KINEPHANOS

Return in Play:

The Emergence of Retrogaming in Finnish Computer Hobbyist and Game Magazines from the 1980s to the 2000s

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Abstract

This article deals with the emergence of the retrogaming phenomenon in Finland starting from the 1980s. On the one hand, retrogaming can be considered as the practice of playing and collecting aging hardware and games, and on the other hand, it refers to a wider cultural phenomenon comprising, for example, commercial products, artistic activities, research, museums and online discussions. Using major Finnish computer hobbyist and game magazines as our primary source material, we trace the origins of game-related nostalgia, historicization, and retro hobbyism. We argue that the last thirty years can be divided into three periods: initial game nostalgia and historicization, the emergence of retrogaming, and the mainstream commodification of retro. The influential role of prominent journalists in the historicization of video games and general spreading of retro awareness is evident in the developments, as well as the perceived generation gaps between older and younger hobbyists. Based on the findings, retro and nostalgia appear as moving targets, when machines, games and characters go through a life cycle from their prime time to oblivion and, eventually, comeback and canonization into shared cultural icons.

Keywords

Retro, nostalgia, video games, computer games, local histories of computing

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1. Introduction

How did the playing of video games evolve from a new media cultural form into something that also looks into the past? Over the past two decades, we have seen a shift where various practices of digital gaming nostalgia and retrogaming have emerged. During the last decade, retrogaming has been recognized as one general tendency of digital gaming among other trends, such as online, mobile, and casual gaming (Newman 2004; Whalen & Taylor 2008; Heinonen & Reunanen 2009. For the popular cultural retro phenomenon in general, see Guffey 2006; Reynolds 2011).

Retrogaming refers, on the one hand, to the practice of playing and collecting original ("classic") video and computer games of the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, or using, for instance, emulators for playing them. On the other hand, retrogaming can be defined as a more general cultural form; it consists not only of gaming as practices or the artifacts primarily used for it (games and game devices) but, in a wider perspective, of other activities, such as the production of a broad range of consumer products, textiles, accessories, game related music videos, literature as well as various artistic, museum and academic practices, and the online circulation of game-oriented information and discussion (Suominen 2008). Hence, retrogaming does not only entail players' or consumers' point of view, but it is also a question of the following aspects: aesthetic expression, experiential arts and research, institutional game preservation, discourse of taste, and a cultural industry driven by game companies, and byproduct manufacturers. It includes special circles, such as the relatively marginal enthusiast subculture of hardcore retro gamers, but also various forms of more casual and occasional "flirt" with old video games, like consumer products in easily accessible non-original packages and forms, which are not necessarily nostalgic, but merely fashionable and curious retro (Suominen 2012).

One – obviously not the only – explanatory framework for retrogaming arises from the (academic) debates on the term nostalgia. Jaakko Suominen has previously argued that retrogaming is a practice that gives forms to gaming related nostalgia. Gaming nostalgia can be defined as an explicated, more or less reflective yearning for older game products, as well as a yearning for earlier experienced gaming situations (Suominen 2008. See also Suominen & Ala-Luopa 2012; Garda 2013). Nostalgic experiences are typically combinations of private

and shared emotions (cf. Whalen & Taylor 2008, 2). Sociologist Fred Davis (1979) makes a distinction between private and collective forms of nostalgia. The separation can be applied to games, too: iconic symbols, such as the Super Mario game figure, can bring similar nostalgic feelings to millions of people even though playing Mario and its recollection have, in many cases, private, individual, and unique features. In this case, a shared cultural object acts as the trigger for nostalgic experiences, even though the primary target for the nostalgia can be something else than an actual game.

Steven Reynolds defines in his book *Retromania* four characteristics of retro: it is always about a relatively immediate past, "stuff" that happened in your living memory; it involves an element of exact recall; it usually relates to popular culture; it does not typically sentimentalize the past, but seeks amusement and charm from it with irony and eclecticism (Reynolds 2011, xxx–xxxi. See also Guffey 2006, 9–28). The characteristics can be equally applied to retrogaming, which might consist of some sentimentalism, but is mostly about the fascination and charm of relatively recent artifacts and phenomena of different game cultures, circulated as original devices, games and their remakes, replicas, byproducts, websites, and YouTube videos. Elisabeth E. Guffey (2006, 10) argues that retro is connected to technological obsolescence, and lists retro gaming as an example of an entire subculture which is "devoted to outmoded technological apparatuses". Furthermore, retro does not always require a first-hand personal relationship with an object, as nostalgia can also be inherited or adopted (on inherited cross-generational nostalgia, see Davis 1979, 61–62).

But how and when exactly did these retro game and nostalgia related practices and discourses emerge, and how have they evolved since? Has there been a major turn at the beginning of the third millennium? For example, Finnish historian Petri Saarikoski (2001, 234) has argued that gaming nostalgia began after the first news about the "death of" the Commodore 64, and other 8-bit computers, such as the Sinclair Spectrum, Spectravideo 328, and Amstrad CPC in the late 1980s. Indeed, speculation on the purported deaths of home computers and gaming devices was very typical for magazines. Our aim in this paper is to find more evidence on those early forms of gaming nostalgia.

We argue that video game and computer hobbyist magazines have played a major role, not only in introducing new forms of gaming and cultural practices (Kirkpatrick, forthcoming), but also in defining the forms of retrogaming, yearning for old items, and, in general, the ways as to how to handle and represent the history of video games (see also Suominen 2011). Hence, this paper traces the emergence of gaming nostalgia and retrogaming discourses by using, in particular, major Finnish computer hobbyist and game magazines, and yearbooks as the primary sources: most notably *MikroBitti* (1984–) (abbreviated here *MB*), *Printti* (1984–1987), *C-lehti* [Commodore Magazine] (1987–1991) (*C*), *Tietokonepelien vuosikirja* [Yearbook of Computer games] (1987–1991) (*TPVK*), and *Pelit* [Games] (1992–) magazines. We have systematically read every available printed issue of the publications, and collected a database of 480 stories and extracts related to retrogaming or game historical awareness in general. *MikroBitti* and *Pelit* have been published monthly, *C-lehti* six times a year, *Printti* twice a month, and *Tietokonepelien vuosikirja* once or twice a year.

The wide circulation of computer hobbyist and game magazines, including subscriptions, has been one defining characteristic of the Finnish game culture. For instance, *MikroBitti*'s circulation in 1985 was 44,780, and peaked in 2006 with 102,970 copies. In 1992 the *Pelit* magazine sold over 15,400 copies, 1996 over 30,000 copies, and 2002 40,000 copies. (Suominen 2011, 4; Saarikoski 2012, 23. To compare to the British situation, see Kirkpatrick, forthcoming, 3.) Other characteristic features have been the relative absence of arcade and console gaming, and the dominance of the Commodore 64 in the 1980s. In 1986–1987 the C-64 had an estimated 66–75 % market share among home computers in Finland, but there is no exact data on the total amount of individual machines sold. According to computer magazines, there were about 150,000 C-64s in the late 1980s. (Saarikoski 2004, 103–105; Saarikoski & Suominen 2009.) All of the above-mentioned factors have significantly shaped the local retrogaming phenomenon.

We seek answers to the following questions: In what kind of forms have retrogaming and gaming nostalgia been represented in these magazines? What has been the role of particular authors in the historicization processes of digital game cultures? Have there been differences in how to nostalgize games and how to define games as retro (on differences in nostalgia, see e.g. Davis 1979; Boym 2001)? Our preliminary assumption is that there are at least three

different phases or layers in the emergence of retrogaming: 1) articulation of game nostalgia, 2) recognizing and naming of the retrogaming phenomenon, and 3) its eventual commodification.

The paper consists of three main sections: the first discusses the nostalgization and historicization of video gaming in Finland in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. The next section focuses on the early retrogaming wave in 1997–1999. The third main section before the conclusion deals with the question of retrogaming becoming a cross-over phenomenon in the 2000s.

2. Nostalgization and Historicization of Video Gaming

> "Commodore 64 was my first micro computer. Purchasing it has shaped my life more than any other decision I have made. However, I have had to leave Commodore computers behind and start a new life. Therefore, this is my last Commodore Inner Circle column." (*MB* 1988/04, 42–43.)

Those were the words of Risto Siilasmaa, a contributor to the Finnish computer hobbyist magazine *MikroBitti* in April 1988, when he ended his career as a columnist. In the column, Siilasmaa recollected his first experiences with computers, and the collaboration with *MikroBitti* since 1985. Later on, Siilasmaa became the founder and CEO of the F-Secure (former Data Fellows) company, and even the chairman of Nokia's Board of Directors (from 2012 onwards). His writing from 1988 is an early example of computer and videogame related nostalgia that started to emerge in the late 1980s.

In most cases, nostalgia was not explicitly – or at least widely – articulated before the 1990s, but there are first hints of it in the Finnish computer magazines. At first, nostalgic undertones were usually directed towards early arcade games, even though Finnish gamers did not have a significant amount of experiences with them, as the Finnish digital game culture had mostly formed around home computers, such as the Commodore 64, and their games. Journalists and contributors of magazines were able to use clichés, such as "good old days" or "the golden age", when mentioning games, such as *Pac-Man*, *Space Invaders* and *Asteroids*, and their own childhood memories of playing those games at, for example, the Linnanmäki amusement

park in Helsinki five to ten years earlier (see e.g. *MB* 1993/03, 89; *MB* 1989/11, 10–12; *C* 1988/01, 52–53). In this sense, Finnish journalists were loosely connected to the international discourse where the pre-crash period of video games (ca. 1970–1984) was regarded as a sort of "Golden Era" or "Golden Age" of videogaming (Kent 2001, 123–177; Payne 2008, 52; Eddy 2012; see also Wolf 2012).

Journalists often referred to those games with the word "classic", which was also the term used for describing a new game that the reviewers considered exceptionally good and revolutionary. A "classic" game was not necessarily old, but somehow ageless and, even though there is a slight difference between claiming a particular game to be a classic and talking about "classic games" of "game classics", using the term was a way to lift a game onto a pedestal and give special recognition to it (e.g. *Printti* 1985/02, 8: "Zork – A Classic of Its Time"). Frans Mäyrä (2008, 55) has defined game classics as titles which "can be considered representative, influential and popular during their period/or later" (see also Swalwell, forthcoming). Later on, a "classic game" has been used as a synonym for retro games, simply referring to old videogames which one still wants to play (Suominen 2013, 28).

According to Petri Saarikoski (2004, 247–253), defining some digital games as classics was an example of how game reviewers adopted practices from cinema and literature critics. Likewise, they could rhetorically ask the readers questions in the lines of "who still remembers" certain old games (e.g. *C* 1989/01, 6–7 ["We have waited for Elite on the Amiga for a couple of years […] but who remembers how to play Elite?"]; *MB* 1994/03, 94; *MB* 1994/08, 33–34), which was a way of strengthening the feeling of belonging to a specific community sharing similar experiences and gaming histories, and also distancing themselves from younger gamer generations and certain contemporary game cultures. This double distinction was a key element in the process where an experience became nostalgic (cf. Whalen & Taylor 2008, 6). Historically oriented articles taught younger generations that there had been digital gaming already before. For older generations, such articles served as triggers and tools for reworking their collective and personal reminiscence. Furthermore, the articles generally deepened readers' gaming literacy. (e.g. *Printti* 1987/issues 13–17; *TPVK* 1988, 25; *TPVK* 1989/02, 33–37; TPVK 1990/02, 21–25; *C* 1988/01, 52–53: ["I first saw a

racing game years ago in my youth. […] By feeding it Marks [Finnish currency] you could turn the wheel and press the gas pedal. There were simple white columns on the screen depicting the street."]; *C* 1989/05, 29–31; *Pelit* 1995/09, 61.)

"Classic" was a term that also game companies adopted for marketing the re-releases, remakes, and conversions of their earlier products. One of the earliest examples of this sort of usage and its coverage in the Finnish computer hobbyist press took place in November 1988 when Niko Nirvi reviewed *Arcade Classics*, a compilation of four arcade games, *Space Invaders*, *Asteroids*, *Gravity Wars* and *Snakes*, which were converted to the Commodore 64. The reviewers of such compilations typically complained that the compilations comprised one or two hits, accompanied with several bulk products – not all the re-releases were hits or classics at all. Old games were compared to the latest developments of the field, too:

> "Current games are more developed than what one might believe. [...] Arcade Classics gives an opportunity to peek into that lost time. It contains four really old games [...]. Every game of Arcade Classics has nostalgic appeal and, to my surprise, also some kind of joy of play. The only true minus is that Gravity Wars and Snakes do not give much joy to a lone gamer. Worth the buy, if the prehistory of games is dim for you." (*MB* 11/1988, 74.)

Complaints about the quality of the collections have often been repeated in game reviews and books (e.g. *MB* 1993/12, 62–63; *MB* 1994/09, 34). Writers might accuse publishers, not only of the selection of games, but also of the poor quality of the technical implementation. At their worst, such conversions are not faithful replicas or emulations, but merely referential simulations and pastiches of originals. (Herz 1997, 74; Payne 2008.) From a technical point of view, the mismatch between arcade and consumer hardware made exact conversions often difficult or even impossible (cf. Montfort & Bogost 2009, 65–79; S.T.A.R. 2012; Heikkinen & Reunanen 2013).

It seems that older games, such as *Pac-Man*, were mostly published as revisions, updated versions with better graphics or new features; authenticity was not a main concern, but merely a way to underline the familiarity and playability (e.g. *Printti* 1985/03, 10; *MB*

1988/08, 16–17; *MB* 1988/12, 81–82: ["Many who have just sold their C-64 have taken the rumors about an emulator as a gift from the gods, as there are thousands of titles that will never be published for the Amiga"]; *MB* 1990/01, 49; *MB* 1993/09, 64; *MB* 1996/11, 89). One distinctive feature of a "game classic" is its ability to act as an influential platform for, on the one hand, faithful remakes, and on the other hand, more or less successful copies, often called "games clones" (cf. Suominen 2013, 28).

The emergence and popularization of 16-bit computers, mainly the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST, in the second half of the 1980s, brought up the question regarding what to do with old computers and their substantial software catalogues. The Finnish computer hobbyist press closely observed the development of software and hardware emulators for these computers. Even though one decade later emulators had an important role in the retrogaming scene, in the late 1980s and the early 1990s they were merely considered as an interesting, but not usually a particularly well-functioning means of improving the narrow software selection of the 16 bit-computers. A need for such emulators was articulated without nostalgic undertones. It was rather a matter of practicality, more commonly realized in the context of printers: new printers had to emulate the functions of some existing, popular ones to ensure the compatibility of the products. (*MB* 1988/02, 20–21; *MB* 1988/04, 16–17; *MB* 1988/04, 7; *MB* 1992/02, 24–26; *C* 1991/06, 28–29.) Likewise, modems typically emulated the Hayes command set. However, as soon as they became technically feasible, computer emulators were considered one way to transfer games from a platform to another, providing possibilities for nostalgic experiences. One of the earliest references to emulators and nostalgia can be found in *Pelit* (1993/08, 65) in the Letters to the Editor column.

At the end of the 1980s – the early 1990s at the latest – game journalism started to construct a historical awareness of digital games. Lengthy articles on the history of individual games, game series, or genres started to appear in game magazines (see e.g. *Printti*'s article series of videogame history in issues 14–18 in 1987), as well as in the *Yearbook of Computer Games*. The history of digital gaming was chiefly represented as a logical progress, and most stories did not feature recollections of individuals' gaming memories (cf. Therrien 2012). There were some exceptions, however. For example in 1990, Jori Olkkonen, a game musician and

an assistant editor, proclaimed the Commodore 64 as a legend. He encouraged readers to return to the old:

> "The Commodore 64 is the very computer that most people have bought as their first microcomputer. During the years, a huge amount of games has been created for it, the total can be counted in tens of thousands. Before the invasion of the 16-bit computers the Sixtyfour was the best gaming machine. Dig up that old machine of yours and enjoy really nice games!" (*TPVK* 1990/02, 24–25.)

Thus, in the early 1990s there appeared some signs of pioneering journalists starting to compare new games to old ones and, at times, favoring the old. In their opinion, older games had original ideas and high playability, although their graphics and sound were poor compared to new games. (*MB* 7/1992, 30; *Pelit* 1995/09, 61; Saarikoski 2004, 254–255. Cf. *Pelit* 1992/05, 61.) Obviously, this kind of opinions, shared not only by the journalists but a substantial number of players, showed that there was a market, for example, for redistributing games as "classic game compilations", and other commodities (Whalen & Taylor 2008, 7).

The nostalgization by journalists, consisting in many cases of humoristic and self-ironic phrases, reflected the notion that there was a new, younger gamer generation growing. The next generation had not personally experienced old games or devices, such as home computers and consoles, whose advancements were also typically presented as different generations. Another way to look at the nostalgization is to consider how it underpinned the status of the pioneers, who were in a position where they could largely define both the discourse, and the history of the gaming culture.

More signs of nostalgization, focusing on not only old arcade or video games, but also 8-bit computer games, appeared repeatedly in the mid-1990s. The discussion was in part connected to a few re-releases and compilations, but mostly to the circulation of freeware and shareware remakes of old games on bulletin board systems (BBS) and the Internet. The *MikroBitti* and *Pelit* magazines started to review these games, and distribute them through their own BBSs among other digital games. For a beginner game developer, it was in many cases easier to start with remaking or improving an old game classic than with a unique fresh idea. We can

thus argue that creating remakes was not primarily a question of nostalgia, or particularly historically aware practice, but a way to learn game development, and probably also get wider circulation for one's amateur experiments and productions. Enthusiast programmers were like art students practicing their skills by copying old masterpieces with a reverse engineering mindset. Such development started already during the previous decade, and, for example, the Finnish game developer pioneer Stavros Fasoulas, who became famous a few years later, published his VIC-20 version of *Pac-Man* as a program listing in the first issue of the *MikroBitti* hobbyist magazine 1/1984 (*MB* 1/1984, 70). Game reviewers typically contextualized the hobbyist works and remakes by referring to their paragons, which was a common style in game reviews in general (Suominen 2011).

Hobbyist developers commonly neglected copyright issues that would not have been in their favour in any case. Questions about intellectual properties – not only concerning game ideas but game copying – were brought up in almost every later article introducing the use of emulators for gaming (e.g. *MB* 1998/11, 114–116: "Heaven of old coin-op games opens to them who navigates to the pages hallowed to the free MAME emulator [...] There is only two obstacles in the fast track to happiness: copyright law and Bill Gates."). One reason for that was magazines' relatively low tolerance towards software piracy, heavily debated in articles as well as in letters to the editor (Saarikoski 2004, 319–337).

Generally speaking, it seems that in the mid-1990s, the first video game generations had reached a suitable age for nostalgia. Enough time had passed from the early use of game classics, and there had been a rupture between old and new, which is typically needed for the emergence of nostalgia. The popularization of the Internet had a major role in the emergence of digital game nostalgia. The Internet acted as a catalyst, bringing together a critical mass of digital game nostalgists and providing a flexible space for the cultivation of digital game history culture and heritage. Several scholars have emphasized the role of Internet as the dominant memory machine enabling various forms of recollection related to a number of different media and technologies (Heinonen & Reunanen 2009; Suominen 2013. On the Internet as a memory machine in general, see e.g. Straw 2007; van Dijck 2007).

Similar developments were underway in other countries, too. For example, in the UK *Edge* had introduced its "Retroview" column in 1994, and the *Zzap!64* magazine had its "Retrospective View" in the "Zzapback" column at least as early as 1987, although its idea was not nostalgization, but to evaluate whether the games reviewed had maintained their value. *Edge*, however, fastened on nostalgia already from the first column describing *Stunt Car Racer*. (*Edge* issue 11, August 1998, 79; *Zzap!64* issue 29, September 1987, 110.) In the big picture, during the 1990s, or even before, retro had become a known concept in the popular culture – typically in fashion and popular music (e.g. *HS* 27.1.1990; *HS* 28.1.1995; *IS* 2.1.1995). Pop and rock music had already seen various revivalist subcultures before that, but in the 1990s the latest, retro became a cross-over phenomenon (Reynolds 2011).

3. The First Wave of Retrogaming

> "A retrogamer (meaning a person who appreciates good old times when games were real games and every idea worth playing) does not have to dig up his old microcomputer remains when missing those real games of the 8-bit era. […] There is a vast selection of games resembling the real deal, ranging from rough pixel graphics and beep sounds to beautiful modern re-creations, even improved ones. Are you old enough, did you once have a permission to drop coins into arcade games, are there glimpses of happy moments with Pac-Man, Defender, Pong, Space Invaders, Galaxian or Centipede in the remotest corner of your memory? […] Would you like to dive into the past? Refresh old experiences, or check what was played during the last decade? The MBnet online environment offers you a round!" (*MB* 1997/03, 76–77)

So far, the earliest reference to "retrogaming" in the Finnish computer and video game magazines we have found on *MikroBitti* 3/1997. In his text, Jukka O. Kauppinen explained the meaning of a "retro gamer" – the need for an explanation demonstrates that the term was not generally used before that in Finland. The use of the term spread after the first mentions in a year (*MB* 1997/09, 91; *MB* 1998/03, 81; *MB* 1998/04, 25; *MB* 1998/05, 19; *MB* 1998/05, 83; *MB* 1998/05, 100–101; *MB* 1998/06–07, 100; *MB* 1998/11, 114–116). The *Pelit* magazine, adopted it after *MikroBitti* (e.g. *Pelit* 1997/05, 20–24; *Pelit* 1998/08, 55; *Pelit*

1998/09, 70; *Pelit* 1998/11, 77), together with game reviewers in newspapers (*IS* 10.12.1998).

We have not been able to trace Kauppinen's or other writers' actual influences for the use of the term, but most likely Finnish journalists followed the international discourse of the time. In an email interview, Kauppinen told that he had basically read every game related English magazine he got into his hands in Finland, mentioning the following: *Computer & Video Games*, *Computer Games*, *Computer Gaming World*, *The One*, *Amiga Action*, *ACE*, *Amiga Format*, and *PC Format* (Kauppinen 29.4.2014). As we noted above, some foreign magazines had already introduced retro-related terminology years before. Kauppinen suspects that he adopted the term from British game magazines, because at that point they began to increasingly nostalgize, in particular, Sinclair Spectrum games, and grown up Spectrum, Commodore 64 and Amstrad CPC users started to create remakes of the 1980s 8-bit games (Kauppinen 29.4.2014).

J. C. Herz (1997, 63) wrote in her famous book on videogame history, *Joystick Nation*, about a shift from "wildly popular to wildly retro", which had been a process that started in the USA "early in the Reagan administration and [...] achieved critical mass" during the time of her book's publication in 1997. Even though the history of the video and computer game culture in Finland is different to the USA, it appears that the critical mass of players interested in retro was achieved also in Finland during the same period, as reflected by the game magazines. Herz underlines one own's personal emotional experiences and deep engagement as reasons for what she calls "video game retromania" (Herz 1997, 65, 79. Cf. Reynolds 2011, who considers retrogaming as one aspect of the general retro phenomenon).

The Internet became an essential platform for retro game related communities who organized online game archives, "museums", collections, conventions, publications and so forth. Petri Saarikoski (2001, 234) claims that basically there was no total rupture, for example, between the old and new uses for the Commodore 64 computers, because in the demoscene community, the Commodore 64 had constantly maintained its position as a sort of cult machine (cf. Reunanen 2010, 81–83). However, the Commodore 64 had vanished from the mainstream, and we may well argue that not everybody shared the notion of the cult status:

either they had not been among the Commodore users (too young or used something else), or, although they had been Commodore 64 users, they wanted to move on and distance themselves from it (cf. Lindsay 2003).

Perhaps the continuing existence of the C-64 in certain hobbyist circles was a reason why the retrogaming boom in the late 1990s was, at least internationally, focused on arcade and console video games. There were special sites for the Commodore and other home computers and their software as well, but they received more attention a few years later (see e.g. the *Commodore Ring*, established in 1996, https://web.archive.org/web/20000302092125/http://www.ncf.carleton.ca/~ag090/cbmring.htm). One influential factor was the increasing popularity of retro game music, so-called SID music (in the case of the C-64) or chipmusic, produced with original hardware or using hardware and software emulators and extensions for, for example, PC computers (see also Saarikoski 2004, 256–257; Dittbrenner 2007; Carlsson 2010; Polymeropoulou 2014). Another factor that separates computer and video games of the 1980s and early 1990s is branding: home computers did not have as iconic mascots as Nintendo with their Mario, or Sega with their Sonic. Such recognizable characters provide a fertile ground for nostalgization as can be seen, for example, in countless byproducts and fan art. Within computer game cultures, it was rather the early computers themselves that became the strongest cultural icons.

Years 1997 and 1998 meant a turning point, but not just because of the Finnish launch of the retrogame/retrogamer term. It appears that during that time the focus turned to increasingly original or genuine gaming experience instead of the simulation, cloning and copying of old game ideas – even though all of them still continued to exist. Technologically, the turn was linked to the popularization of the Internet, as well as the introduction of new, more efficient computers that enabled better software emulation of old devices. *CCS64*, developed for the PC compatibles by Per Håkan Sundell in 1995, is one of the earliest examples of how emulation was gradually becoming a viable solution for running old home computer software (http://www.ccs64.com/).

Likewise, Finnish magazines introduced emulators in the context of nostalgization and retrogaming, which differed from the earlier articles on emulation (*MB* 1997/01, 80–84; *MB* 1997/04, 106–107). They also described, shortly after their launch, projects such as *MAME* (Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator), which was portrayed in *MikroBitti* as a sweet opener of the coin-op heaven, as well as an "apparent source of retro-orgies" (*MB* 1998/11, 114–116. On MAME, see also *Pelit* 1997/05, 20–22; *Pelit* 1998/11, 77), and visited the then-recently opened Computer Game Museum in Berlin (*MB* 1998/05, 103).

In addition, *MikroBitti* introduced its "12 years ago" column, which republished old game reviews. The first reintroduced game was *Ghostbusters* (1984). (*MB* 1997/02, 86.) Likewise, the *Pelit* magazine established its "5 years ago" column; such articles were a sign of a new era for both game historicization and journalism (*Pelit* 1997/03, 13). Most likely, the introduction of the columns was connected to the rivalry between the journals. Their role models can be found in similar foreign columns, as well as the "50 years ago" or "100 years ago" format common in regular newspapers.

Journalists continued to use terms, such as "classics" and "legends", and they still toned their articles with more or less self-ironical or diminutive statements including words and phrases in the lines of "Cretaceous period of gaming/computing" (*MB* 1997/01, 80–84; *MB* 1997/04, 106–107), "evergreens" (*MB* 1998/04, 88), "prehistory" (*Pelit* 1995/02, 59; *Pelit* 1997/05, 20–22), "moss-bearded" (*Pelit* 1995/08, 24–25; *MB* 1998/05, 100–101; *MB* 1998/06–07, 100), "old geezer", "micro veterans" (*Pelit* 1995/06), and "resurrected" (*Pelit* 1997/05, 65; *MB* 1993/12, 62–63; *MB* 1999/08, 104; *MB* 1999/09, 109). Humor was, in general, a way of increasing the effectiveness of game journalism; in the big picture, ironical self-awareness has been recognized as one common feature of retro (e.g. Guffey 2006, 163).

In addition, all of the above-mentioned terms serve as examples of a history discourse which constructed the idea of a gamer community with some kind of generation gap inside it. It is also easy to note how the recollections were largely gendered: practically every game journalist was male, and they used wording that referred to purportedly manly qualities of game nostalgia. The reminiscing community consisted of mainly men, although there were female players and magazine readers (cf. Jenkins 1998; Nordli 2001; Saarikoski 2004, 167–

186; Saarikoski 2012). Likewise, according to a recent Finnish survey, it still seems that collecting games and devices is a male-dominant hobby (Naskali & Silvast 2014, 62).

Previous history oriented studies have, at least implicitly, emphasized the importance of the *MAME* project, as well as hobbyist community based practices in game preservation, archiving, curating and replaying. Matthew Thomas Payne (2008, 56–57) even argues that *MAME* versions (related projects and communities) "lead to a kind of Classic Ludological Reformation, giving previously atomistic consumers the technological means to become community participants in developing their own emergent historical narrative and collective identity" (see also Whalen & Taylor 2008, 7–8). James Newman (2012, 26–31) is more critical in his tone, and argues that the systematic preservation of game related digital cultural heritage cannot be left to enthusiasts alone. Saarikoski (2001, 235–237) underlines the importance of cross-linked websites, forming so-called rings (e.g. the *Commodore Ring*) focused on nostalgia and retrogaming. It appears that some scholars practically reinvent nostalgia: if the Golden Era of video gaming took place before 1984, then perhaps the late 1990s were the Golden Era of retrogaming. Nowadays, retrogaming, in its commercialized and commodified ready-made form is, ironically put, not what it used to be (Signoret 1975; Davis 1979, 117). The related nostalgia is not restorative but merely reflective – or it is only of the armchair kind: "nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory" (Boym 2001, 38 citing Appadurai 1996, 78. On restorative and reflective forms of game nostalgia, see Garda 2013). Eventually, retrogaming started coming out of its player community closet and turning into more fashionable retro, less about gaming. The transformation took place largely at the beginning of the third millennium.

All in all, the first substantial retrogaming boom of the late 1990s was a hobbyist driven phenomenon, even though some game publishers tried to benefit of it, for example, by re-releasing and remaking their games. Commercial interest followed quite quickly behind the enthusiasts' emerging interest, and the introduction of retrogaming related phenomena. The remaking of games was still popular amongst game hobbyists, although some of them started to focus on emulation. We may perceive emerging institutionalization of game-related cultural heritage practices, as emulator projects, museums, and collections received some attention. The academic world and memory institutions, such as public museums, libraries

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and archives did not yet notice digital games (with a few exceptions), but on the other hand, hobbyist communities somewhat mimicked memory institutional discourses and practices, for example, when calling web sites as "museums" or "archives". In Finland, the *Finnish Game Automata Society* (Suomen Peliautomaattihistoriallinen Seura, SPEL) was founded in Spring 1998, and *Pelikonepeijoonit* – The Arctic Computer & Console Museum, based on the collections of three private collectors, started in 1999 (Heinonen & Reunanen 2009). Already before the founding of such organizations, there had been individual collectors.

Based on these observations, we argue that the concept "retrogaming" became commonplace within the game hobbyist culture during 1998–1999 the latest, because of the influence of game magazines and websites. After that, it took a couple of years more before it diffused to the mainstream.

4. From Subculture to Crossover

During the last ten years retrogaming has transformed from a subcultural and marginal phenomenon to a crossover mainstream subject. The process can be perceived through the institutionalization and commodification, that have raised some controversies and debates amongst hobbyists and professionals. Steven Poole, a British journalist, and the author of the *Trigger Happy* book, claimed in November 2002 that "retrogaming" made him sick due to several reasons:

> "First, the actual word 'retrogaming'. What's that about? I can read a novel by Joseph Conrad published 100 years ago, or a Len Deighton thriller from the 1980s, and I won't be accused of 'retroreading'. I'm not 'retrolistening' if I stick on some Bach or Frank Sinatra or Van Halen. [...] And in social terms, the tragedy of retrogaming having become a 'scene' is that it has attracted the attention of that most annoying of lifeforms, the Shoreditch Twat, the kind of idiotically trendy denizen of the fringes of the City of London who will wear an Atari T-shirt for its 'cool' value but knows nothing about gaming beyond FIFA and Lara Croft." (Poole 2002.)

Poole criticized the inability to separate classic games from trash. The notion referred to a situation where retrogaming did not necessary refer to a person's return to their own earlier

experience. Retrogaming started to become a fashion, which was seen in many forms of popular culture, including 8-bit graphics and game-inspired music videos, clothes and accessories (Suominen 2008). Retro games were commodified and re-packaged by game companies into new forms that widened, but at the same time continued the tradition of game collections, when they incorporated pieces of the past that could largely be considered as bulk. In this respect, companies also redefined the past by selecting releases that were of questionable importance in their original context.

Stephen Brown (2001, 6–9) has distinguished three major categories of retro manifestations. He calls them Repro, Repro Nova, and Repro de Luxe. *Repro* refers to the copying of a product closely as it was, even though its meanings might have changed. *Repro Nova* is a product combining old and new, typically enhancing old with new technologies or styling new with old. *Repro de Luxe* is sort of second order product, neo-nostalgia: it recycles a product which has been nostalgic to begin with. For example, an emulated or converted game, or the re-release of an old game review is an example of Repro. In contrast, a totally transformed version of an old game, like *Tomb Raider Anniversary* (reviewed in *MB* 2007/08, 91), or a newly annotated, republished game review are Repro Nova. So far, we have not seen that many examples of Repro de Luxe products in this context, even though, for example, licensed games might have had nostalgic meanings to those who were already familiar with the original product.

Aside the mainstream retro, which tended to focus on Repro Nova, there were other, marginal user groups that focused on collecting original devices and games, circulating information and creating emulators. *MikroBitti*, for example, regularly published introductions and reviews of fan-made sequels and remakes of classic games, which appeared to become a trend in 2003–2006 (*MB* 2003/06-07, 122; *MB* 2004/03, 113; *MB* 2005/06, 112; *MB* 2005/07, 113; *MB* 2005/10, 116; *MB* 2006/01, 114; *MB* 2006/02, 114). Journalists usually referred to the original games with the term "classic" without using the word retro.

Finnish computer and game magazines reported about marginal, as well as more commercialized and mainstream forms of retrogaming. It seems that "retro" started to refer to a general trend while "classic" referred to individual games. In the context of retro,

journalists reported about new commodities, such as game t-shirts (*MB* 2001/04, 99), a handheld Commodore 64 emulator (*MB* 2003/04, 25), as well as about easy to use plug-and-play retro game products:

> "Fall off your chair, retroman. Atari Classics 10-in-1 joystick provides 10 nostalgic games from the 1980s, and does not require anything else than batteries and a television to work. Why would you need a console when a sole controller is enough? A company called TV Games has come up with the idea of packing classic Atari 2600 games into something that looks like a traditional VCS joystick. […] Real legends and some less known stuff have been selected for the stick. […] We heartily recommend this, mostly to the older gamer generation. It is pointless to offer this to the Playstation generation, except as a joke." (*MB* 2004/04, 100. See also *Pelit* 2003/09, 85.)

They noted the role of Nintendo Wii's *Virtual Console* in the circulation of old games, and also referred to other consoles' similar platforms (*MB* 2004/03, 128; *MB* 2004/04, 100; *MB* 2007/01, 98–101; *MB* 2007/05, 103–105). The Wii with its Virtual Console was called the "all time retro game machine" (*Pelit* 2007/01, 31. See also *Pelit* 2007/02, 70). Scholars, too, have recognized JAKKS Pacific's plug and play devices' and the *Virtual Console's* significance in the popularization of retrogaming (Whalen & Taylor 2008, 1–3; Payne 2008, 58–65). Jones and Thiruvathukal (2012, 108) emphasize that the "retro revolution" in the Wii's case was a "carefully constructed experience" when they discuss how particular old games were selected, re-produced and commercialized.

We argue that later generation game journalists have grown into the reminiscence culture, and adopted the early established ways of representing digital game histories. Recollection had, however, gotten new forms when new consoles, as well as PC computers, became platforms of gaming nostalgia. Not only the 1970s' and 1980s' games were missed, but also the 1990s' ones, and journalists gave hints on how readers should adjust their PC for getting also MS-DOS games to run (e.g. *MB* 2004/04, 86–89; *MB* 2005/11, 84–86).

In other countries some special retro game magazines started to be published, such as *Retro Gamer* in the UK in 2004, and *Retro* in Germany in 2006, but in Finland the market was apparently not big enough, even though online retro magazines such as *Pelikapseli* (Game Capsule) were published for some time (*MB* 2000/11, 113). Instead, Finnish magazines started to follow international examples by publishing retro game columns (*Pelit* magazine, 2003 onwards, also its new rival *Pelaaja* [Gamer], 2002 onwards), supplements (*Pelit* 2010/07; *Pelit* 2010/12), as well as lengthy game history articles. Recollecting became increasingly historically aware and interpretative. For example, *MikroBitti* renewed its "12 years ago" column in 2001, when the magazine started republishing old game reviews, where a journalist (not the original author) assessed the meaning of the game from a contemporary perspective, and typically included some personal recollections of his/her first experiences with the game. The column continued until Autumn 2006, when a reform of the magazine took place, and game content was significantly cut. The last game introduced in the "12 years ago" series was *Superhero League of Hoboken* (1994) (*MB* 2006/09, 91).

In the 2010s, national historicization of digital games has increased in magazines and books, but the Internet has an even bigger role in it than earlier. Blogs, video blogs, discussion forums and online magazines, such as Dome.fi and V2.fi, have taken the leading role in retro game journalism in Finland, partially due to the structural changes in printed magazines and audience behavior. However, the new *Skrolli* magazine (2013–) focusing on computer hobbyist culture, is targeted to a more marginal group of computer enthusiasts, and has frequently published computer and game historical articles. *Skrolli* has also articulated its nostalgic attitude towards game and computer cultures with the printed format of the publication, although it also comes as a PDF version and has a website.

5. Conclusion: Metamorphoses of Retrogaming and Magazines

Nostalgization, historicization and retro have been articulated in magazines in a number of ways: in commercial and freeware game reviews, product presentations, website introductions, news sections, special history or retro oriented articles, and authors' personal columns. Especially columns and full-blown game reviews have also contained personal recollections by journalists.

Leading game journalists have had a major role in constructing historical awareness, supported by articles from other frequent contributors. Jukka O. Kauppinen, Niko Nirvi, Jyrki J. J. Kasvi, Jukka Tapanimäki, and Tapio Berschewsky have been among the key figures in Finland. It seems that members of the first game journalist generation have raised both younger readers and journalists to become members of the digital game heritage community. Together the journalists have built a sense of community with the help of history, even though, at the same time, they might have strived to separate themselves from the younger gamer generations. Positively thinking, the awareness spread by the magazines has most likely had a positive long-term effect on the ongoing game preservation efforts.

The assumption we made at the beginning of the paper proved to be valid. It is possible to distinguish three different phases or waves in relation to gaming nostalgia and retro. The mid-1990s were a turning point when the concept of retrogaming was introduced in Finnish game media, and various forms of sharing and circulating information on old videogames emerged, largely due to the popularization of the Internet. However, already before that there existed a rich culture of nostalgizing and recollection of game ephemera.

During the last 15 years the idea of retrogaming has been commercialized, and it has become a common topic in magazines that dedicate special features to it. There are no major differences between magazines in this respect, although they have stressed different things in their publication policies: the ways of nostalgization, historicization and introducing retrogaming have been mostly similar. However, it is possible to observe the partial tension which has emerged between the concepts "retro game" and "classic game". A retro game can be almost anything old and exciting that is approached with a more or less ironical attitude, whereas a classic is a timeless quality product. This tension should be studied more closely in the future.

Quite obviously, the target of retro-oriented game nostalgia has shifted over time. Even though the early digital games from the 1970s and 1980s are still part of it, there is a constant flux towards newer products becoming retro. In addition, it is possible to follow the life cycles of individual iconic objects of computer and game cultures, such as the Commodore 64 – how it became popular, how its death was expected, how it was forgotten, neglected,

missed, and then remembered again. In other words: how they act as an anchor in nostalgizing, and a reference point for reminiscence.

We have shown that computer hobbyist and game magazines constitute a functional and rich set of source material that provides for historical analyses on the development of retrogaming. The magazines both reflect and build conceptualizations and practices related to retrogaming, and the historicization and nostalgization of digital games.

Acknowledgements

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