced." For example, there is an ongoing discussion about which moves in the game are "Broken" (See Figure I & II). Broken, for *SSBM* and or the fighting game community (FGC), actually means overpowered or *too* good . Both seemingly have positive connotations for the *SSBM.* Moves or characters deemed "broken" are strong and perhaps exciting. But players are also interested in the discourse of balanced play, which is evident from the existence of community add-ons **like** UCF .

We can expand the discussion of balanced and broken gameplay to think about what is or is not banned. Aside from the globally adopted ruleset, the tournament organizer (TO) has the discretion to ban aspects of gameplay. This is one of the more obvious sources of power at play in the community. It is worth noting that, at Melee events, the TO and referee is usually one person and, occasionally, a team of people. Other teams, such as community hub site Melee It On Me (MIOM) and the newly formed Code of Conduct, also contribute the discourse describing what is and is not allowed. Instances where bans, especially the expulsion of toxic and harmful players, are ignored by tournament organizers are deviant and disappointing,as most often things that are banned or not have the community's safety in mind for competition and more universal situations. However, because of the *SSBM* community's lack of central authority (common to other esports), bans can be harder to enforce orregulate.

Other crucial phrasing relates directly to gameplay. As players improve their technical skills, mindset and gameplay become more central to the competitor experience. Primarily,

SSBM discourse describes playstyles as either aggressive or campy (as in "camping' [describe camping as a practice]). Aggressive play is preformed by players throwing out as many hitboxes as possible, rush-down tactics and a lot of approaching one's opponent. Campy play is much slower and patient. It is characterized by a reluctance to approach one's opponent, waiting for them to make a mistake or expose an opening. This strategy is extremely "successful", as it has kept player Hungrybox at rank one for three consecutive years. However, campy play is often seen as lame or uncool, which implies the game is meant to be watched. In an article debriefing a tournament from 2019 about a player quitting because of their opponent camping, reporter Ian Walker writes, "playing to the growing spectator class is sometimes considered more important than allowing competitors to use whatever tactics they need to ensure a win, even if those tactics aren't that exciting to watch" (Walker, 2019). Thinking about audience is part of describing play as "lame" or "cool" because it inherently implies the game is meant to be spectated.

Regardless of whether a player is aggressive or campy, there is always a winner and a loser. Smash players are often regarded by other FGC as notorious because of their passion for arguing about things that are broken, balanced, banned, not banned, cool or lame (see included tweets, Figures 1-11). Players have come up with a long list of excuses when they lose. Popularized especially by its appearance in the Smash Documentary (2013), excuses for losing have been coined "johns" (See Figure III). Famously, the response to someone "johning" is to say "No Johns". This implies that there should be no excuse or John for losing which perhaps could be patronizing, harmful, and ableist especially to new players. Some "Johns" have become universal among Smash players. Some prominent "Johns" include: controller issues, not enough sleep, food, or water, a cold venue, or a lack of warmup time.

Dissecting the lexicon adopted and moulded by SSBM players for almost two decades gives light to community values. The chosen words and phrases show etiquette and community norms. As well, they show that the entire basis of what is good is community specific, and can

likely be investigated into SSBM sub-community values to see what different regions expect and honour for gameplay and ideology.

While my analysis focuses primarily on the North American experience of SSBM, it is worth noting that the ruleset for competitive play is universal. The ruleset was birthed on *SmashBoards* forums, one of the earliest and most concrete rule list is from 2009 {https://SmashBoards.com/threads/mbr-official-rule-set.257229/#post-8981808). Other early tournaments in competitive SSBMhistory like Apex and EVO 2015 hosted rules on their own websites, which were documented on SmashWiki. In the early days of rule formation, there was some resistances to the exclusion of all items as many characters have innate projectiles. However, this resistance is years gone. These rules are used in casual and competitive play. Only five stages of the twenty-nine stages included are used. This is because they are the most "neutral", presenting generally a flat stage, with three platforms {except for Final Destination, which has no platforms) that sometimes move. These five stages have the least amount of hazard and present only some differences in scale and attributes from each other. Moreover, the in-game timer is set to eight minutes and each player is given four stocks. Most matches do not use the entirety of the eight minutes, but when one does, it is often regarded by players as boring or too slow. Items are turned off in competitive play to eliminate as many non-player variables as possible. Most often, all brackets are double elimination, giving players at least two chances to advance in the bracket. Although double elimination format is common to a lot of the FGC, I believe there is a pleasant correlation between the story of the underdog esport in line with the underdog's losers' bracket run.

This ruleset has become solidified over time and is expected in almost all forms of play for SSBM players. Only recently have there been additional side-events at tournaments that use different ruleset, like Rishi's Jungle Jam and Genesis 7 or Sarni Singles at Smash Summit 9. These alternative formats are often aimed to shake up the current rules by introducing sillier play. In my experience, giddier formats like these happen lateinto a smash-fest (gathering of

friends to play SSBM) to stir up a good laugh. In regard to regulation, T.L. Taylor sums up, "rules are not fixed, but are evolutionary systems that grow alongside the ongoing construction and performance of play" (ibid. p.55).

Discourse Formation by Authority Performance

Carolyn Marvin's (1988) study of the rise of the electrician in the early 20th century is a useful case study to understand how experts emerge in a given community. The earliest formation of the expert in the context of the first electricians occurred in pursuit of universalized "proper" standards. Electricians developed journals and shared texts to position themselves as experts. Marvin explains that the notion of the "expert" arose as a new form of accreditation developed by the textual community (writing, documentation of knowledge). independently of the professions or the academy. Experts rely on the circulation of their discourse to determine who has a voice in the textual community and who does not, showing that power is always at play in expert communities. Marvin writes in regards to the electrician "experts", "experts to publics, and equally in expectations held by laymen concerning their right to share in an electric prosperity made possible by public recognition and indulgence of expert ingenuity" (ibid, 16, 1998). Thus the element of audience or "other" is crucial in building the "expert". In addition, Marvin writes, "Those who were socially positioned to know this assumed inventive poses if their skill were not up to par" (ibid. 17, 1998).

Similarly, SSBM players define themselves as experts in online forums and through gameplay guides. Examples of these forums and guides include *SmashBoards,* popular YouTube channel SSBM *Tutorials,* reddit threads, Meleeli brary.com and the circulation of personal player accounts circulated online. In many ways, SSBM experts unite through their own particular form of technological literacy. Often, outsiders frame technological literacy as a neutral attribute; it is expected to remain unchanged as it circulates through expert communities. However, technological skills derived from literacy are governed by the body, meaning truth can

be derived directly from bodies, rather than from texts. Marvin notes that there are constant debates of interpretation of a given text, but rarely about its textual authority. Marvin writes, "disagreements were rarely about the priority of textual authority, or even about broad principles of legitimate interpretation. Their differences concerned substantive points of interpretation..." (ibid. 14, 1988). Authority is derived from performance and is digested by others by a shared passion and belief in the uniqueness of the material of the community in question. People who present as experts are able to allot names, labels, and signs to things which in turn can and does become apartof community discourse.

Here is an example of how power is preformed for SSBM. As mentioned previously, Hax and company have developed software modifications to fix what he perceives as a mistake in the game's programming. In this 20-minute video (See Figure IV), he presents several charts and data with a black background. The semiotics connotations of this presentation style support Hax's performance as an "expert" by using academic stylization coupled with the documentary style voice-over coverage of the topic. The video is filled with technical jargon but still tries to be accessible to the average SSBMplayer. I will not dive into Hax's arguments and data collection but hope to note that this academic lecture style presentation of his argument is a means to present power and to influence community discourse.

Timelining History & Discours e

Players and community participants shape discourse in specific contexts and times. Many have tried to produce a timeline of the history of competitive SSBM such as Samox's 8-part documentary *The* Smash *Brothers,* Prog and Gangly's docu-series *Last Stock Legends* or various mini docu-series released by esports teams like Cloud9 or Team Liquid. The formation of a timeline for SSBM is based on a group of players that matter, and a collective response to shared practices and cultural belonging. This timeline to follow is compiled from Samox's *The*

Smash Brothers, the SmashWiki timeline, and early *SmashBoard* forum entries by thespymachine.

Primarily, *SSBM* begins upon the game's release in 2001. The earliest epoch of *SSBM* was shaped by passionate basement-dwellers and gamers. The rise of the internet allowed players to circulate information and build rivalries coupled with a budding competitive spirit. The *SSBM* community has narrativized its own history in a manner that follows. This self-narrativization qualifies as expert discourse in Marvin's sense as the community is legitimizing its own history by assigning mythological status to what outsiders may see as insignificant events. To begin, arguably, the Golden Age of Melee began in 2004, with the addition of the game to the MLG (Major League Gaming) roster, one of the largest esports events of the time. MLG purchased *Smash World Forums,* now known as *SmashBoards.* The people at MLG were able to stabilize the forum servers, but they also deleted many tournament results and data from years prior (Major League Gaming). Many outsiders questioned competitive Melee's legitimacy, as they were fixated on the developer's intention for the game to remain casual. However, because of the players' commitment to the community's growth, they formed and circulated their shared ideas about the game's development beyond the space MLG created. This is one of the many reasons that *SSBM* only lasted a few years on their roster, which included Ca// *of Duty: Advanced Warfare, DOTA II,* and *Smite* (MLG Events). The SmashWiki notes SSBM was removed from the roster in 2007 to give way to the next game in the franchise. *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* replaced *Melee* in the MLG lineup in 2010, however, there was an incident where players were found guilty of manipulating the bracket. Neither *Melee* nor *Brawl* returnedto the MLG roster in 2012 onwards. *SSBM* made one last appearance in the roster for (in)famous MLG in 2014, but SmashWiki states there was a lot of criticism and logistical issue for how the tournament was ran and recorded. There is little-to-no trace of *SSBM* on the MLG website today.

The budding spirit and excitement of the player's subversion of the game publisher's intentions made room for competitive *SSBM.* In 2008, Nintendo's antagonistic attitude towards *SSBM's* growth was reflected in what some (SmashWiki) refer to as "The Dark Ages," which coincided with the release of *SSBM s* successor, *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* (SSBB) for the Nintendo Wii. Confused by the latest addition to the *Smash* franchise, *SSBM* tournaments ceased for almost a year. But the passion for and pursuit of competitive Melee did not cease for players.

Following this **lull** is the widely-acknowledge Era of the Five Gods. Armada, Hungrybox, Mango, Mew2King, and PPMD had consistently dominated tournaments from around 2008 to 2015. This is an era of *SSBM* heavily dominated by expert players. In Carolyn Marvin's discussion the expert she writes, "experts' own goals were to harness public adulation to improve their own social and professional standing while keeping public admirers at arm's length" (Marvin, 16, 1990). These "god"s' deep literacy and mastery over *SSBM* merit them as experts. Moreover, Marvin continues to explain that new media, like *SSBM,* fashion social groups called audiences. She writes, "here the focus of communication is shifted from instrument to the drama [the "god"s] in which existing groups perpetually negotiate power, authority, representation and knowledge" (ibid, 5). The notion of audience and experts was most apparent at an invitational tournament called 'T he Five Gods," which solidified this moment in *SSBM s* history. This epoch is pivotal in the argument of whether or not Melee is or should be a grassroots project or a professional esport. Here, segueing to professionalization is louder than before as massive companies like Redbull begin to hold stakes in players and the community.

As well, this epoch brought with it the rise of the celebrity within the *SSBM* community. The rise of the celebrity is a sign that *SSBM* was clearly capable of evolving as there are a variety of processes in motion that design and shape players as celebrity. It becomes difficult to separate the notion of expert and celebrity for *SSBM,* especially in the context of top players, because those in the spotlight feel pressure (conscious or not) for performance in and outside of

play. Vitally, the rise of the celebrity also created space for cooperate sponsorship, which can and did expedite SSBMs growth.

The next epoch, referred to by the SmashWiki as "The Platinum Age" or "The Age of the Documentary," took shape from 2013 - 2018. Samox directed and released an 8-part documentary titled *The* Smash *Brothers,* which outlined the community's history in detail. Many Smash players attribute its release to a rise in community numbers. Others look down on these new members, calling them "doc-kids" because they were not present for the initial grassroots formation of the scene; A useless tactic in my opinion, but an example of ongoing gate-keeping discourse for SSBM. SmashWiki notes a Tafoknits tweet that reads, "[Doc-Kids] basically represent people who got into the game after Aug 2013 in light of the Smash Documentary" (@tafokints). Below this is a list of "doc-kids" who have climbed the ranks noting Marth-player Zain, who began playing in 2014, as the first "doc-kid" to win a major, Shine 2018. Professionalization continued at an accelerated rate, as many players and "gods" were signed to major esports teams, securing their identity as competitors both financially and discursively. Being signed by an esport team is vital to the professionalization of SSBM.

The "Chaos Era", from 2013 to today, included many of the five gods retiring or taking a step back. In 2016, PPMD (see Figure V) announced an indefinite break from SSBM, citing many health issues (Smith, 2016). Armada retired from competitive singles play in the Fall of 2018 (Wolf, 2018). Mew2King continues to circulate in and out of tournaments, in favour of focusing on his upcoming book (Siuty, 2018). Mango's results and commitment are wavering, often focusing on his popular stream instead of competition results (Masters, 2019). Hungrybox remains at the top of his game, asserting himself as Rank 1 on the Melee Panda Global Ranking (MPGR) for the past three years (Michael, 2020). There are a number of factors that assert the current time as one of chaos. SSBM is at its largest and most professionalized point in its history. As many players are averse to altering the grassroots framework of participation of the scene, many of them continue to rely on the etiquettes and norms of the grassroots culture

as a means of not moving on or growing up. Moreover, as play techniques become ever more advanced and universalized, play styles are becoming more clearly defined than before.

Today, SSBMplayers are in constant tension, debating whether SSBM is amazing and alive or broken and dead. A "hype" or exciting set and a well-run tournament bring life to SSBM, but "boring" or floatier matches and a venue that is too "cold" (literal temperature) leave SSBM players feeling hopeless. As epochs become defined, by online player run resources and the experts' voices narratives of inclusion and exclusion become louder and more present than ever.

As SSBM continues to divide its history into epochs, there is clear sense of a need to narrate its own history. Notably, epochs are useful for tracing discursive shifts in the community and for looking at what changes occur within that window. The ongoing juxtaposition of adhering to grassroots styles and the wanting of growth and expansion leave SSBM in perhaps another transitional period. Ultimately, it is the game itself, the players' situated context and time, the rise of the online community and the professionalization collocating with grassroots narratives that form epochs constructed of discourse for SSBM.

It Matters to Be Here

One notable element about SSBMs discourse is that it is not past gee-politics. This operates in contrasts to the most esports, which can happen almost anywhere. While large events still draw spectators=, most esports can happen online, sometimes with both players and audiences in seclusion at home. Developers of competitive games like *Overwatch* or *League of Legends* create online match-making and ranking systems for esports, which players then sanction.

SSBM is an interesting case for esports as it is extremely rooted in physical, tangible place. Because the gameplay has been left largely unaltered by Nintendo (minus community "fixes" like UCF), SSBMrequires players to sit next to their opponents for optimal play. Melee rarely hosts online preliminaries, because they are not viable for competitive play, due to lag.

SSBMs early history is based in regional pride, with players travelling from city to city to defend their local community. The yearning for attending and physical presence has been a must for players throughout *SSBM s* competitive history. Optimal play can only be achieved in person. For Melee, it matters a lot to be present. To have experienced a notable tournament or match in person can be used as cultural capital to situate a player's self as more of a *SSBM* player than another. Twitter and live streams of tournaments offer live participation for those who can't attend. Players adopt rituals, like collecting and displaying acquired tournament badges and lanyards, which act as an archival timeline based on technical and social involvement. Because of Melee's long reliance on a grassroots narrative, some people give more cultural capital to people who were present during certain epochs.

Being There: Reflections on Genesis 7

Genesis is one of the most notable Smash tournaments of all time and is hosted in Northern California. This year, I met with over than two thousand gamers to play and celebrate Smash. I have attended quite a few major tournaments but this one felt different. I went into this experience with a number of quantitative questions and took several notes and pictures in and around the venue. I was especially curious about the construction of the space, the temporal mapping of bodies, and the comparison of grassroots and corporate influences on the tournament.

Although I have been to tournaments in a space with similar square footage, none occupied the area as compactly as Genesis 7 (G7). After collecting a badge, players passed through a minimal security screening and found themselves in artist's alley. Here, retailers sold personal and fan art, such as posters, charms, stickers and pins, alongside licenced paraphernalia like plushies and apparel. Other booths sold modded and handmade controllers, systems and peripherals. Custom controllers and buttons have become a serious commodity for competitive *SSBM.* As a signifier of identity and to optimize play, players are quick to line up to

update and modify their controller. Some modders brought in mini-soldering stations and the tools to help less-motivated players replace parts inside their controllers.

There is an interesting tension for the various controller and hardware companies on site, as they straddle the line between grassroots and cooperate in a way that is often overlooked. For example, players seem to prefer modders with more cultural capital than flashy booths and presentation. Although companies I witnessed in the space presented experienced and well funded, the line for *Top Notch Controllers* was by far the longest and lasted well into day 2 of the event. Beloved modder N3zModGod streams and mods alone out of his garage. His booth had similar hardware to the others: wire frames to hang merch and banners with social media tags on display. However, his cultural capital as one of the most dedicated modded, due to his extreme personal investment, ties and positive feedback from top players preform a deeper commitment to the grassroots narrative *SSBM* players inherently love. N3z's commitment to the *SSBM* in particular is displayed by his purchased ad space on stream in which he lists the top players using his modded controllers. This too sets him apart from other companies that offer mods for multiple games. Overall, it is obvious that the tournament organizers value community creators and modders as they were placed at the entrance of the venue and all guests must pass through them to enter the space.

After the artist's alley, there were a variety of rented arcade cabinets for free play. It was rare to see them not in use. Following the cabinets was the beating heart of space: the tournament organizer's (TO) desk. The desk is arranged in the centre of the venue, with several tables arranged in a square to keeps the TOs, their tools, files, snacks and belongings "trapped" inside. There was a large touch screen monitor cornering the desk that players could use to search for their match times and view the brackets. This is the space that holds the most power, as the TO essentially makes everything happen. Being a TO can often be a thankless job. I noticed in the enclosed TO desk, they were supplied with gummy vitamins, water bottles and

some snacks, so its nice to know that the G7 organizers show their appreciation and understand the strenuous job of the TOs.

Everything after the TO desk was entirely for tournament play. Roughly 64 setups for SSBM with Wiis and GameCubes and exclusively CRTS were arranged to form eight pool stations of four. However, I saw a number of CRTs that were either off without a console, or hidden under a table. Many setups had been reset but didn't have memory cards. The lack of memory cards makes them unplayable, because the game is missing the full cast of characters, as well as some stages. This is likely because attendees moved memory cards around to make more set-ups playable, but in doing so rendered others (temporarily) unusable. This adds unwanted complexity to tournament, because at majors, players crave gameplay and are in a perpetual state of searching for a setup. Players scan the venue to snatch up any open set-up almost immediately as the thirst for gameplay is innately instilled to this scale of the event.

Surprisingly, G7, as well as past Genesis tournaments, was sponsored by Nintendo. Despite this, I did not notice a very strong presence from the colossal company. Perhaps Nintendo's opposition has been overstated by experts in the community. On one hand I agree that *Melee* deserves more, on the other, I can speculate on the possibility of future damages to the community if experts continue to treat Nintendo very hatefully. They had their logo on the title in combination with the G7 logo on every stream backdrop, badge and stream overlay, but aside from this, I didn't see any other visible representation or contribution. Of course, Nintendo has shown more evident support for *Super* Smash *Bros. Ultimate* and *Splatoon 2,* which were both featured events at G7, and perhaps one of the reasons Nintendo chose to support the event. I speculate on Nintendo's involvement effects hardware choices for the event. Obviously, each Wii emulating the game's software is accounted for with a physical copy of the game. However, Nintendo generally hasn't responded well to the use of UCF (Kahn, 2018) and argues for Smash gameplay without modifications. However, I did notice UCF on several set-ups at G7. Was Nintendo aware of this? How could they even become aware of this, if only 2 setups are

being used on stream? This is an interesting predicament for Nintendo, that is almost untraceable unless they were to have a representative onsite.

G? was absolutely bustling with excitement. Every large-scale tournament has upsets in the bracket, which circulate quickly in the enclosed space. The venue always seems to be more filled after lunch because many players are averse to waking up before 10:00 a.m. By around 2:00 p.m. on the second day, I noticed an exceptional inflation of hype (excitement) engulfing the space. Players hustle around the space to catch the matches that aren't streamed, giving them a unique real-time experience that can be used as cultural capital exclusive to the moments they witnessed. After two rounds of double elimination pools, the top 64 bracket is created, and this is arguably some of the "best" (i.e. the most entertaining or unpredictable) SSBMplay is seen.

Many top 8 matches are the same players from repeat matchups, and are thus perceived as less exciting by some players. Top 8 is special at G? because it is relocated into a theatre near the venue, a move unseen in other major tournament settings for SSBM (aside from EVO (Evolution, the equivalent of the Superbowl for FGC) when SSBMwas included in the lineup). In the theatre, the division of spectator and competitor is propelled by the separation of audience to stage. As well, the grandness of the theatre coupled with the high production quality emphasizes the celebritization of top players, that may be missed or obfuscated by the grassroots ideologiesshared by the community.

V. Technique

How it Starts

SSBMs growth as a competitive community was entirely created by its players in hand with the material affordances of the game. Techniques and practises within the community are what make up the contemporary culture of SSBM. Raymond Williams explains that analysing culture can be a way to discover the nature of an organization built on several complex relationships

(1961). Meanings and values of a given group are kept alive by social inheritance and embodiment and are proven universal when they are learned (ibid.). Analyzing one technique can reveal other [techniques] reflected within it, according to the nature of group. Williams points out that interrelations of techniques reveal information on a wholeorganization.

Moreover, Williams conveys the operation of selective tradition within a culture as a process that governs techniques by special interests of the group (Willaims, 1961). This process is where techniques that were/are considered dead or abandoned become rediscovered and remixed to adapt to the contemporary culture.

The grassroots nature and shared practices for *SSBM* contend with methods of co-creation of discourse and technique identified by gaming scholars Emma Witkowski and James Manning. Their study notes conventions of high performance and networked play practices on the layers of interplay between community and game developer through a case study with Nintendo and *Super Mario Maker's* networked community. While Nintendo holds omnipotent power for *SSBM* (or any other game they have created), Witkowski's text emphasizes the importance of co-creation in esports, specifically the importance of knowledge holders. The text reads, "co-creation renders visible the paradoxes of infrastructure, where the weight of change is loaded onto the players themselves" (Witkowski, et al., 2017, 13). High performance play for *SSBM* is shaped by a large network of Nintendo's interventions and high-performance players. I argue that Nintendo's adversity to competitive *SSBM* has simulated a stronger ownership for *SSBM* community members of their knowledge and discourse creation. However, the lack of Nintendo's intervention results in an infrastructure that doesn't overtly support player's rights, centralizing the onus of socio-technical infrastructures on players rather than a game's developer like in other esports.

Looking at specific techniques within *SSBM* culture can reveal not only the systems of behavior that players value, but also how and why players adopt certain techniques into *SSBM* culture. As competitive *SSBM* was built as a remix and reversal of developers' intentions, it

serves as a fascinating culture study rooted in its onset as a remixed esports culture. At its roots, technique is the combination of in-game play and the bodies of players.

Hidden Competitive Potential: The Beginnings

Regardless of *Nintendo's* intentions, shortly after its release, players began to realize the game's competitive potential. They began developing advanced techniques and move combinations, which emerged alongside a budding competitive spirit shared by players around the world - despite Nintendo's intentions. The circulation of techniques primarily began when east coast and west coast players began to build rivalries and play together as noted by *The* Smash *Brothers* documentary (2013). Others may have posted on guides on *SmashBoards.* Today, there are copious amounts and style of guides to help players with SSBM techniques. Most of these advanced techniques have been developed from glitch oversights and experimentation. One of the more common techniques is a called a wavedash, a positioning tool executed using three inputs: Y/X to jump, Lor R to shield, followed by inputting diagonally downwards on the analog stick. It takes a lot of practice, but is a crucial positioning tool for every competitive player. A wavedash can be more useful than a normal dash because: it doesn't turn a player's character around when moving backwards; it's a useful response after a successfully shielding an attack so they can position for forward (front) facing hitboxes that is the most damage ; and it's more versatile than a normal dodge, especially for characters that have very slow roll times. Other advanced techniques have been discovered to reduce a character's landing lag after an aerial attack, such as L-cancelling- inputting UR a few frames after an aerial attack to cancel its landing lag or time it takes to land back on the stage. Even a technique called shield dropping could be considered a time-saver- when a player drops through a platform while shielding which removes 2 frames of the dropping animation. Very similar to L-cancelling is jump-cancelling,which affects gameplay in similar ways but can only be used for certain moves and characters. These shortcuts and glitches found by players

globally are used to speed up movement, gameplay, and combo gain beyond the game's initial functionality.

Artist's Statement: What You See Isn't What You Get

See Figures I & II

The narrative for competitive *SSBM* subverted Nintendo's original intentions for the game's use. Through the discovery and formation of advanced techniques, it is evident that *SSBM* players used the tools in the game's software beyond what was initially imagined for the game. Although subverting initial intentions for technology is a common trope in media history, the case for *SSBM* is particularly significant because of the irony at play. Nintendo's intention was to create a casual "children's party game" but the game "accidentally" resulted in forming a nearly entirely active serious adult community, the exact opposite of the game's intent. As well, *SSBM s* competitive history was entirely driven by its players, who started in the home. This piece is a replica of in-game tournament legal stage "Yoshi's Story". It is my personal favourite stage to play on because of its tight parameters and childlike aesthetics. My model of this stage is set in 4-3 ratio, just like the game adding only a half inch to each side to allow more space for detail. The piece is made from household or elementary materials: construction paper, white glue, markers, pens and cardboard. The use of these accessible materials speaks to *SSBM s* history of building something from the simple domestic space into something far-reaching and grandiose.

Practice Makes Perfect

When examining techniques in *SSBM* culture, the obvious place to start is by assessing modes of practice, as this is how a competitive player separates themselves from a casual one. Modes of practice are most commonly practicing timing, spacing and inputs for moves repetitively until memorized and engrained in muscle memory. In her study of power gamers, TL Taylor differentiates the distinction between a casual and power gamer in *Everquest.* Power gamers

are dedicated to backstory and narrative, and attempt to prevent their game from ending. While they may accept a game's flaws, they never cease to push its limits. They are distinctly social, and they rely on others' additional information to improve their technical skills and accrue knowledge. (Taylor, 2003). Most, if not all, competitive *SSBM* players exemplify the ethos of Taylor's definition of a power gamer. However, they differ because there is no story to worship and love. This definition helps shape the understanding of what it means to be a Smasher, but is not absolute. Players expect their peers to spend hours practicing (or "grinding") their technical skills (or "tech-skill") in order to be considered part of the competitive *SSBM* culture. Through practice, players learn and discernthe techniques of play within SSBM culture.

Practice time for players is made up of bountiful techniques that are often interrelated or require similar inputs, timing and/or spacing Although most players may have their own practice regimes, players typically polish their movement, control, and tech-skill. Advanced techniques distinguish a casual player from a competitor. There is a plethora of written and recorded guides for emerging players such as Meleelibrary.com, the forums on *SmashBoards.com,* and YouTube channel "SSBM Tutorials".

Practice also takes place during competitive experience. Many top matches begin and stream "handwarmers", which is a means to reconnect and reintegrate the corporeal feel and embodied actions of play. Here players exhibit their personal practise drills and which other players can model.

The techniques competitive melee players practice can exhibit what makes "good" play and emulates what players' hope to see when watching *SSBM.* Practice or "grinding tech-skill" is where value is assigned to gameplay.

Financial Practise: Money Matches

When players have come to a point where they want to test their skill, they will often challenge other players to a money match. Money matches are a common sight at tournaments of all scales. This technique is a particular form of gambling and adds more risk to gameplay. Players

challenge others by setting the amount of money on the line and the set count. They place the cash on the setup in use to signify to others that they are partaking in a money match, which is more serious than casual play ("friendlies"), so that others will not disturb them. There have been some iconic money matches in competitive SSBM s history used as a means to settle rivalries, trash talk and animosity (See Homosocial Control Techniques: Trash Talk section).

Movement and Defensive Techniques

See *Figure III*
The following chart lists (almost) every gameplay option for defense. Of course, many SSBM and FGC players alike may argue that there is no offense or defense, as they are interchangeable. Here, I am trying to trace and show the range of defensive gameplay options players must learn, practice and execute. Outsiders to SSBMmay regard fighting games as primarily based on attack options, but for SSBM and FGC alike, players must come to understand and cope with all the tools available to them in gameplay. Notably, many characters have unique recovery options and special advanced techniques discovered by SSBM players exclusive to that character. Those are omitted from this chart as it is more of a general application of the SSBMs cast.

Player Identity Through Technique

Techniques of play can be the means to understanding what is important to a given community as well as the individual. Performing certain techniques in and outside of play, allows oneself to align with SSBM culture.

Picking a main character (or "main") is a player's initial form of self expression as a competitive player. Less than 10 characters are viable for competition, according to a community-developed tier list (See Figure IV) (though some strong players excel using low tier characters).. Each character has its own weight, speed, move-set, frame data, and overall flow of play. Selecting a main is an example of player's priorities in game as they are ultimately selecting the affordances

of a given character. Picking a main should align with a player's predisposition to what they can do well; it is an attempt to align their strengths to those of a character. Players' mindsets are produced by the affordances of their choice of main, and can even produce cyborg subjects as players begin to merge with their main as an digital extension of themselves, when executing advanced techniques become as tacit and normalized as breathing. Donna Haraway's discussion of cyborgs explains when bodies and technology can merge in a way that restores or allows greater potential for activity, only enabled by the addition of technology to the self. Haraway's cyborg theory embraces things like body hacking or editing the body (Haraway, 2006). Players not only have their controllers, but as well their on-screen character become a cyborgian extension of their body, to realize things beyond what the body may be capable of. Often, people form judgements about players' personalities based on who they main. The choice of main is intrinsically related to playstyle by nature of the speed and affordances of a character.

The aforementioned techniques for play are universal for competitive participation. With this, there have been a variety of techniques discovered developed by specific players and are coined by their tags, such as the following: Scar jumping, Hax dashing, Ken Combo, Amsah tech, Wobbling, Shine stalling, PC Drop, and Isai Drop. The use of nomenclature here identifies these specific players as authorities in the community. Their techniques have also become universalized but are distinct and special as they were discovered and distributed by named individuals. Using their names to describe these techniques emphasizes how the community built its competitive

framework as grassroots.

Various bodily techniques are also attributed to individuals in the community. An example of this is how the top ranked player, Juan "Hungrybox" DeBiedma normalized standing while playing. It is unclear as to why he started standing while playing, and he doesn't do it very much anymore, yet is still referenced when people stand while playing. At one point, Hungrybox would stand

midway through a set, to show that he was changing his game-plan. Other players are known for wearing sunglasses while playing and unconsciously having their tongue out while playing. Unique grip and stance cases for SSBMhardware display particular embodied and individualized senses of play.

Technique Case Study: Wobbling

Wobbling is an infinite combo (where players can theoretically infinitely combo their opponent in an endless loop of damage, unescapable by the player receiving the combo) exclusive to the Ice Climbers character in SSBM. Ice Climbers is a unique character in the game's cast because a player controls two characters at once, Popo and Nana. Popo is the lead climber, and performs inputs first, followed by Nana. The two-in-one affordance of this character presents the option for a special technique called "desyncing". This technique is exclusive to Ice Climbers not only for SSBM, but for successor games as well. To perform a desync, a player inputs an attack while their main character, Popo, cannot attack, but Nana can. For example, by performing an attack after a spot dodge (dodge in place), if timed properly, only Nana will do the attack (SmashWiki).

Ice Climber's desync potential led to the discovery of a notorious advanced technique called Wobbling. Coined by Wobbles at NorCal Tournament 2 in 2006, wobbling is an infinite combo exclusive to Ice Climbers in SSBM. It should be noted that the technique was discovered in Japan, but popularized on the SSBM scene globally by player Wobbles. The technique begins with Nana grabbing their opponent, and becomes infinite as Popo begins to rhythmically attack the character in the grab. To escape any grab in SSBM, players can mash/spam buttons A, B, X, Y, L, R, Z, and, if timed right, players can reduce a grab's counter by 6 frames. There is a small window at the beginning of all character's grab, whereby players can "mash-out" (rapidly pressing specific buttons in particular situations with potential of escaping). However, as this window is extremely small, it poses a difficult task. Mashing out became popularized as a

universally required technique for competitive play as wobbling rose to power. When executed correctly, wobbling is an infinite grab whereby Popo grabs and Nana repeats tilt attacks (foreword or down) until the opponent is at a high enough percent to kill. The combo is topped off with almost any hard-hitting smash attack, sending opponents to the blast zone.

This move is a crucial example of a community exploit of the game's software. It capitalizes on a unique form of grab hitstun -- the moments after being hit by an attack that a character is unable to act outside of directional influence or teching, that is inescapable during a wobble. Community discourse commonly perceives this move as extremely overpowered (OP) and "boring" or as repetitive and unthoughtful play. (See Figure V) Today, there is still an ongoing debate in regard to whether this technique should be banned in competitive play. Recently, many large tournaments banned wobbling, such as The Big House tournament series. However, it remains legal at *Genesis.* Those opposed to the ban share a similar ideology to SmashWiki's Wobbling analysis; they write, 'Opponents of a ban claim that wobbling is a legitimate tactic, acting no different from infinite combos found in other fighting games, such as those found in *MaNel vs. Capcom 2,* or even Melee's other chain grabs (ibid.).

Notably, a lot of the controversy around this technique is because it's an exploit rather than an affordance that Nintendo programmed into the game's software. However, this is the case for most advanced techniques in SSBM, which are cherished by SSBM players. Wobbling's notoriety is derived from the perception that it is uninteresting to watch (See Figure V) and may deter new players from playing SSBM. The wobbling ban debate poses a larger question of who determines what gameplay is good or interesting. Players unite through mechanisms like social media (pictured) to pose their rhetorical force of "wobbling being bad." The influence of the more popularized voices in the community help shape rhetoric and ideology to be internalized as communal consensus. Tweets and actions like this are mechanisms for regulation and highlight power structures in the community. While wobbling is often frowned upon, it is a useful exploit for understanding the competitive mentality of SSBM. Here, players

not only imply that the game is meant to be spectated, but also suggest that the game requires interesting gameplay. Wobbling is a different means to the same desired end (victory), but, , because of its lack of "style" and creativity, many SSSM players wish to ban it.

Homosociality, Gender and Technique

Melee players strive to perform and execute technique at an elite level. These techniques, at their roots, are invented by long-time players, and circulated through tutorials. Thus, the authority of what is "good" in play and attitude rests in the hands of the top players and prominent voices in the community.

Competitive SSBM, like most other fighting games, is congested with male players and their often vexing masculinities. These forms of masculinities can often be toxic, demonstrating aggression, anger, violence and/or apathy. While I am not trying to demonize men, it is important to recognize harmful community behaviours. Referencing the canon of professional sports, Taylor writes, "Understanding the construction of masculinities is central to understanding the nature of gender and professional video gaming [esports]" (Taylor p. 110). Although there are efforts to include and create space in esports communities for marginalized gender identities and voices, the vast majority of players are cis-male. This sameness allots power to those who are similar, unifying the male voice as a dominant source of what becomes normalized or sanctioned in the community, especially because of SSBMs Anglo-centrist beginnings.

In her analysis of homosociality, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick quotes Hartman on patriarchy: "relations between men, which have a material base, and which through hierarchy, establish or create an independence and solidarity among men that enables them to dominate women" (Sedgewick, 1985, p.3). Sedgwick adds that heterosexuality becomes built into kinship and the relationships developed within a homosocial context. This is the product of the same system that oppresses women and other marginalized identities, which is not only present in esports

culture, but also society more generally. The products, unproductive or problematic player identities, of the homosocial environment are performed by top players or long-time community members and trickle down to the rest of the community. I argue that the homosociality of the SSBM community, as well as its adherence to echoing of its own history rooted in uniformity and masculinity, constructs a culture that is not only harmful to newcomers that are not cis-male, but that also hinders community growth in a larger esports context.

Homosociality often leads to prominent male players ostracising new non-male players. I have been playing and attending SSBM events since early 2015. Even today, it is rare to go to an event without being seen as a non-genuine player or without being ignored during conversation. The first and most aggravating question I get asked is "do you play?" This creates a hierarchy based on the assumption that people who align with SSBM culture must play, and that there are right and wrong ways to participate in the space. When men sit down to play friendlies (casual games) with strangers (other men), it is rare that they are asked if they play or not. It is just assumed. Anyone who knows me knows that I am a very social person. Despite this, I have been made uncomfortable or felt unsafe at most tournaments I attend because of a lack of commitment to tactful behaviour. Following this, are instances where men try to "white-knight" or attempt to guide non-cis-male SSBM players. This includes trying to teach tech-skill (that I often already know) or mansplain elements of play e.g. how to stage strike). The pinnacle of these interactions is unwanted romantic advances or flirting. There is an underlying assumption by many players that women or other gender identifying people in the SSBM space are there to support a boyfriend or have little interest in growing their skill as a SSBM player, a narrative defined by Todd Harper as " infrequent but extant" (Harper, 115).

Online community spaces present similar barriers for non-male players. As a member of several SSBM regional Facebook groups, I see the continuation of patterns of exclusion when posts begin with "Hey fellas/lads/mans" and the like. While many SSBM twitch streams are useful in providing expansive exposure for the scene, the majority of these popular streamers

are men who routinely address their audience as "Boys". Although these instances may seem small to some, they are the result of the internalization of male-only mindset for gamers. I encourage not only SSBM, but all gamers to reflect on their dialect and consider if some of their discourse is harmful or gatekeeping to others.

It was only last year, 2018, that the first woman was able to crack the MPGR Top 100 yearly ranking, placing player Magi at 97th in the world, jumping to rank 43rd for 2019 (Nestico, et al., 2019, 2020).

Homosocial Technique Constructed by Players

Gender aside, the sameness pf the loudest voices in the community holds a huge influence on discourse and techniquesfor those who identify as part of the *SSBM* expert community. While many of these players construct meaningful play for many fans, like forming new combos and schools of thought for play, they also often emulate unhealthy habits and engagement.. These primary community figures act as new more accessible celebrity through the primary affordances of online interactions. These primary figures, like the aforementioned "5 gods" or those ranked on the MPGR are allotted a stronger sense of authenticity or importance. Their expertise is supported by their longer history in *SSBM s* competitive sphere (of course also because of their skill and seriousness). In an esports context, *SSBM* like other fighting games centralizes the more successful competitors and their identities simply because the game is played (generally) as 1v1. The onus and responsibility of identity performance becomes inherent whether these players are conscious to it or not. These players, now celebrities are watched not only in play but off stage as well.

These players are constantly being watched. Aside from in gameplay, many players and celebrities perform on social media. If a player is involved in *SSBM's* social media sphere or if they have attended a larger scale tournament, it quickly becomes evident that partying, more specifically drinking, can be a large part of the culture for many top players. Because most

events take place at large convention centres that are near or attached to hotels hosting hundreds to thousands of players, many parties are attached to tournaments. These parties give rise to a drinking culture (See Figure VI).

As a result, many top players advertise their love for drinking, especially at events, and post pictures of themselves partying. It is common for players to drink in the venue, concealing alcohol is opaque bottles. While drinking at tournaments may be masked, others encourage and advertise it. For example, at recent event Smash Summit 9, one piece of filmed content featured Hungrybox encouraging Mango to drink in order to play better (Beyond the Summit Smash, 2020). Moreover, Mango celebrated his beloved football team's, the Eagles, victory with several drinks and passed out live on his popular Twitch stream. He was banned from streaming for two weeks due to Twitch's terms of service for streaming (Gooding, 2019). Mango is an extremely popular player and streamer with a die-hard group of fans. After the ban ended, his stream came back harder than before, with subscriptions and donations rolling in like wildfire. Although I love to watch Mango play, this lifestyle (and his broadcasting of it) enables a greater acceptance for alcoholism within the community. Mango and other top players have been playing the game for over a decade. This long-formed player authenticity, coupled with a high skill level and presentation of Anglocentrism sameness allows players' actions, like publicizing drinking, to be more likely accepted, and even admired. While I am all for a little bit of partying here and there, especially at exciting *SSBM* events, to constantly endorse this can often be excessive and indulgent. This is especially concerning as *SSBM s* popularity continues to grow to include underage players.

The case for *SSBM* as a homosocial grassroots community also sanctions activity that can be seen as counterproductive. Alcohol abuse is an obvious negative effect of the homosocial environment that cause imbalanced and may encourage unhealthy habits. However, some other activities are less blatantly harmful, but still affect the shape and growth of the community in a larger esports context.

Given that SSBMs culture is rooted in grassroots tournament and event organizing, there is a strong significance and value tacitly assigned to people who have participated in *Melee* for several years. As new proficient and expert level players emerge, many struggles with accepting them into the culture. There is a strong sense of nepotism for seniority among players. One notable and dramatic example of this, is a long-time player and documentary star Kashan "Chillindude829" Kahn's diss-track "Respect your elders", in reference to William "Leffen" Hjelte's rise to the top in 2015. A diss-track, a musical verbal attack on a given person/group, is rooted in hip hop history beginning in the ?Os, pioneered in rap-battles and other rivalry-based events. The appropriation of the diss-track is a useful reminder that no community is ever truly sealed off from the world and its influences. As well, this track is an example of popular SSBMplayers adopting borrowed models of celebrity behaviour.

The two were seen to have a Twitter "beef' and butted heads on and offiine, particularly with respect to the right to play the neutral Fox colour in game, as Chillindude believed it be his right as he had been playing longer. Chillindude had challenged Leffen to a first to five, $100 dollar money match, of which he played the track before to psyche him out. Despite this, Leffen quickly won 5-0. Today, Leffen is ranked in the top 5 players, while Chillindude resting at 57th in 2017, and not ranked for 2018 (Lee, 2018). Both players have immense followings, Leffen for his skill and controversial attitudes, and Chillindude for his long existing history in the community and active stream. Although Chillindude does not compete very much anymore, and does not share the top player spotlight anymore, he is still respected and regarded as crucial in the grassroots narrative.

This adverse attitude to new players taking space in the scene is emulated in this specific situation. I wonder how this situation would have played out if Leffen was a non-male player, or non-celebrity for that matter and how it would have shaped the interaction differently. Melee players are quick to dismiss new players as important unless they show proficiency in the game. If this attitude continues, I worry about how new players will be accepted into the culture

if they provide something other than immense skill. Moreover, I worry that if players do not learn to appreciate and even thank other community practices, gatekeeping and negativity will continue. In fighting games, because of the singularity of play (i.e. No teams larger than 2 people) it is easy to overlook the non-competitor as they are highlighted in most streams and advertisements. It is crucial for SSBM to continue to learn to appreciate all the different roles at play for the community. At the sum of it all, Melee players are united by their love for the game, and conscious or not, want it to live forever. The only way to allow for this growth is to disband homosociality and its sanctioned activity and loosen the grip on the adherence to a strictly grassroots narrative.

Homosocial Control Techniques: Trash Talk

Any Smash or FGC player is aware of the hype and intensity exciting matches can bring to the community. As evident in most sports and esports, spectators and community members can become extremely passionate about certain teams or players. They will voice these opinions through a number of performative actions like cheering on their favourites or conversely or demoralizing their opponent. Many FGC or Smash players may argue that trash talk is an integral part of play and performance, but despite it being an obvious example of bullying, has more imperious effects than hurting the feelings of the person who is being booed.

Making jokes or trash-talking players inherently is a process of "othering", as defined by Marvin in her study of the expert (ibid, 1988). Joking about a player can signify them as an "other". SSBMplayers are often quick to voice clear disappointment of peers' actions as "wrong" or not in line with the community discourse, perhaps as a means of vocally solidifying themselves as part of SSBM. People of rank or privilege, like top players, are readier targets for this othering solely by their celebrity status. Some may see this as more acceptable as most top players are fairly similar, 20-30-year-old males who share a deep passion for SSBM. Their

power and influence in the scene make it easier for them to brush off the trash talk, but when the same trash talk is done to marginalized people in the community, the effect runs deeper.

Humor, or trash talk, at the expense of powerless groups have more averse effects of "othering" than that of the celebrity. Marvin writes,

> 'T hough experts often appealed to the purity of their professional honesty to justify their claim to public recognition, they did not feel bound to practice the same honesty in their relations with stigmatized groups. Instances of deception and intimidation that were reported unselfconsciously and described as agreeably humorous, even morally essential when practiced by experts on these groups" (ibid, p.35 1988).

Although experts appeal to the public by performing professionally in order to be seen as valid, they do not demonstrate the same level of professionalism when dealing with marginalized groups. This may imply the expert's need to other marginalized groups as a means to seem even more powerful and congruent. While trash talk among experts or pro players is just empty bullying, when executed to almost any other identity rather than a pro player, the effects can be ostracizing. Trash talk forms distinction in discourse. The targets of this bullying are players who may not appear in line with common discourse or expectation, and for that reason are often tragically overlooked.

Resistance to Homosocial Discourses

Fortunately, some groups have developed techniques to help deter the homosociality in SSBM culture. In 2017, the community saw the rise of an event called "Smash Sisters," which was created by long-time SSBM players Lil "Milktea" Chen (See Figure VII) and Emily "emilywaves" Sun. The event is sponsored by Anykey, an organization for advocacy, diversity and inclusion in competitive gaming spheres. The event is a series of women's crew battles to bring new and veteran players together and encourage competition. Often, the crews are formed by region which is a nice way for women to unite with other women from their region. At its beginning, the

event was highly successful and brought a lot of hype and feelings of inclusion to these players. Milktea spoke about infusing empathy into gaming practises to address sexism in these spaces through this inclusive event (Chen, 2015).

However, despite the events only being recorded and not streamed, non-participants use this platform to compare these women's skill and determine "who is the best girl smasher," which is the opposite of the event's intention. I suggest an adaptation of bracket style, perhaps moving away from crew battle style in favour of something else. I think about doing a doubles round robin bracket, so women can play more than once in the competitive format, and perhaps grow a close 1 on 1 relationship with their partner. While this won't solve the issue of people attempting to rank women players, it may help other people feel more comfortable in the space as the onus of competition will be more shared. This is also because I am a huge advocate for doubles format. As well, I have been in discussion with Milketea about ways of opening the Smash Sisters space to more identities and infusing more queer accessibility into this space, as the branding is fairly feminine. I look forward to seeing the way this event continues to shift community practise and create more
space for all players to meet people and play together.

Moreover, Kyle "Dr.Piggy" Nolla has been working hard to construct a Code of Conduct for all the smash games. Her academic background and ongoing research about gender, cognition and videogames position her in a valuable position to seriously help improve the community. Working hard with her panel of volunteers, they seek to create protocol for issues in the community like harassment and sexism. It is an extremely daunting task, but I trust and applaud Dr. Piggy, and her team to help build a safer space for the tournaments of tomorrow.

I would refer people looking to make SSBM or any gaming space more inclusive to the AnyKey foundation. Founded in 2015, AnyKey's mission statement reads, "AnyKey's primary objective is to substantially increase diversity, inclusion, and equity in competitive gaming" (2020). They host a variety of resources for those who wish to amplify, connect and empower

gamers from all backgrounds. I would direct anyone who reads this to take AnyKey's GLHF pledge which is a promise to make a difference as a positive and inclusive member of a given gaming space.

It is important to understand that diversifying this homosocial space is a process and that is okay. At its roots, esports is shaped by videogame culture overall. There are copious amounts of scholarly work like Kinder's early analysis of Nintendo's older razor marketing theory, outlining the social dangers of early video game cultures' exclusive marketing to boys (ibid, 1991). Moreover, Judy Wajcman's feminist theories of technology recall that gender is embed in technology itself (Wajcmam, 146). Although Nintendo's marketing strategies have changed with the times, one can still see its residual impacts even in the title of the game (and franchise) itself, *Super Smash **Bros.** Melee.*

Many gamers may overlook this history, arguing that women and other players should simply "get good" or "they would compete if they were good enough". Here I assert a useful passage from Todd Harper's response to comments like this that brings perspective to the issue of homosociality:

> [Comments like this are met] with repeated rhetoric about how the community is blind to ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation... all that matters is skill. This puts women players, in particular in an interesting double bind: unacknowledged structural and cultural barriers act to keep many (not all) women who want to compete away... yet their lack of presence is used as a backdoor justification for not just prevailing attitudes about women's skill or belonging in competitive culture, but also for the lack of women in the first place (118, Harper).

Ultimately, to continue the resistance against the homosociality for SSBM players should keep showing up, stop pretending it isn't an issue and to be more than just an ally and advocate for space and belonging towards marginalized gamers, said by Bo Ruberg in their keynote about diversity in esports (ibid. 2019).

Continuing to Resist and Grow: The Wholesome Gaming Manifesto

See Figures VII, ***IX, X, XI, XII*** & ***XIII***

The Wholesome Gaming Manifesto was a performance art piece I started in 2019. I presented myself as a gaming oracle in a hand-made cloak with several different wires and gaming accessories sewn into the fabric. I stood before an audience and read a speech with gusto and fierceness. The speech, entitled "a speech for the ages," was a call to action for the gamers of tomorrow, encouraging wholesome play over toxicity. Here is a section from the speeches' introduction:

> In the Anthropocene Epoch of today, gamers are beginning to harmonize and become synonymous with mainstream culture. As consoles progress and franchises' game titles grow, so do we as gamers. Yet, vexing situations and disappointing developments seem to surface all too often in gaming communities. Gamers are often remembered as infused with rage, impotence, rampant sexism and other ill-favoured qualities.
>
> This interdisciplinary theological movement is a call for change. No longer will there be gatekeepers, ostracizing gamers of infinite and expansive identities. No longer will antagonism and apathy be our signifiers.No longer will gamers be or be seen as distasteful.
>
> Virtue is coming. With this movement and its teaching, gamers can ascend to wholesome status and include new forms of spirituality into their gaming practises.

The introduction was followed with a list of imperatives for behaviour regulation and reflection for online/offline gaming, casual/competitive play, community and the self. Although many celebrity gamers encourage their audiences to act appropriately and discourage toxicity, it does not seem effective enough to reach the entirety of the gamer population as it continues to grow rapidly. Therefore, I presented myself as a religious figure for gaming, as religion has not only a longer history than gaming, but also because people seem to offer a more directed attention to

religious figures. As well, some may intertwine religious aspects into their gaming practises already, consciously or not. The speech concludes with offering those ready to ascend to wholesome gamer status a pledge. People ready to pledge were asked to recite an oath out loud, written on the card pictured, and to sign and date the card. They were then given a pixel heart emblem as a sign of their commitment to wholesome gaming. During the time of presentation, I created a Discord channel for wholesome gaming discussion, however it has become inactive.

This performance uses drama and rhetoric to remind audiences that gaming is not going away any time soon and should be handled with care. As gaming practices like *SSBMs* competitive scene grow to encompass more of the world, I urge people to reflect on their own practices in these spaces. As esports merges to become a dominant part of popular culture, it is crucial that these practises are handled with respect, considerations and empathy to ensure a sustainable, accepting and approachable future.

VI. Conclusion

Competitive *SSBM* is arriving at a moment when original hardware, software and gameplay have mutated, reformed and re-naturalized as proper. Without denying the processes that led to here, these changes in discourse and technique make me speculative on the fate of *SSBM. SSBM* is in constant transition, guided by the forces and values of the community, which were and continued to be hindered by Nintendo's lack of participation. Will *SSBM* ever stabilize? Or will it only continue to change, grow and evolve in line with other esport flows?

The issue of sustainability reveals itself in the need for player's self-governance. It is a lot of work for (top) players to brand themselves and remain the centre of attention. These players as celebrities are generally in deeply embedded in social networks, media and performances. While some top players are lucky to have esport team sponsors to help carry the onus of the celebrity, many free agent players act as their own managers. Those who

participate with SSBM at a serious competitive level may often battle the bridge between work obligation and leisure as they attempt to (financially) support themselves through their participation. Many "legends" of SSBMhave retired to settle into more reliable careers. Others may attempt a double life. Will SSBM ever become a reliable job like other esports, without Nintendo's intervention and support? In early March of 2020, The Smash World Tour (smashworldtour.com), SSBM and *Super* Smash *Bros. Ultimate (SSBU)'s* first ever circuit was announced. The combined starting prize pool for this year long event is $250,000, the largest amount in SSBMs history. The circuit runs internationally and any tournament that has more than 32 entrants can opt in to be counted to towards 10-month long process of qualifying for the finals. This is a huge step forward for SSBMs recognition as a legitimate and professional esport. However, not all beloved tournaments have opted in nor has Nintendo been involved in anyway. At the time of this writing, Nintendo has yet to respond to this new circuit, but I speculate if they are okay with this never mind getting involved.

Some argue Melee is perfect, others say Melee is broken. Many players say both, when actually authentic play can only be deemed by one's subjective position towards SSBM. Players will continue to draw on the presentation of authority in hardware and player performance to conclude how to compose their loyalty to competitive play. Here, I present my loyalty to SSBM by dedicating my Masters' degree and research to the game. Academia aside, this is my love letter to SSBM. From my perspective, when you love something, you should interrogate and analyse it while finding ways to nurture and improve it. I have presented a number of thoughts, discourses and alternativesto the current state of SSBM. As evident, discourse and techniques are in flux, and I hope that my work here provides scaffold for deep reflection and awareness to all aspects of SSBM as an esport.

Figures

II. Method

1

Figure 1 Basement Melee

Figure II Aerial shot of the maquette

Figure III. Close up of maquette (Coin for scale)

Figure IV. Eye leve l sho t of the maq uette

11. Hard ware & Software

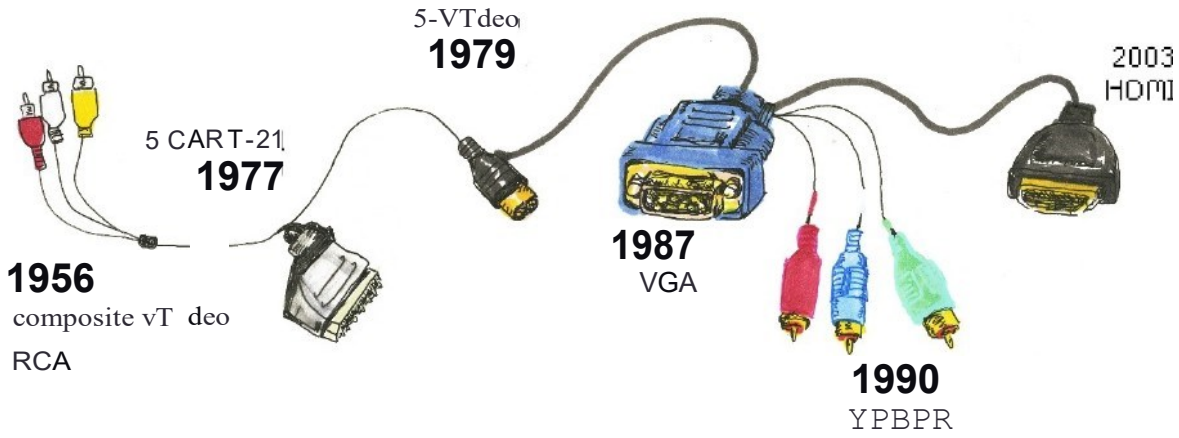


Figure I **(abov e)** Signal pro cessing time line
Figure II **(below)** 5 most common hardwar e for *SSBM*

Figure Ill Ink dr awing of S-Roya l's Mel ee Mach ine

Figure IV Ink dra wing of side view of S-Royal's Melee Machine

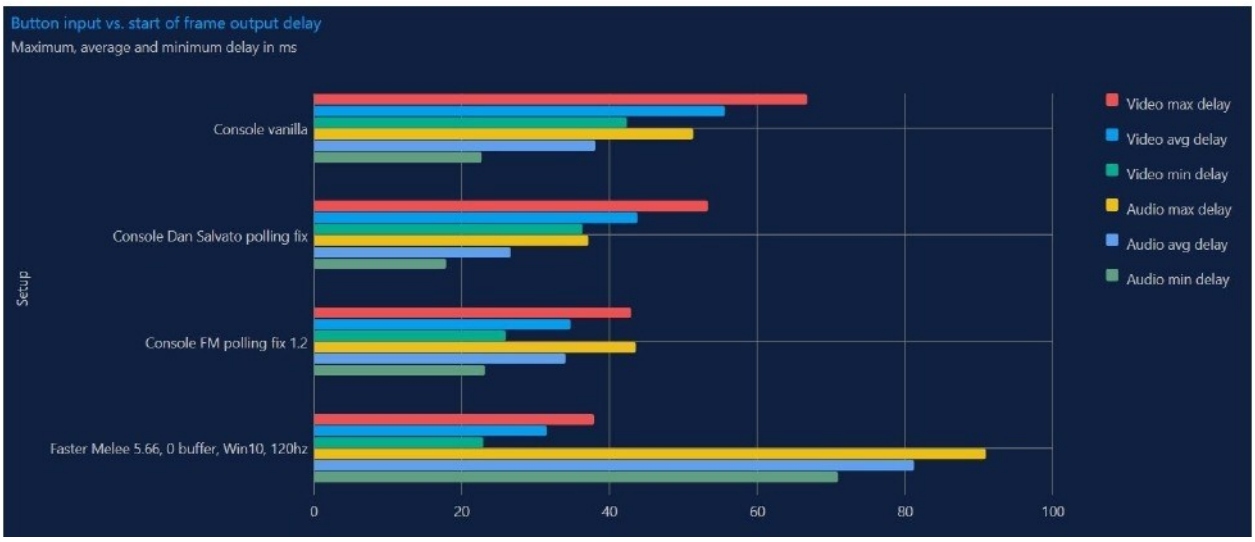


Figure V Kadano's chart comparing button input and start of frame output delay. He writes, "[This] chart that comparesdifferen t hardware/ software combinations in audio and video input lag. Values are given for minimum, average and maximum. For emulation , I only included the veryfastest configurations that I have measured so far, considering their respective use cases. The Faster Melee sample has been taken with slightly different measurement standards, measuring at 25% up from the bottom of the CRT monitor" source
hm>: // kadano .net /SSBM /inputlag/

Figm·e VI 2 shell backs of a GameCube controller . The black/ first one includes the spring resistance in the triggers, the second/purple shell has the springs removed. This is a common hardware mod for *SSBM.* This image shows the slight height difference for controller triggers. Many people only do this mod to one side. It is entirely player specific and subjective to a player's preferred controller feel.

Figure VU In k drawing of Ch ar's foo t play

Figu r e VIII The Fra nkenstein Controller

Figure IX Full frontal of Frankenst ein Controller

Figure X Top down view of Frankenste in Contr oller

IV. Discourse

Figure I *SSBM* "God" Armada tweets abo ut technique with Fox regarded as "bro ke n", here mean ing ove rpowered. (twitt e r.com/ Ar madaUGS)

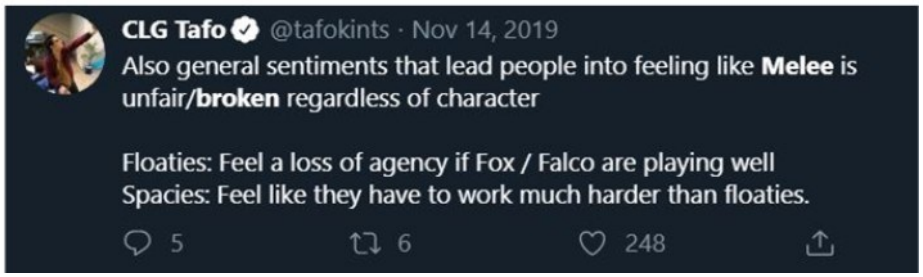


Figure II General Manage r of es ports tea m CLGand *SSBM* vet era n Tafokints tweets abo ut community perce ption of Melee ' s possible imbala nce as "broke n"

bn':: cing a tre ;c ;etitors atevents that I believe really prevent growth (THREAD)

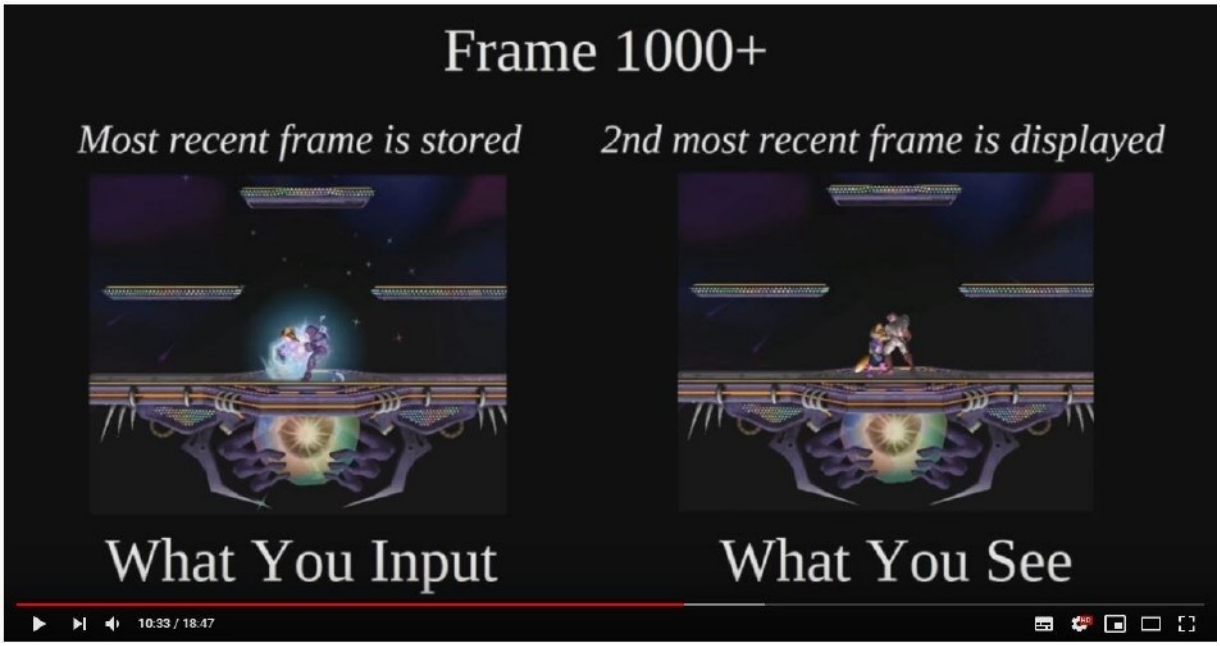
1) Enter a bracket > get tilted by an opponent
2) Play autopiloVangry > not present in the match
3) Reflects on performance and says "I lost because *small moment* lead to 0-death"

ryobeat

I hella agree! The "No Johns" mentality has some flaws (i.e sometimes silences all reasons for losing, even good ones) but overall was straightforward and focused on like "yeah I just gotta be better"

Now we live in a time of like "small external factor meant everything"

Figure III MPGR Top 100 player , Ryobea t' s thoughts on "No Johns "



how to host SSBM t ournaments wi thout CRTs

50,l.ı views· 22 OCl2019

,.. 3.6K •• 39 ,+ SHARE !"+ SAVE

Aziz Al-Yami
1:2.BK subscribers

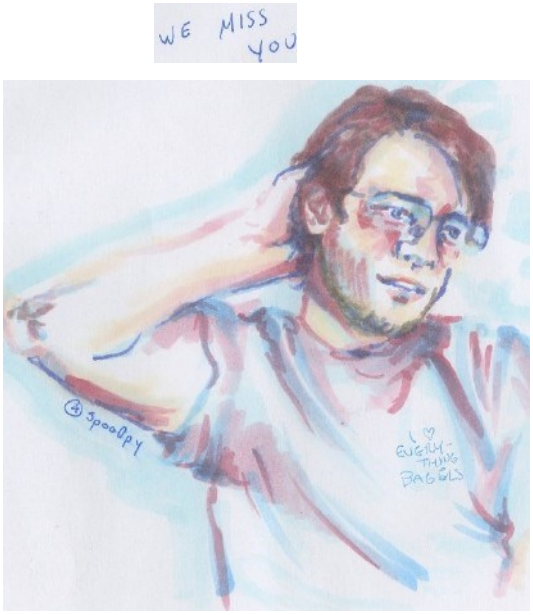


Figure V Ink drawing of (my) favourite *SSBM* "god", PPMD

V. Technique

Figure I
Tiny Yoshi 's Story close up

Figure II Full shot of Tiny Yoshi's Story

Figure III Moveme nt and Defen sive Techn ique Chart

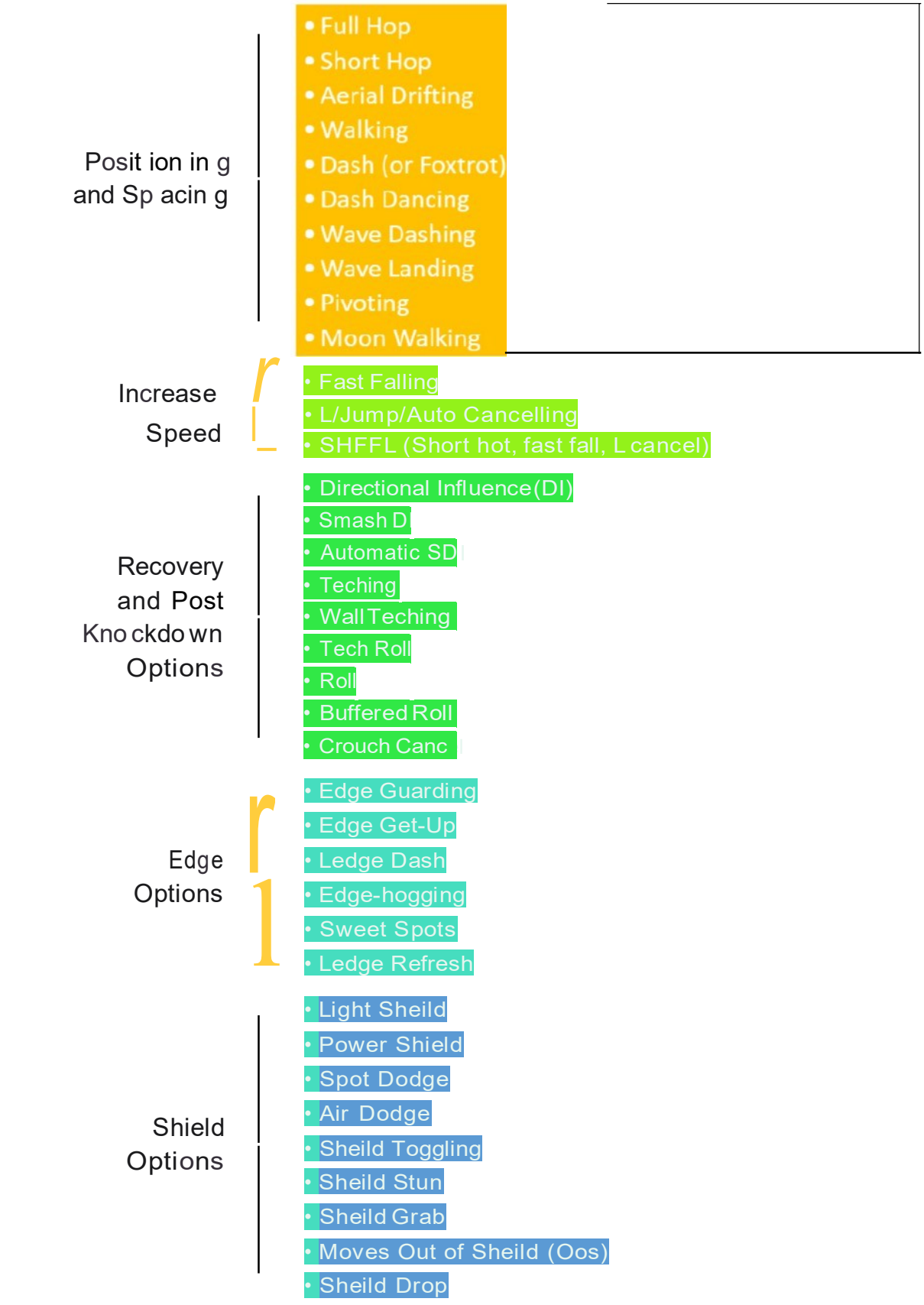


Figure IV My *SSBM* t ier listdesign

Figure V Screenshot of top 10 player Zain's opinion on wobbling (from twitter.com/zainnaghmi)

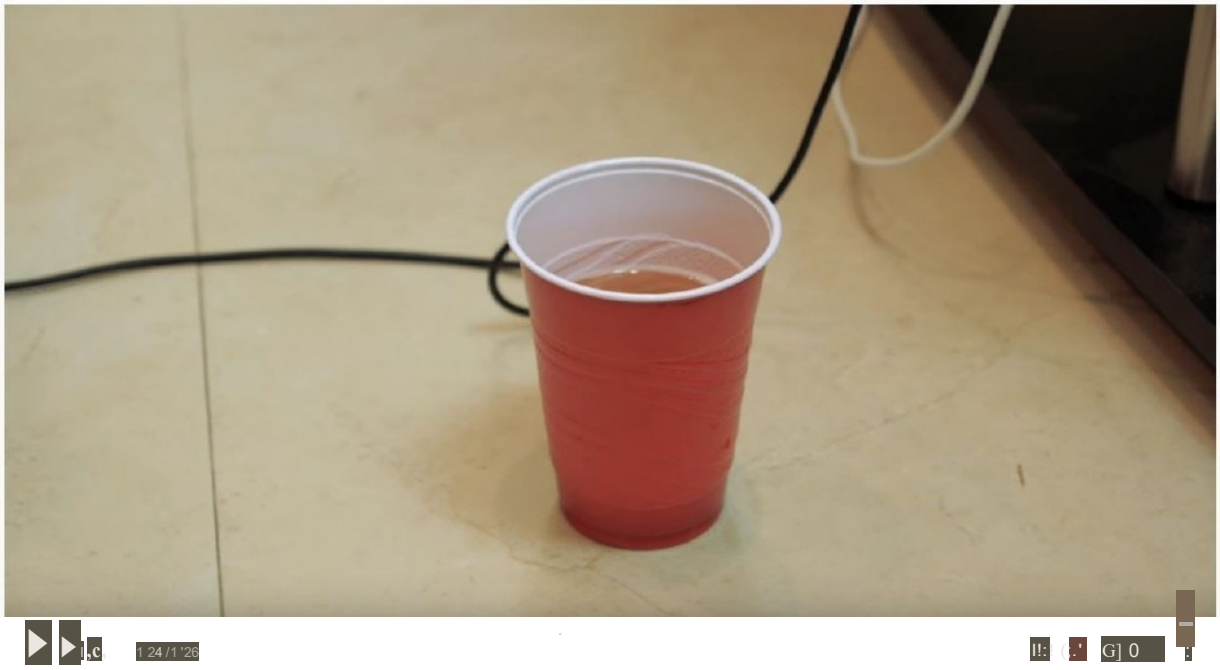


Figure VI - A red solo cup filled with beer in a video that explains popularized notion "Team Beer", a motto created at a past Smash Summit. {time stamp: 1:24) https:/ /www.youtube.com /watch?v = 3 K!Pw 7Y XvA

Figure VII. Oil painting tribute of my friend and Smash Sister's cofounde,r, Milktea

Figure VIII FullshotofTheWholesome Gaming Manifesto Performance (documentation by Alex Apostilitis)

IJftTH ICftRID

I PLECGE TG SUSTfllttfllt) E"flCT ENPflT"Yi SPIRITUALITY llllt) REFLECTIGlt lltTG NY GflNlltG PRfl CTICE(S) o I "EREBY CGNNIT TG BElltG fl MltGLESGNE Gfl NE Ra

SIGNED: _____
DATE: _____

Fig u re IXThe Wholesome Gaming Manifesto Oath Card

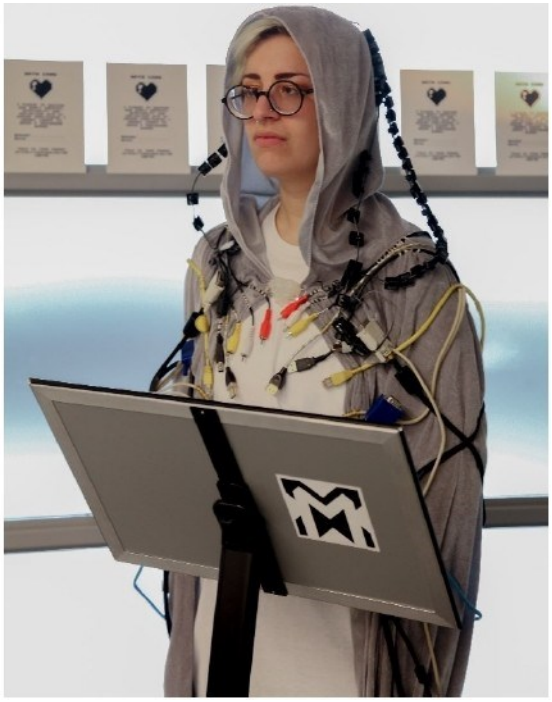


Figure X Portrait ofllle Wholesome Gaming Manifesto Performance (documentation by Alex Apostilitis)

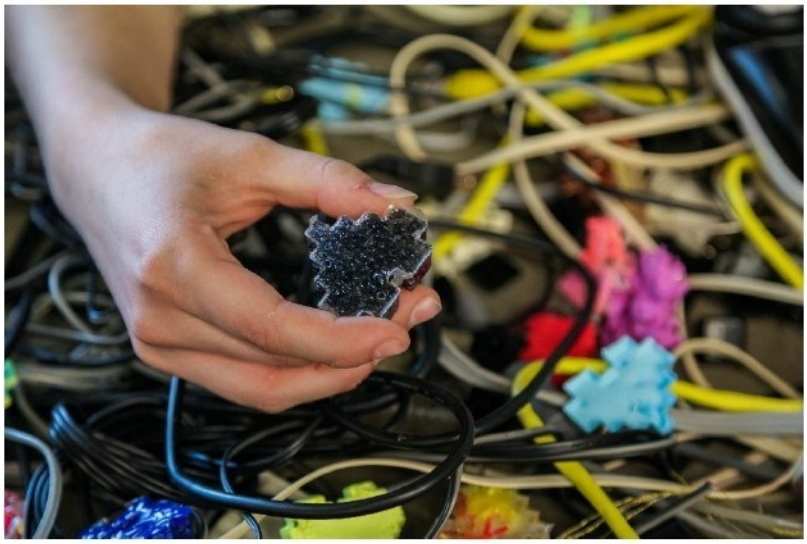


Figure XI One pixel resin heart (documentation by Alex Apostilitis)

Figu re XII Pixel hearts at the altar (documentation by Alex Apostilitis)

Figure XIII Connecting to the pixel hearts (documentation by Alex Apostilitis)

Work Cited

Acland, Charles R., ed. *Residual media.* U of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Al-Yami, Aziz 'Hax$', *How to Host SSBM Tournaments without CRTs* October, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6B4t5fCEbQ> [accessed 6 November 2019]

'About', *AnyKey* <https://www.anykey.org/en> [accessed 28 February 2020]

Apperley, Tom, and Jussi Parikka. "Platform Studies' Epistemic Threshold." *Games and Culture* 1.21 (2015): 1-21.

Basset, Mike "Typo". "ANALOG STICKS: Understanding, Testing and Troubleshooting Your Controller's Most Important Part." *Melee It On Me,* 9 Nov. 2016, www.meleeitonme.com/analog-sticks-understanding-testing-and-troubleshooting-your-controllers-most-important-part/.

Bogost, Ian. "Against Aca-Fandom." *Bogost.com,* 29 July 2010, bogost.com/writing/blog/against_aca-fandom/.

Boym, Svetlana. "Nostalgia and its discontents." *The Hedgehog Review,* vol. 9, no. 2, 2007, p. 7+. *Gale Academic Onefile,* Accessed 27 Nov. 2019.

Bryce, Mio. "Cuteness needed: the new language/communication device in a global society." *International journal of the humanities* 2.3 (2006): 2265-2275.

Beach, Emily. 'T he History of Flat Screen TVs." Techwalla, Leaf Group Ltd., www.techwalla.com/articles/the-history-of-flat-screen-tvs.

Beyond the Summit Smash. *Melee: The Next Generation - Smash Summit* 9, 2020 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BqTdklB 01E> [accessed 28 February 2020]

Chen, Lilian. *How I Responded to Sexism in Gaming with Empathy,* 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orOa-yRL4NI> [accessed 16 October 2019]

Chillindude829 - Respect Your Elders (Leffen Diss Track) <https://genius.com/Chillindude829-respect-your-elders-leffen-diss-track-lyrics> [accessed 15 October 2019]

Custodio, Alex (2018, April). The (After) Lives of the Game Boy Advanced: Emulation, Embodiments and Nostalgia. Paper presented at the R-CADE Symposium, Camden, **NJ.** April , 2018

Doolan, L. (2018, July 08). Masahiro Sakurai Isn't Concerned About Competitive Aspect Of Super Smash Bros. Retrieved June 20, 2019, July 8, 2008.from http://www.nintendolife.com/news/2018/07/masahiro sakurai isnt concerned about competitive aspect of super smash bros

Ernst, Wolfgang. "Media Archaeography: Method and Machine Versus History and Narrative of Media." *Digital Memory and the Archive.* Ed. Jussi Parikka. Electronic Mediations 39. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013. 55-80.

Elsaesser, Thomas. "Media Archaeology as Symptom." *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 14:2 (2016): 181-215.

Foucault, Michel. *Archaeology of knowledge.* Routledge, 2013.

Foucault, Michel. "On the Archaeology of the Sciences: Response to the Epistemology Circle." [1968]. *Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology.* [1994]. Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 vol. 2. Ed. James D. Faubion. Trans. Robert Hurley and others. New York: The New Press, 1998. Series Ed. Paul Rabinow. 297-333.

GameCube technical specifications. (2019, February 13) February 13 2019.. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wik/iGameCube technical specifications,

Gooding, Luke. 'Cloud9 pro Smash Player Banned on Twitch after Passing out on Stream', *Dot Esports,* 2019 <https://dotesports.com/culture/news/cloud9-pro-smash-player-banned-on-twitch-after-passing-out-on-stream> [accessed 15 October 2019]

Haraway, Donna. "A cyborg manifesto: Science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the late 20th century." *The international handbook of virtual learning environments.* Springer, Dordrecht, 2006. 117-158.

I. (2007, March 30). Wii specs vs. GC specs .. tell me the Wii is another GC now. - System Wars. March 30th 2007. Retrieved from https://www.gamespot.com/forums/system-wars-314159282/wii-specs-vs-gc-specstell-me-the-wii-is-another-gc-25539714,

Kirschenbaum, M. G. (2008). Mechanisms: New media and the forensic imagination. 2008. Retrieved from http://raley.englishucsb.edu/wp-contenUEngl800/Kirschenbaum-intro.pdf

Laferriere, Jas. "Ugh, This TV Lags!" Melee It On Me, 27 Mar. 2014, www.meleeitonme.com/this-tv-lags-a-guide-on-input-and-isplay-lag/.

Ito, Mizuko Jenkins, Henry, et al. *Participatory Culture in* a *Networked Era:* a *Conversation on Youth, Learning, Commerce, and Politics.* Polity, 2017.

Khan, Imad, 'Q&A with Nintendo at E3 -- The Future of Esports', *ESPN.Com,* 2018 <https://www.espn.com/esports/story/_/id/23804948/ga-nintendo-e3-future-esports> [accessed 13 November 2019]

Kinder, Marsha. Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Berkeley: University of California Press, c1991 1991. http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft4h4nb22p/

Lee, Daniel, 'SSBMRank 2017: 60 to 51', *Redbu/1,* 2018 <https://www.redbull.com/us-en/SSBMrank-2017-60-51> [accessed 3 February 2020]

'Major League Gaming', *SmashWiki* <https://www.ssbwiki.com/Ma jor League Gaming> [accessed 3 February 2020]

Marvin, Carolyn. "Inventing the Expert." *When Old Technologies Were New,* Oxford University Press, 1990.

Marvin, Carolyn. *When old technologies were new: Thinking about electric communication in the late nineteenth century.* Oxford University Press, USA, 1988.

Masters, Tim. "Bet on Esports with Luckbox - Esports Betting Done Right." *Luckbox,* 1O June 2019, luckbox.com/esports-news/article/the-mango-why-melee-is-great-but-not-lucrative.

Michael, Cale. "Hungrybox Named the Best Super Smash Bros. Melee Player for the Third Year in a Row." *Dot Esports,* 24 Jan. 2020, dotesports.com/fgc/news/hungrybox-named-the-best-super-smash-bros-melee-player-for-the-third-year-in-a-row.

Miyake, Kuriko, 'CNN.Com - Flat Panel TVs Just Keep Getting Bigger -[accessed 15 November 2019] October 3, 2001' <http://www.cnn.com/2001/TECH/ptech/10/03/larger.flat.panel.idg/index.html?related>

'MLG | Events' <http://www.majorleaguegaming.com/events/75/mlg-world-finals?utm_source=SmashBros&utm_medium=NP> [accessed 1O February 2020]

Morrison, Sean. 'Smash Sisters Creates a Space for Women in Esports', *ESPN.Com,* 2017 <https://www.espn.com/espnw/culture/feature/article/19027670/smash-sisters-events-welcome-women-play-connect-smash> [accessed 16 October 2019]

Meyers, Maddy. "Time Is Running Out For The Super Smash Bros. Scene's Favorite Game Controller." *Compete,* Sept. 2017, compete.kotaku.com/time-is-running-out-for-the-super-smash-bros-scenes-fa-1818815657.

Nestico, Andrew "PracticalTAS", and Darren Lynch, '#MPGR2018: 100-91', *Redbull,* 2019 <https://www.redbull.com/us-en/mpgr-2018-100-91> [accessed 3 February 2020]

Nestico, Andrew 'PracticalTAS', 'Smash Melee Rankings 50-41 | #MPGR2019', 2020 <https://www.redbull.com/us-en/mpgr-2019-50-41> [accessed 3 February 2020]

Radway, Janice A., 'Women Read the Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context', *Feminist Studies,* 9.1 (1983), 53 <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177683>

Ruhberg, Bo. "Diversity & Esports." Presentation, UCI Esports Conference 2019, Irvine, California, October 2019.

Salvato, Dan. "Universal Controller Fix." 20XXTE, www.20xx.me/ucf.html.

SmashWiki, 'Wobbling', *SmashWiki* <https://www.ssbwiki.com/Wobbling> [accessed 25 November 2019]

Smith, Chris. "History of the CRT TV." *BT.com,* 24 Feb. 2017, home.bt.com/tech-gadgets/television/retro-tech-the-crt-tv-11363858003032

Smith, Wynton "Prag". "The Battle in and out - Kevin 'PPMD' Nanney." *ESPN,* ESPN Internet Ventures, 19 Feb. 2016, www.espn.com/esports/story/ /id/14806799/the-battle-kevin-ppmd-nanney.

Siuty, Luke "Woocash". "Jason 'Mew2King' Zimmerman Is Working on a Book about His Life and Super Smash Bros." *Shoryuken,* 17 May 2018, shoryuken.com/2018/05/17/jason-mew2king-zimmerman-is-working-on-a-book-about-his-life-and-super-smash-bros/.

'Super Smash *Bros.* in Esports', *Wikipedia,* 2020 <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Super_Smash_Bros._in_esports&oldid=938748164> [accessed 10 February 2020]

'Super Smash Bros. Melee in Competitive Play', *SmashWiki* <https://www.ssbwiki.com/Super_Smash_Bros._Melee_in_competitive_play> [accessed 21 October 2019]

Taylor, T. L. "Power games just want to have fun?: instrumental play in a MMOG." *DiGRA Conference.* 2003.

Taylor, T.L. *Raising the Stakes: E-sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming.* Mit Press, 2012

Thespymachine. "Melee 'Genealogy' -A Unique History of Melee." *SmashBoards,* 17 Jan. 2014, SmashBoards.com/threads/melee-genealogy-a-unique-history-of-melee.345237/.

"The Smash Brothers." *SmashWiki,* www.ssbwiki.com/The_Smash Brothers.

Walker, Ian. "Melee Player Quits Match Over Opponent's Jigglypuff Stalling." *Kotaku,* Kotaku, 1 Apr. 2019, kotaku.com/melee-player-quits-match-over-opponents-jigglypuff-stal-1833725878.

Wajcman, Judy. "Feminist theories of technology." *Cambridge journal of economics* 34.1 (2010): 143-152.

Williams, Raymond. "The analysis of culture." *Cultural theory and popular culture: A reader* 2 (1961).

Witkowski, Emma, and James Manning. "Playing with (out) Power: Negotiated conventions of high performance networked play practices." *Proceedings of DiGRA International Conference.* 2017.

Wolf, Jacob. "Armada Announces Retirement from Super Smash Bros. Melee Singles." *ESPN,* ESPN Internet Ventures, 18 Sept. 2018, www.espn.com/esports/story/_/id/24724988/armada-announces-retirement-super-smash-bros-melee-singles.

Yao, Richard, 'Gaming as a Cultural Force', *Medium,* 2018 <https://medium.com/ipg-media-lab/gaming-as-a-cultural-force-dc456f8a41ab> [accessed 10 February 2020]

Zeilinski, Siegfried. "Introduction: The Idea of a Deep Time of the Media." *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means.* Electronic Culture- History, Theory, Practice. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006.