(Re)Playing (with) Videogame History

Moving Beyond Retrogaming

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Moving beyond Retrogaming

by

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Resumé

Forfatteren af dette speciale har foretaget en kvalitativ undersøgelse, hvor 9 spillere af gamle spil, også kaldet retrogamere, er blevet interviewet om deres motivationer for at spille gamle spil, hvordan de spiller dem og hvor længe. Ved at indtage et fænomenologisk ståsted, ønsker dette speciale at undersøge, hvordan disse gamle spil manifesterer sig i respondenternes livsverdener og hvad dette indebærer for deres opfattelse og brug af disse gamle spil. Denne undersøgelse er blevet betragtet som frugtbar, da den kan problematisere og videreudvikle den nuværende akademiske diskurs omkring retrogaming, der reducerer alle nutidige interaktioner med gamle spil til en aktivitet, der er motiveret af nostalgi. Ved at analysere de indsamlede interviewdata, argumenteres der i dette speciale for, at der eksisterer flere motivationer til at spille gamle spil, udover nostalgi.

Dette speciale identificerer fire motivationer udover nostalgi. Den første type, kaldet amatørarkæologen, er interesseret i at spille "dårlige" og kuriøse gamle spil, på grund af en form for ironisk nydelse og historisk nysgerrighed. Den anden type, amatørkunsthistorikeren, er interesseret i at spille de gamle spil der er blevet anerkendt som klassikere, for at forstå computerspillets historiske udvikling, hovedsageligt fra et design perspektiv. Den tredje motivation er baseret på en glæde ved gamle spils fysikalitet og holdbarhed. Her identificeres også en historisk interesse for computerspillets teknologiske udvikling. Den sidste motivation udover nostalgi er mere pragmatisk. Her spilles gamle spil ud fra den motivation, at de er mere simple og/eller mere udfordrende end moderne spil.

I diskussionen præsenteres en typologi af spillere, baseret på analysens resultater. Derefter argumenteres der for, at feltet der beskæftiger sig med nutidige interaktioner med gamle spil, er nødt til at udvide sit begrebsapparat, for ikke at sammenblande mange forskelligartede interaktioner under et vagt begreb som retrogaming. I den sammenhæng introducerer forfatteren to nye begreber han selv har defineret, *historical play* og *nostalgic play*.

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Contents

1. Introduction

This thesis will argue that the current academic literature on retrogaming as a practice and the retrogamer as a subject, has been lacking in fully describing the variety of practices and subjects that engage with old games. To clarify, Newman (2004) defines retrogaming as the contemporary playing of games from the 70's, 80's and 90's, both on original hardware and emulators (pp. 164-65). Scholars such as Suominen (2007), Heineman (2014), Lizardi (2014) and Guins (2014) both implicitly and explicitly frame the playing of old games as a strictly nostalgic practice. Their research on the subject usually takes one of two forms: Either the research is strictly theoretical, or it is based on empirical data gathered from online forum posts or old magazines. While this kind of research has a lot of value, its arguments about what makes contemporary players want to play old games is somewhat superficial.

I have conducted semi-structured interviews with 9 Danish, self-ascribed retrogamers, ranging in age from 20 to 40 years. The interviews were about the role of old games in the individual's everyday life, what games they played, for what reasons, for how long, what motivated them to do so and more. As will become clear throughout this thesis, the motivations for playing old games are manifold and provoke a variety of practices. This is not meant to imply that the practices identified by the scholars mentioned above don't exist, rather, the nostalgic use of old games is just one among many.

This thesis will do three things. First, it will investigate the motivations for contemporary players to play and collect old games. It should be noted that this thesis' primary focus will be on the activity of play. Second, it will explore the different ways that players engage with old games and what effect this has on their perception of old games. Third, it will attempt, based on the main findings, to broaden the vocabulary of the field studying contemporary engagements with old games. As will hopefully become clear, the contemporary player of old games is not the unknowing victim of exploitative corporate forces that perpetually rerelease games that, to the player, signify a simpler time (Lizardi, 2014, p. 7). In fact, many of them aren't motivated by nostalgia at all. They play what they consider classics, to understand the history of the medium that they love, both from a technological and design perspective.

Allow me to clarify a few terms: Throughout this thesis, I will refer to the games my respondents are playing, as 'old games'. This is the most fitting term to use, since other recurring terms encountered in the literature are either unprecise or burdened by normative cultural meanings. I will refrain myself from using the term retrogames, since that denotes something entirely different. Garda (2013) conceptualizes of retrogames as contemporary games, employing visual aesthetics and mechanics that stem from or explicitly refer to older games (p. 1). Also, I will not be using the term 'classic' or 'vintage' to refer to old games,

since, as Swalwell (2016) puts it, that term is frequently associated with "vagueness, nostalgia, or hyperbole" (p. 45). The necessary age for a game to be old will not be defined by this thesis. While scholars such as Newman has set the limit to the 90's, this thesis deems those games old, that a respondent perceives as being old. Furthermore, when describing the playing subject that is of interest to this thesis, they will be referred to as players of old games, not retrogamers. This choice has been made, because the concept of retrogaming and retrogamers will be problematized in the discussion of the thesis. With that said, when referring to an established community of players that self-identify as retrogamers, they will be described as a retrogaming community.

The aim of this thesis' qualitative exploration of player's uses and perceptions of old games is to understand old games from the individual players perspective. The uncritical use of terms mentioned above would frame the phenomenon of playing old games from a particular perspective, before data collection has even commenced. Also, this thesis is interested in understanding how old games give players the ability to interact and play with videogame history. Wade & Webber (2016) argue, that to properly understand games from a historical perspective, we need to "understand games as conceptual objects situated at the centre of a number of histories […]" (p. 9). This is the view on games that this thesis will inhabit, by employing a phenomenological perspective, thereby framing them as objects in the world that are shaped by whoever is using them.

To end this introduction, the thesis will briefly be outlined. First, a literature review will take the reader through the necessary literature and perspectives that allow me to conceptualize old games and the players of old games. Afterwards, the review will go through current research into retrogaming, old games as culture heritage and introduce a series of analytical concepts from the field of history didactics.
The methodology section will go through the thesis' methodological considerations, its use of phenomenology, as well as explicate the processes of data collection and analysis.
The analysis section will begin by going through the five most salient motivations for playing old games. Following that, it will be analysed how much the respondents focussed their playing on having an authentic experience with the original hardware. Finally, the data relating to the tension between public and private spheres in relation to playing and collecting old games will be presented.
The thesis' discussion will begin by synthesizing the main findings, by presenting a typology of players and their perceptions of old games. Afterwards, a new concept, *historical play*, that is meant to function as the antithesis to retrogaming, will be sketched out. It is proposed that this concept, together with the concept of *nostalgic play*, could be fruitful in studying contemporary engagements with old games from new perspectives, and to move beyond the notion that all engagements with old games can be encapsulated in

the umbrella term retrogaming. The final part of the discussion will discuss the results and reflect on the methodology.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing the cultural after-life of videogames

This first part of the literature review will conceptualize the group of players that engage with old games. Afterwards, the relevant literature that allows us to consider the videogame from a phenomenological perspective, will be presented.

2.1.1 Situating retrogaming

This thesis focusses on a group of players, that for different reasons enjoy playing and collecting old games. Colloquially, the members of this group are described as retrogamers. To begin with, it's salient to consider how we should conceptualize this group. Crawford (2011) has at length considered what it means to conceptualize videogamer culture in general. He argues, based on Mäyrä (2008), that "video gaming has an identifiable culture, maybe even a style, of its own" (Crawford, 2011, p. 98). Crawford goes on to criticize Mäyrä and other scholars' use of the subculture concept to describe the entirety of gaming culture. Based on the Birmingham School's, and most notably Dick Hebdige's (1979) work on theorizing subcultures, the concept has primarily been identified with groups concerned with social subversion and resistance (Crawford, 2011, p. 99). Crawford suggests that gaming culture should be understood as a neo-tribe (ibid., p. 101). Neo-tribes, as described by Crawford, are identified by "their fluid and often changing nature and membership" (Ibid.). Crawford considers this term more applicable to videogamers, since they move in and out of their gamer identity, based on whether they are currently playing or discussing games or not (ibid.). With that said, I will argue that the culture of retrogaming is in fact a subculture, primarily defined by its resistance against the obsolescence of old videogames.

In his book *Best Before: Videogames, Supersession and Obsolescence*, James Newman (2012) argues that the videogame industry, as well as journalists and marketers, are actively creating and recreating a discourse of obsolescence (p. 9). In this discourse, new console generations are framed as inherently better, because of their novelty and technological advances (ibid.). In 2003, Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witherford and Greig de Peuter observed the same trend in the industry and described it as the "perpetual innovation economy":

> "where the relatively short-lived play value of software and the successive waves
> of hardware innovation in the technology circuit create an incessant upgrade
> dynamic of new commodity releases" (Kline et al., 2003, p. 220)

Newman laments this perpetual innovation for two reasons: First, because old games are framed as junk instead of objects worthy of historical and cultural analysis. Second, because it highlights technological advances as the only legitimate type of innovation in the videogame industry (Newman, 2012, pp. 9-10).

Going back to Crawford and his presentation of Hebdige's subculture concept, Crawford explains that "subcultures engage in a process of 'bricolage', whereby groups draw on existing consumer goods […] but redefine and combine these to develop a distinct style" (Crawford, 2011, p. 99). While the word style feels a bit out of place, since it seems to connote a fashion style, this is still a fitting description of playing and collecting old, obsolete games. It's a subcultural practice that goes against the obsolescence imposed on older consumer goods, in this case videogames and hardware, and appropriate them to a variety of new uses.

2.1.2 Videogame after-lives

Having made clear how the practice of playing old games is framed, I will now move on to present the theory that allows me to consider old games after they have been discarded by the industry, as a thing in the world with many potentials. To this end I will be using phenomenology as an analytical lens to understand the players interactions with old games. Phenomenological philosophy focusses on "people's lived experience" and argues that "[a]n object enters our reality only when we perceive it […]" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 4). Phenomenology privileges the first-person perspective on how phenomena present themselves to a subject in the world, and if we want to understand how this particular thing presents itself, we must include the perspectives of the subjects to whom the thing is presenting itself to (Zahavi, 2014, p. 199). All these processes take place in a subject's *lifeworld*. Zahavi describes the lifeworld as "the world we take for granted in our everyday lives, it is the pre-scientific experienced world which we know and don't question" (ibid., p. 206) The lifeworld is to be understood as the world as it presents itself to us, how we perceive it, and is understood by phenomenologists as "the basis of all philosophy and human sciences research" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 23). Phenomenology's influence on the thesis' methodology will be explained in the corresponding section. For now, let it be clear that the phenomenological perspective is used to approach old games as they are experienced in the world by different subjects, instead of framing them in advance via a particular theory.

One of the most renowned phenomenological philosophers that has theorized technology, is Don Ihde. In the first half of the 20th century, the philosophical writing on technology had been scarce, since philosophers such as Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt, framed technology as a negative influence that could potentially subjugate language (Achterhuis, 2001, p. 5). During the 80's an empirical turn took place, where philosophers of technology began to research the social forces that shaped the development and uses of technology (Ibid., p. 6). Instead of presupposing that a given technology's purpose is what the creator has intended, it has several potential purposes that are defined and constantly renegotiated by the actors using the technology. As presented by Verbeek, Ihde names this inherent ambiguity the *multistability* of technology, arguing that technologies are what they are, based on their use (Verbeek, 2001, p. 134).

In his book, *Game After: A Cultural Study of Video Game Afterlife*, Raiford Guins (2014) uses Ihde's perspective to investigate "the historical life cycles of video games and the diverse ways we experience them today" (p. 4). He goes on to explicate that: "Things or objects […] take on numerous lives as they undergo recontextualization across their careers and biographies" (Ibid., p. 9). The mission statement of his book could very well be used to describe this thesis as well. While he is mainly interested in following the technology to its many different after-life destinations, i.e. an arcade-machine into repairs or Atari cartridges being dug out of a hole in New Mexico, this thesis is more interested in investigating the ways that old games manifest themselves in the lifeworld of the average player and how they are used. I am not undertaking the massive task of tracing the entire life trajectory of a given videogame. Where Guins' and my intentions do align, is in the new perspective this approach may elicit on the construction of videogame histories, allowing for a more critical view of the past, instead of being marred by both explicit and implicit nostalgia (ibid., p. 3). As Swalwell (2007) highlights, it's problematic that the discourse surrounding old videogames is dominated by nostalgia, since she suspects there are more reasons for contemporary players wanting to engage with old games (p. 257).

Another book this thesis has found profound inspiration from, is Charles Acland's *Residual Media* (2007). In his introduction, Acland conceptualizes of residual media as the study of formerly discarded materials, which remain in use in the world as part of a "'living dead' culture" (Acland, 2007, p. xx). This study is placed at the intersection between:

> "media and cultural history, bringing together studies of technology and cultural
> practice. It contributes a corrective to contemporary scholarship's fetishization of

the 'new'."

(Acland, 2007, p. xix)

I have chosen to include this theoretical perspective, because it acknowledges the "material entwinement of the old and the new" which Acland argues will elicit "a particular experience and understanding of the passing of time and historical change" (ibid., p. xvii). As will become clear, while the old games maintain their function as a game to be played, they can also provoke reflection on subjects such as the technological history of videogames, developer biographies and game design innovations. While Guins primarily researches recontextualizations of the past, Acland's perspective more explicitly acknowledges the existential nature of engaging with discarded materials, in this case old games. This meshes very well with my phenomenological perspective and use of interviewing as my data collection method, which elicits what Acland calls a "thick description" of contexts, which is instrumental in understanding how a given residual medium is used by an individual (Ibid., p. xxii).

2.2 Retrogaming, nostalgia and cultural heritage

This part of the literature review will present how old games and the practice of playing them, has been framed differently by researchers focusing on, respectively, retrogaming and cultural heritage.

2.2.1 Retrogaming framed as juvenile & nostalgic

Heineman (2014) explores how online retrogaming communities are rhetorically constructing videogame history. Using methods from public memory scholarship, he "examine[s] how gamers use digital tools and contexts to communicate a particular vision of gaming history in and against one created by the game industry" (Heineman, 2014, p. 6). While his article presents some interesting perspectives, it reads more like an introduction to how public memory studies could be used in a game studies context, than an in-depth analysis of how these histories are constructed. The quotes that he highlights certainly illustrates his point about fans having an oppositional relationship to publisher priorities (Ibid., pp. 10-11). However, he goes on to connect the practice of retrogaming exclusively with older players (ibid., pp. 6-7). After having asserted that "there have [...] been a number of studies that, collectively, offer a strong contextual and theoretical foundation for studying retrogaming culture", he goes on to list different qualitative studies of players over the age of 30 (ibid., pp. 6-7). It seems the thought that younger players would have any interest in playing old games is not worth considering. This blind spot is possibly also a result of Heineman's exclusive focus on online forums. Heineman notes that the retrogamers on these forums "respond

viscerally to any official challenges to their own vernacular views of gaming history" (Ibid., p. 16). This does not seem like a space that welcomes younger enthusiasts. Heineman concludes his paper by suggesting that nostalgia is a primary reason for the "recent retrogaming boom" (ibid., p. 16). Likewise, Suominen (2007) has theorized that the rise of retrogaming in digital culture at large, is a consequence of earlier generations of gamers growing older, framing it as a primarily nostalgic, juvenile practice (pp. 4-5). Ryan Lizardi (2014) most critically frames the playing of old games as a nostalgic practice that negates any reflexive, critical view of history (p. 9). Lizardi writes that:

> "The video game remake and port becomes just another easy draw, moving a
> normal nostalgia for experiences from childhood toward a repetition compulsion
> that veers towards the melancholic. It fixes contemporary media consumers
> before their own Mirror of Erised, transfixing them into a subject that is always
> looking backwards to a past that never existed at the expense of their
> engagement with today or tomorrow" (Lizardi, 2014, p. 82)

His point that retrogaming is characterized by its repetitiveness signifies that he, like Heineman and Suominen, conceptualize retrogaming as a practice only being undertaken by older players that want to replay games from their past.

2.2.2 Boym's restorative and reflective nostalgia

The preceding segment has highlighted how current research on retrogaming has framed it as a practice that is intrinsically nostalgic, based on the assumption that all retrogamers are at least 30 years old. Besides this normative assumption, possibly a consequence of the researchers' own age, the articles presented employ a conceptualization of nostalgia, that only focusses on the yearning for an unobtainable past (Suominen, 2007, p. 5; Heineman, 2014, p. 14; Lizardi, 2014, p. 7). Svetlana Boym's (2008) nostalgia concept however, highlights nostalgia's potential to provoke different reactions towards the past, present and future, based on her distinction between *restorative* and *reflective* nostalgia (p. 13). These concepts will briefly be presented, since they will be utilized later in the thesis. Boym describes restorative nostalgia as a type of nostalgia that stresses the longing towards a home, attempting "a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home" (Ibid., p. 13). This is essentially the same kind of nostalgia concept utilized by Lizardi, Heineman and Suominen, which frames the retrogamer as an ahistorical subject that thoroughly romanticizes the past and wants to return to a simpler time. Boym goes on to explicate that "[r]estorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition" (Ibid., p. 13). On the other hand, reflective nostalgia focusses its energy on the longing itself, taking the nostalgic experience as a

starting point for further reflection on, broadly speaking, "history and the passage of time" (ibid., p. 15). The past is not something to be reconstructed but used as a resource to reflect on life and its brevity. Most importantly, Boym argues that restorative and reflective nostalgia may revolve around the same object (ibid.). Boym's concepts will be used later in the thesis, to explain how a player's nostalgia may manifest itself in a variety of ways.

2.2.3 Old games as cultural heritage

Much of the research framing old games as cultural heritage focusses on processes and problems of videogame preservation (Barwick et al. 2011; Newman, 2009; Guttenbrunner et al., 2010; Thompson, Rugill & McAllister, 2009). While this type of research is of colossal importance and deserves to be prioritized, the unavoidable consequence is that less research focusses on how the cultural heritage of games is shaped and negotiated in the everyday lives of players, outside of archives and museums. Suominen & Sivula (2013) are some of the few scholars that focus on how videogames manifest themselves as cultural heritage. They make a distinction between external and internal cultural heritage, with the latter referring to "games cultures' own understanding about what in gaming-related practices is historically important and worth preserving" (p. 5) It is this type of cultural heritage that is of interest for this thesis. Suominen & Sivula highlight the process of *heritageization*, "an interpretative activity in which historical value is added to an intangible or tangible artifact", as an activity of special interest for people researching the cultural heritage of games (ibid., p. 2). Suominen & Sivula note that:

> "Retrogaming research has so far focused mainly on discussion of the
> phenomenon in general […]. Applied case studies on retrogaming would be able
> to go even further." (Suominen & Sivula, 2013, p. 13).

This highlights why the practice of playing old games is being researched in the manner this thesis has set out to do, by interviewing the players of old games themselves. To understand how the history of videogames manifests itself in the lives of players, as well as how it is being processed into cultural heritage, we need more than the perspectives of professional archivists and curators. The only interaction thus far between videogame history researchers and non-researchers, has mainly been for preservation purposes, where materials from amateur historians have become part of official museum exhibits (Stuckey et al., 2015). This still leaves the ordinary player's perspectives on old games, their values and uses unresearched. A recent book, *Fans and Videogames: Histories, Fandom, Archives* (2017), that collects papers on player's interacting with videogame history, focusses exclusively on productive fans that, in a variety of ways contribute to game history (Swalwell et al., 2017, p. 3). While this is an important book and

a valuable contribution to an understudied field within game studies, it only restates the fact that ordinary players of old games, that don't make their presence known publicly, haven't been represented in the current research.

2.3 History didactics

This part of the literature review will present the field of history didactics. Following that, a group of crucial concepts will be introduced. Finally, memory studies will be presented and its connection with and differences from history didactics will be explained.

2.3.1 The presence of the past

History didactics is a field within the larger field of history, that is interested in researching how people encounter and engage with history outside of a formal educational context (Karlsson, 2008, p. 32; Adriaanssen & Grever, 2017, p. 74). This view of history is fundamentally existential, since it focusses on how history manifests itself in the everyday life of individuals. History is that which is past, but it is also forever present around us, and we as individuals shape and use history as part of our everyday lives (Karlsson, 2008, pp. 25-26). It negates any inclination that we at some point will get toward some objective truth about History (Ibid., p. 28). Instead, the past is framed as a resource that we use in our everyday life. History didactics has been deemed an interesting analytical perspective for this thesis, because it allows the thesis to frame the interaction between contemporary player and old game in a more nuanced way. Instead of presupposing that it's a nostalgic activity, it may be viewed as a complex interaction between the past, present and future. This study of the everyday presence of the past is based on a triad of concepts: *historical culture*, *historical consciousness* and *history-use*, which will be presented presently. Where it is applicable, examples from game studies using the concepts will be presented.

2.3.2 Historical culture

Historical culture can broadly be defined as the ways that a group relates to the past (Adriaanssen & Grever, 2017, p. 73). Bøe & Knutsen (2016) write that "historical culture is expressed in institutions, such as museums, archives and libraries and in private life in the ways that we think and act." (p. 16). It's a very broad concept that encapsulates both the members of the historical culture, references to the past in the form of "artifacts, rituals, customs, and narratives", as well as the schools, cultural institutions and media that distribute these references to the past (Nordgren, 2016, p. 3). Thus, a historical culture is constituted in the interplay between "popular and academic culture, material and immaterial articulations" (Adriaanssen & Grever, 2017, p. 75). It is the manifestation of a group's current engagement with the past,

which provokes a "persistent reconstruction and construction of historical conceptions" (Jeismann, 1977, p. 12 in Adriaanssen & Grever, 2017, p. 74). For example, Suominen & Sivula's (2016) analysis of how Finland's first videogame was reconstructed as heritage in the interactions between professional and amateur game historians, illustrates how a historical culture is negotiated between official and unofficial channels. As time passes and cultural perceptions shift, what was originally perceived as the product of a juvenile pastime, becomes national cultural heritage.

2.3.3 Historical consciousness

Nordgren defines historical consciousness as "the process by which we as individuals, emotively and cognitively, understand the relations between past, present and future" (2016, p. 3). Historical consciousness can be understood as the personal conceptions of history that don't necessarily become part of the surrounding historical culture, but which are influenced by it (Adriaanssen & Grever, 2017, p. 75). Due to the intensely personal nature of individual historical consciousness, empirical research on the subject is scarce (Karlsson, 2008, p. 50). Most research on historical consciousness has either been theoretical (Rüsen, 2004) or has focused on analysing the types of historical consciousnesses implicit in texts (Karlsson, 2008, p. 51). This thesis will through interviewing gain a deeper understanding of the player's historical consciousness. This thesis will present data that suggests, that these players do in fact possess a historical consciousness, that informs not only what they play, but also how they play.

2.3.4 History-use

History-use can be defined as the concrete actions that manifest itself within a certain historical culture (Bøe & Knutsen, 2016, p. 16). They are the concrete actions and articulations that are simultaneously shaped by a historical culture and shaping it (Nordgren, 2016, p. 9). Furthermore, history-use can be understood as an expression of a particular historical consciousness (ibid, p. 6). Within society at large, these uses of history can manifest itself in several ways. For example, historians interpret the past scientifically to produce knowledge, the public uses the past existentially to remember and orient themselves in history, whereas companies may use the past for marketing purposes (Bøe & Knutsen, 2016, p. 18; Karlsson, 2008, p. 59). History didactic scholars have prominently used the concept of history-use to analyse how governmental and cultural institutions have tried to construct notions of community, both nationally and locally (Bøe & Knutsen, 2016, p. 93). In a game studies context, Suominen (2012) has used the concept to critically engage with Nintendo and Sega's processes of rereleasing old consoles in new, more user-friendly versions (p. 3). Suominen's analysis is innovative in the way that it frames the playing of old games as a practice performed by a certain historical culture, however, his analysis is limited by only focusing on the history-use of the game companies themselves. While he acknowledges that the practice of

playing old games is an "everyday use of history" he describes the activity as ""revisits" and "replays" of history" (ibid., p. 2). This makes it seem as if the game companies are the only influencers on the historical culture. This thesis will show how individual members of the retrogaming community use the history of games, manifested in old hardware and software, to do more than just revisit the games they played in the past.

2.3.5 Canon and archive

The final concepts to be introduced, *canon* and *archive*, were developed in the field of cultural memory studies by Aleida Assmann (2008). The concepts are used to describe how the past is remembered in a given historical culture, either actively or passively (Assmann, 2008, p. 98). The canon consists of those artefacts that are being actively remembered by a culture and that are kept alive in the present (ibid., p. 99). A prominent example of this can be found in the form of monuments (ibid.). Relating this to videogames, I would argue that Sega and Nintendo's rereleases of old games and consoles can be considered an example of parts of game history being canonized. This canonization takes place at the intersection between fans, developers and publishers. The archive refers to all the objects and artefacts that, for one reason or another, have "fall[en] out of the frames of attention, valuation and use" (ibid., p. 98). Having become decontextualized from their originally intended meaning they become "open to new contexts and lend themselves to new interpretations" (ibid., p. 99). In time, these passively archived artefacts can enter "a new context which gives them the chance of a second life" (ibid., p. 103). A prominent example of this can be found in the case of the game *E.T.* (Atari, 1982) for the Atari 2600 console. E.T. was marketed as a new classic by Atari, hated by the public and promptly forgotten, but now it has acquired the status of a memorialized object, precisely because of its many imperfections and troubled history (Guins, 2009). To my knowledge, the canon and archive concepts have not been used in the context of game studies before, but it will be feature in the coming analysis, to explain how some players of old games engage with the history of games from two very different starting points.

2.3.6 Memory studies and the influence of Maurice Halbwachs

Before moving on, it needs to be made clear how a field similar to history didactics has manifested itself, in the form of memory studies. Memory studies is, according to Jay Winter (2010), the study of how the past is performed by individuals and groups and how these performances shape collective notions about the past that is being referenced (p. 11). The concept of collective memory was originally developed by the French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the mid-20th century, and was meant to explicate how memory is socially constructed, i.e. that an individual is only able to remember in context of social

groupings, that have collectively created a certain image of the past (Warring, 2010, p. 14). As Warring makes clear in her introduction to the field: "Due to the interdisciplinary nature of memory studies, a multitude of concepts exist, whose internal relations aren't easily explicated, and their numbers are so large that only a selection can be mentioned here" (p. 6). She goes on to explicate that concepts from memory studies are prominently used by historians themselves, complicating things further (ibid.). Trying to understand the conceptual distinction between history and memory, Warring traces it back to Halbwachs' original writings on collective memory, where Halbwachs himself makes a sharp distinction between history and memory, defining the former as authoritative and rational, and the latter as diffuse and affective (ibid., p. 30). This way of perceiving history is also apparent in the writings of contemporary memory scholars, that define history in the same way that Halbwachs does (Winter, 2010, p. 12; Wertsch & Roediger, 2008, p. 320). It's of utmost importance to note, that Halbwachs' distinction made sense in his own time, when historiography, performed by trained academics, was considered the only legitimate way to produce history. However, as the field of history didactics shows, a significant cultural turn took place in the 1970's (Adriaanssen & Grever, 2017, p. 76; Karlsson, 2008, pp. 32-33). As this section has hopefully elucidated, history didactics and memory studies may essentially study the same thing; contemporary manifestations of the past. However, I have chosen to mostly rely on concepts from history didactics, since these concepts are more internally coherent and less numerous. Also, while parts of memory studies do focus on individual memory, its main focus is on communities of memory. History-use is, in the context of this thesis, a more usable concept to describe the individual player's interactions with old games. With that said, the application of concepts from history didactics is far from unproblematic, which will be discussed more thoroughly later in the thesis. For now, I am using the theoretical backdrop of history didactics to frame the community of players engaging with old games as a historical culture, that is constituted by many different individuals that are actively engaged with videogame history.

3. Methodology

This part of the thesis will present the overall research design, as well as discuss and argue for why the interview method has been chosen. Finally, it will consider the ethical aspects of interviewing and describe the processes of sampling, recruiting, data collection and analysis.

3.1 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis is to be understood as "the target of the study or more specifically, what is the basic data type being studied." (Lankoski & Björk, 2015, p. 4) For this thesis, the unit of analysis is the qualitative interview data produced by conducting semi-structured interviews with 9 Danish, self-ascribed retrogamers. By analysing these data, I hope to gain insight into their motivations for playing old games, and what this implies about their perceptions and uses of these old games.

3.2 Phenomenological psychology

Before moving on, it's time to clarify how the phenomenological foundation of the thesis has had an influence on the research design. Darren Langdridge's book *Phenomenological psychology: Theory, Research and Method* (2007) has been an invaluable resource to understand what the phenomenological approach entails. As has already been established, the phenomenological perspective resists the subject-object dualism and argues that "an object enters our reality only when we perceive it" and that "our perception varies according to the context" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 4). The phenomenological approach is interested in understanding "meaning and the way in which meaning arises in experience" and is less concerned with issues of causality (ibid., p. 9). Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the researcher uses methods that "elicit rich descriptions of concrete experiences and/or narratives of experience" (ibid., p. 5). In the old tradition of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, the inventor of the phenomenological method, argued that, based on one experience, phenomenologists should be able to identify the "universal structure(s) (essence(s)) underlying the experience" (ibid, p. 20). This notion of universal essences has been problematized later, by existentialist phenomenologists such as Martin Heidegger, that call for the need to understand our own existence in its historical and cultural context (ibid, p. 27). As has already been established in the literature review, the phenomenological perspective is fundamental for my understanding of old games as something in the world with many potentials. The methodology of phenomenological psychology helps me to reflect upon and understand how I should approach my data collection method. This entails me being aware that I, the researcher, am co-constructing the topic I am investigating (ibid., p. 9). This means I must constantly reflect on my own practice of conducting the study

and accept that I cannot be a "detached observer in search of some objective truth" (ibid, p. 59). More importantly, what the phenomenological approach clarifies, is that the focus of my investigation is not on the person experiencing something, but on the experience itself (ibid, p. 16). To be clear, this thesis is not constructing an ethnography of players of old games. If that where the case my data collection would probably consist of me participating in their daily lives and informally interviewing them (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). Instead, I am trying to understand how the playing of old games is experienced, and how old games manifest themselves in the lifeworlds of my respondents, in order to potentially describe them as something more than nostalgic objects. Through interviewing, I collect "descriptions of the interviewee's lifeworld, with the intention of interpreting the meaning of the phenomena described" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 45). In the next part, I will describe in more depth why the interview method was deemed the most useful and why the semi-structured approach was taken.

3.3 Interviewing

The motivations to choose the interview method have been many. First, due to the practicalities surrounding the thesis and the time to produce it, interviewing was deemed the method most likely to produce the most usable qualitative data in the least amount of time. I considered doing a *focus group interview*, which entails gathering a group of respondents and having the interviewer direct the flow of conversation through a series of questions (Halkier, 2014, p. 9). According to Lindlof & Taylor (2011), focus groups exploit the *group effect*, referring to the cascading effect that one respondent's utterance may have on another respondent, thus creating large amounts of data (p. 183). However, a potential downside of focus groups is the phenomenon of *group think*, where a heterogenous group of respondents become cautious in their utterances, either for fear of standing out or offending another respondent (ibid, p. 186). This is one of the reasons why the focus group interview was not selected as a data collection method. I knew that some of my questions would be of a personal nature, to interrogate the relationship between personal nostalgia and appreciation of old games in general. In a focus group, respondents may not be comfortable recounting childhood memories in such an open forum. From a more practical standpoint, I found it untenable to conduct a focus group interview on my own, since it's most commonly performed by groups consisting of at least 2 members (Halkier, 2014, p. 38).

I will now move on to clarify why the semi-structured interview type was chosen. Bernard (2006) distinguishes between four types of interviewing, based on the amount of control the type gives the interviewer in controlling the flow of conversation (p. 210). At one end of the spectrum is *informal* interviewing, where the researcher has no control over the interview context (ibid, p. 211). On the other end, *structured* interviewing is controlled by a set interview schedule, making the interaction between

interviewer and interviewee that of filling out a questionnaire orally (ibid, p. 212). Between these two types of interviewing, there is a type that incorporates the best of both worlds. The semi-structured interview allows for the interviewee to express themselves freely, while the interviewer maintains control of the interview situation through an interview guide (Langdridge, 2007, p. 65). Due to this type of interviewing's strength in maintaining both consistency and flexibility, the semi-structured interview is the one most frequently used by phenomenological researchers (ibid.). As Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) put it, this type of interview is in the most literal sense an "inter view", "where knowledge is constructed in the interactions between interviewer and interviewee" (p. 18). It is considered the most useful type of interview in situations where the researcher only has time to conduct one interview with a respondent (Bernard, 2006, p. 212). Also, in-depth interviewing has been described by game studies scholars as an excellent way of collecting information "about gamers' preferences, opinions, experiences, and more" (Cote & Raz, 2015, p. 93).

3.4 The interview guide

In the semi-structured interview, the purpose of the interview guide is not to rigidly run through a series of questions in a given order, instead it consists of a "series of questions and prompts designed to elicit the maximum possible information" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 65). In contrast to a schedule, a guide gives the researcher the freedom to "drop some questions from the list, or add optional questions, or improvise still others" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 200). In working on my own interview guide (Appendix 1), I have heavily made use of nondirective questions, which is "a type of question that allows the subject freedom to define the scope and terms of his or her answer" (ibid., p. 202). My third question, "What do retrogames mean to you?", is meant to nudge the respondent into a reflective mode about their relation to old games. This is what researchers call a *grand tour question* (Bernard, 2006, p. 220; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 202). Based on the respondent, I would use the term 'old games' instead of 'retrogames'. To get around any normative notions that the term retrogaming and retrogames might elicit, I made it clear before interviewing began, that my use of the term simply referred to the playing of old games. By listening to how they frame their relation to old games early on, I was able to determine what follow-up questions would be suitable and how deeply I needed to probe the respondent on later questions, such as "Are you interested in the history of videogames?". A probe is to be understood as a stimulus the interviewer produces, that provokes the respondent to talk more (Bernard, 2006, p. 217). These probes come in many forms, they can be silence, echoing the respondent's last sentence, uttering 'uh-huh' and much more (ibid, pp. 218-220). As Kvale & Brinkmann highlight, "The interviewers ability to sense what an answer immediately means, as well as what potential meanings it points towards, is essential" (2009, p. 155).

3.5 Ethics

As with any research endeavour, a range of ethical problems need to be considered and addressed. According to Kvale & Brinkmann, this not only relates to the interview context, but to the entire process of doing research, from early thematization to publishing (2009, p. 81). The most fundamental responsibility of the researcher is to protect their informants, before, during and after interviewing (Cote & Raz, 2015, p. 97). This relates both to keeping the respondents' identities safe and anonymous, as well as to make sure that the interview situation doesn't unsettle or disturb the respondent (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 91-92). The first point, guaranteeing anonymity, is upheld by this thesis, since all respondents appear in the text under pseudonyms. This was made clear to all respondents before interviewing began. The second point, not unsettling the respondent, was not as much of an issue. Interviewing self-ascribed retrogamers about their favourite pastime was a joyful experience for many of them, since most of them never had the chance to talk about the subject in such depth before. With that said, Boellstorff et al. (2012) point out the "asymmetrical power relations and imbalance of benefit between investigator and investigated" (p. 129). With that in mind, I have made sure to present myself in a somewhat restrained manner in all interactions with my respondents, since it would be unethical of me to present myself as a "fellow gamer" to gain their trust, when I am in fact most interested in gathering data from them.

3.6 Sampling & recruiting

For this study, the *sampling* unit of primary interest are people, since I am most interested in understanding their perspectives on a particular phenomenon (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 110). Since I am investigating the phenomenon of playing old games, I have used *purposive sampling* to find respondents (Langdridge, 2007 p. 58). This means that I have searched for respondents "who share the experience at the heart of the investigation" (ibid, p. 58). The shared experience of interest to this thesis is, obviously, the playing of old games. Due to the qualitative nature of the thesis and the amount of time available to produce it, between 5 and 10 respondents were deemed an appropriate amount. This number also fits well with the phenomenological approach, where "there will be little attempt to generalize beyond this particular sample" (ibid, p. 58). Instead, the focus of this study is to "develop detailed descriptions of the experience of a small number of people who all share that experience" (ibid, p. 58).

Recruitment relied exclusively on reaching out to online communities. In this case, it involved two Facebook groups, one was as a marketplace for buying and selling old games and hardware, the other a discussion-based group that appreciated old games in many different forms. Combined, the two groups had over 16.000 members. I wrote a long post that asked for persons interested in being interviewed for about 2

hours about their playing habits and supplied some general information about times and locations for the interviews. It was made clear in the post that the interview could be conducted in either the respondent's homes, or at the IT-University of Copenhagen. This choice was included so that potential respondents that felt more comfortable being interviewed in a well-known environment, weren't discouraged from responding. This resulted in 22 interested responses. Those interested received a follow-up email, where they were asked to fill out information about their age, city of residence, what platforms they played old games on, as well as what old games they had played. During this process, a lot of potential respondents dropped out, by not replying to the follow-up email or any further communications on my part. Due to further cancellations I ended up with 8 respondents. These respondents were chosen based on their availability, as well as their heterogeneous responses to the questions in the follow-up e-mail. Not only did they vary markedly in age, but also in their preferences for different types of games and consoles. I decided to include two respondents from Jutland, even though it meant that these interviews needed to be conducted via Skype and telephone. To get as close as possible to 10, I chose to include the interview data produced by a test interview, that I had conducted three months prior, before the work on the thesis began in earnest. This test interview was conducted to test the basic assumptions I had about the playing of old games, the interview guide, as well as the viability of the whole research endeavour. Due to the fact that the interview guide had only been changed marginally after the test interview, I deemed it acceptable to include the test interview data. This resulted in me having a total of 9 respondents.

3.6.1 The respondents

This short part will briefly attempt to describe how diverse my respondents are. As the literature review has shown, the subject of the retrogamer has been constructed rather simply, as a male in his 30's with a juvenile mindset. My small sample of 9 goes to show that this is nothing more than a stereotype. My respondents range in age from 20 to 40, the youngest being a bachelor student in Religious Studies with a proclivity for Final Fantasy games, the oldest being a father of 6 who enjoys modifying Sega Dreamcast consoles. But even those that are similar in age don't resemble each other in the slightest. One respondent, aged 34, is a Twin Galaxies world record holder and published author while another, aged 33, has a master's degree in Geography and is a member of several punk bands. One is a 24-year old tax consultant that plays Sonic the Hedgehog on his smartphone, but only for practical reasons, another a 39-year old sound engineer who has bleached his Commodore 64 to make it look like it did in his childhood. While they are all connected by their passion for old games, that is in fact the only way they resemble each other.

3.7 Data collection

This part will briefly describe the practicalities surrounding the actual conduction of the interviews. 5 of the 9 interviews were conducted face-to-face at the IT-University of Copenhagen, in a secluded meeting room. Before asking the first question in the guide, the respondent was briefed on the nature of the investigation and it was explicated that they would be presented anonymously in the final report. Finally, I asked for their consent to having the interview audio recorded. During the interview, I used the printed-out interview guide as a notepad, where I continuously wrote keywords. While these keywords helped me to remember what the respondent had said later in the interview, some keywords were fitted with a question mark at the end, signifying that this subject was something that I needed to probe further. These extra questions could in turn produce new extra questions, which were essential for me to gain a deeper understanding of the respondent's experiences. The average length of an interview was about 110 minutes. Interviews were later transcribed with a level of detail in accordance with what Langdridge deems appropriate for a phenomenological study. He writes that phenomenological psychology works with a "relatively simple level of transcription", compared to a field like linguistics (Langdridge, 2007, p. 73). The transcription has focussed on transcribing the audio recordings ad verbatim, but not detailed the lengths of pauses or intonation. The final interview transcripts (Appendix 2) are about 200 pages long and underwent thorough coding.

3.8 Data Analysis

The process of coding the data has been heavily informed by the method of *interpretative phenomenological analysis*, where the main focus is to understand how "people perceive an experience, or rather what any particular experience means for them: a focus on the lifeworld" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 107). This analysis methodology is based on reading and re-reading of the transcripts, where statements in interviews are condensed into individual codes, that in time may reveal certain themes in the data, that inform new interpretations of the data (ibid, pp. 110-111). My own coding and analysis worked in the following way. While interviewing, I noticed certain recurrent themes across my respondents. When my transcription process was over, I began coding my data based on these themes I had identified. I created a separate Word document for each of my themes. During my reading of the transcripts, whenever I identified a statement that fit a theme, I would copy and paste that statement into the document. This process also produced new themes. In the new document, I would condense the statement into a simple sentence. This sentence was the code. If a statement resonated with more than one theme, I would add a code signifying what other themes it connected with. These coded transcripts were reread several times, in order to refine the codes or to move a statement from one theme to another.

4. Analysis

This part will present the analysis of the collected data and the findings of the thesis. First, the motivations for playing old games will be presented. Next, the analysis will present to what degree the respondents privilege having an 'authentic' experience. Finally, data surrounding the interactions between public and private spheres in the so-called retrogaming community will be presented.

4.1 Motivations for playing old games

This part of the analysis will present the five most salient motivations for playing old games, that I have been able to unearth from the data. The motivations are not being presented in a prioritized order. As was explicated in the methodology section, when working phenomenologically, I am co-constructing my subject and am therefore unable to get toward some objective truth about the practice of playing old games. Had someone other than myself analysed the data, they would perhaps have identified a completely different set of motivations. As a phenomenon occurring within a culture across time, the following motivations could be outdated within the next few years. Please note that the following quotes have been translated from the original Danish transcripts. The number at the end of each quote citation refers back to a number in the Danish transcripts, if the reader of this thesis feels any need to read the original, Danish quotes.

4.1.1 Nostalgia

Nostalgia is the one motivation for playing old games that all 9 respondents share. I will begin this part of the analysis by describing examples of restorative nostalgia. For some of my respondents, the nostalgia of playing a childhood game seems to almost transport them back in time and space. When asked about why he still plays *Bart vs. The Space Mutants* (Acclaim, 1991), Charlie answers:

> "Well it's just uh… uh… to relive sitting in that small living room with the old
> striped carpet and looking out at the apple tree while I try to progress further
> than the first fucking stage." (Charlie, age 34, A16)

Charlie's sensuous description of an earlier time is something different than what Hans describes. He experiences a return to a simpler, better time. When asked to explicate what kind of memories he connects with the Nintendo Entertainment System, he answers:

> "It's just good memories like aahh we're all cozy and people didn't quarrel with
> each other and you didn't think about bills and it was about now we're having fun

with Lego and Nintendo. […] That's nice compared to today where if you do this, something is also going to happen sometime in the future." (Hans, age 21, A16)

While both are examples of restorative nostalgia, the latter quote is the one closest to Boym's conception, since it's about the impossible return to a simpler time and place. Charlie's quote isn't ideological, it describes the pleasures of the more detailed memory recall that is possible when playing old, nostalgic games. As Ulrik explains, when asked if he recalls memories when playing:

"[…] oh yeah, these are the kinds of memories I can almost remember picture perfectly, if you can say that. Point out what happened that afternoon when we played this, when I played this for the first time. […] I can generally remember those things, for a handful of games that is, those that made an impression." (Ulrik, age 24, A11)

In this context, the old game functions as a nostalgic object that gives the player an experience of accessing and remembering the past. However, the act of playing isn't a necessary component. For Bent, the old Playstation 1 CD cases elicit nostalgia:

"It's something I remember from back when you could buy, I didn't have it myself back then, but now I do, it gives that feeling of being a child in the 90's. […] It's nostalgic in the way that I saw Playstation 1 games at my friends." (Bent, age 26, A40-41)

For Christian, who still plays on his old Commodore 64, certain things beside games and hardware are needed:

"[…] It [the Commodore 64] has to be on the floor and there needs to be chips on the table and cola and then we're off with the screwdriver and tape recorder and whatever else." (Christian, age 39, A17)

Here the restorative nostalgic experience is constructed not just by the presence of old games and hardware, but also by certain spatial configurations and props that reestablish an earlier context.

Next, it will be presented how the nostalgic engagement with old games may also be in the reflective mode. Here, the purpose of engaging with old games isn't to try and reconnect with a certain vision of the past, but to reflect on the experiences themselves.

For Vincent, it's a pleasurable nostalgic experience to return to his childhood games, to see them from new perspectives:

> "[…] [T]here is a nostalgia in experiencing something you've experienced before
> with a new perspective, to look at something you've looked at before and couldn't
> understand how you could make it, but now you're just oh this is how you do it.
> You start recognizing patterns, seeing how it all fits together, instead of just
> pressing x all the time and hoping it goes well." (Vincent, age 20, A13)

For Vincent, replaying *Sonic Heroes* (Sega, 2003) isn't about reconnecting with a concrete memory, but to actively reflect on his more developed cognitive and gameplaying skills. This in turn allows him to experience a host of new pleasures, different from the ones when he initially played it. The act of playing still gives him access to the past in some form, but it is used to reflect on personal development. This development can also relate to social and psychological developments. When asked about whether he reflects on the past when playing games from his childhood, Vincent answers:

> "Well yes partly. I don't know if I think about it when I'm sitting there. But I think I
> do because I've developed a lot personally. I was very lonely in my childhood, so I
> played a lot of videogames and therefore it's fun to go back and be a much more
> socially active person, have a lot of social connections and doing a lot of things
> and feel how I felt back then." (Vincent, age 20, A77)

Here the playing of old games from his childhood has a cathartic, therapeutic effect, because they allow Vincent to access an earlier part in his life. However, it isn't framed as a haven towards which he feels a longing. It stands as a point in time that he uses to reflect on himself. Another effect nostalgia has, is its potential to engender a general interest in the history of videogames. In the following quote, Thomas explains how his initial nostalgia developed into something more than that:

> "Of course it began with me… having nostalgia for Nintendo and that's probably
> where it started quietly and became more than just Nintendo and consoles…
> including videogames and computer games from the old days. It has then evolved
> into a bigger interest then what it began with. Now, I can't think of anything more
> exciting than hearing about the videogame crash of 83." (Thomas, age 33, A30)

For Thomas then, the nostalgic engagement with old games was a starting point for a deeper interest in the history of games. However, having a nostalgic attitude does not prohibit the respondents to also engage

with the history of games in different ways. This brings up another important point, namely that restorative and reflective nostalgia aren't mutually exclusive modes of engagement. Both Vincent and Thomas have also expressed the pleasures of coming into contact with specific childhood memories, just like Charlie and Hans. I am bringing up this point, since I don't want readers to think I am pointing towards a hierarchy or teleology, where restorative nostalgia may lead to reflective nostalgia, which in turn may lead to a historical interest, with historical interest being the "correct" way to engage with old games. If we consider what kind of history-use the players perform in the nostalgic context, it seems fair to call the use existential, which Bøe & Knutsen (2016) describe as the "universal human need to remember, and, through that, experience change and gain a sense of orientation in life." (p. 18).

Finally, it will be suggested that nostalgia has a profound effect on how retrogamers structure their collection habits. A recurring theme in the interviews, was how respondent's felt a need to acquire games that they either encountered or owned during their childhood. For Bjarne, his collecting is informed by the games he read about in magazines as a child:

> "[…] [W]hen I sit with games I've read about, there is of course a lot of nostalgia in
> that, it's probably about discovering a game you've never known and give it a try.
> See if it's worth something." (Bjarne, age 30, A25)

Ulrik makes a distinction between games that are 'need to have' and 'nice to have', making it clear that:

> "[N]eed to have is what I had when I was younger. Simple as that." (Ulrik, age 24,
> A20).

Charlie, an avid collector who maintains that his collecting habits are influenced very little by nostalgia, still has a need to collect games from his childhood.

> "It doesn't matter if they are fun or good or not. (Laughing) That fucking Simpsons
> game for NES, Bart vs. The Space Mutants, it's extremely bad, but I had it back
> then, so I have to have it now." (Charlie, age 34, A16).

4.1.2 Digging in the crates – Amateur archaeologists

Moving on from nostalgia, the following section will present a motivation for engaging with old games that is based on the respondent's interest to explore the archives of videogame history. When referring to an archive, I am referring to it in the context of Assmann's (2008) distinction between canon and archive, with the former referring to objects of the past that are being actively kept alive by culture, while the latter

refers to things that, for whatever reason, have been forgotten. These forgotten objects have the potential to gain a new life, by being rediscovered and appropriated into new contexts. While Assmann writes about an actual historical archive located in an institution, I consider the archive of old games to exist several places at once. By naming this section 'Digging in the crates', I am referring to the act of going to flea markets and sifting through stacks old Playstation, Nintendo and Phillips titles. This activity also takes place online in Facebook groups like the one I used to recruit my respondents. When a personal collection has grown large enough, it may also become an archive, where the collector sifts through the games they haven't played yet. While it may sound strange that a person should have a collection filled with games they haven't played, several of my respondents have bought lots containing 30-50 games, just to acquire one particular game of interest. These unwanted games are either sold again or eventually played. Investigating how fans curate the history of videogames online, Navarro-Remesal (2017) observes that quite a lot of curatorial energy is spent on highlighting games that were either unreleased, considered bad and/or commercial flops. Although my respondents don't engage in the same kind of curatorial activity, they are, like the fans highlighted in Navarro-Remesal's chapter, interested in preserving them. Navarro-Remesal writes that these games "can be appreciated as works to be played, for their historic contribution to the medium, or even as a source of ironic enjoyment." (Navarro-Remesal, 2017, p. 142)

Considering ironic enjoyment, it was observed in the data how the playing of "bad" old games was a preferred social activity for some of my respondents. For Thomas, having fun with his friends is an excuse to take a closer look at his own sizeable collection:

> "[…] When we're just two people drinking and getting ready to go out, we'll explore my collection a lot more than if we were five. Then we go in and think okay let's try something totally obscure. Then we'll come upon something totally fucked. I remember us playing a football game on the NES where each round was actually 45 minutes long." (Thomas, age 33, A44)

For Bjarne, his collecting habits are informed by an interest in discovering the obscure or overlooked game.

> "I bought [a Playstation 2 game] called Beneath[*sic*! *Under] the Skin* [Capcom, 2004]. […] It's about this alien… that can transform into humans. I bought it because I thought it looked interesting […]. That's an example of what I buy because it's weird and interesting. This is also where I think, this is more artistic. Weird games where you think, damn that's weird, uhm, this should probably be a good playing experience" (Bjarne, age 30, A5)

What is of importance for Bjarne then, is the need to have an interesting play experience, that is outside the norm. This need to unearth curiosities may in time develop into a deeper appreciation of the curious. When asked about why he prefers physical videogames, Bjarne answers:

> "Then you can put it up. It's like with films and books, you can put it on a shelf, so when people come to your home they can be impressed. […] I've installed three gallery shelves where I have *Daikatana* [Ion Storm, 2000] standing in the box, together with *Rise of the Robots* [Mirage, 1994] in the box. Again, they're terrible games, but they're interesting." (Bjarne, age 30, A17).

Daikatana, which some consider to be a prime example of a flopped first-person shooter, has been transformed into an art object, displayed to say something about the ironic, refined taste of the owner. At this point it should be noted, that these excavations into the forgotten past can also be motivated by a desire to simply explore the leftovers, instead of necessarily hunting for curiosities.

> "Often it's just pure curiosity, for example I bought *Tarzan Freeride* [Ubisoft, 2001] for PS2, which I had no idea what was. I just remember having seen the cover when I was younger and thought, that's probably cool, they made a Tarzan game where you surf a lot. Now I found it for 20 [kroner], it's probably not that great, but whatever, I want to try it, why not." (Bent, age 26, A12)

In the above quote, Bent's motivation for buying the game is based on the fact that it has become a cheap commodity, which allows him to buy games he was unable to earlier for economic reasons. When the vast majority of a former state-of-the-art consoles library of games becomes outdated and much, much cheaper, it opens up whole new avenues for exploring the (almost) forgotten past.

Engaging with the archive can also be an invitation to reflect on the status of videogaming's canon. Here, the engagement is informed by an interest in problematizing what is considered a classic. For example, when asked what he considers classics, Vincent answers:

> "[…] [Y]ou could say Final Fantasy 7 is a classic because it sold really well, but I'd say that Klonoa is a classic […], because it dared to break some boundaries. It had a good mascot […], but also some new ideas that worked well and left a mark. […] [I]t's about the way you link together with enemies and use them to jump further. They are not just an obstacle but also a resource […]. I'm probably a hipster by

> heart, so when it's a little less well known, then I'm more inclined to go that way."
>
> (Vincent, age 20, A42)

Here we have an example of a less well-known Playstation 1 game, *Klonoa: Door to Phantomile* (Namco, 1997), being considered more of a classic than *Final Fantasy 7* (Square, 1997), based on its innovative mechanics. This reflection on the canon of games may also evolve into a reflection on what good game design is. Bjarne's answer to what he considers a classic, is another interesting example of how the player of old games, due to their constant interactions with the past, may have views of classics that differ from those of the industry and mainstream videogame culture:

> "I would say that E.T. on Atari is a classic, not because it's a good game. I don't
> know if it's a classic but it's a must play. Because… it's the most notorious game of
> them all. […] It's an amazingly bad game, but it's not as bad as people say. […]
> [A]bout E.T. I would say, you need to play it and see what it is. Learn, what kind of
> game it is and why is it so notorious." (Bjarne, age 30, A10)

E.T. is presented as a sort of anti-classic, that, due to its notoriety and impact on videogame culture and history, is deemed as important as well-established "classics". Further on, Bjarne reflects on E.T.'s possible influences on other games and their design.

> "If you look at it, it sort of resembles Zelda, this top-down view game, I don't
> know if anyone else at the time did it. […] That's what I also find frightfully
> interesting about that game. It had some ideas that weren't that bad, it was just
> the execution that… went wrong." (Bjarne, age 30, A10)

This goes to show how the old game in this context may not just be perceived as a curiosity, but also as a potentially neglected step in the evolution of videogames. For Bent, playing *Star Wars* on Game Boy (NMS Software, 1991) also engendered reflections on what constitutes good game design.

> "I also bought Star Wars for Gameboy. It's really bad, but damn it's fun that it's so
> bad. […] The gameplay is so weird, and the camera is bad since you can't see
> what's coming towards you. But I only know that because I've played games that
> have done it well. Every Mario game places you at the far-left side [of the screen]
> so you can see what's coming towards you on the right […]." (Bent, age 26, A16)

Considering the type of history-use performed here, it seems fitting first and foremost to describe it as entertainment, since these old games are played for some kind of ironic pleasure. But, when the curios old game leads the player to reflect on the canon of game history and game design in general, it begins to resemble what Bøe & Knutsen call scientific history-use, where something is interpreted from a historic perspective (2016, p. 18). This is not meant to imply that the other motivations don't engage with games as entertainment. While they still do that, entertainment is not the primary history-use.

4.1.3 Back to the roots – Amateur art historians

Moving on to the next motivation, this segment will present data that suggests, that some respondents are motivated by an interest in engaging with games that are colloquially described as classics. In this context, the player focusses on the canon of videogames, not the archive. This kind of engagement is less chaotic than that of the archaeologist and is focused on playing and collecting those games that the industry and players revere. I have chosen to call these types of players amateur art historians, since they are primarily interested in playing old games to gain a deeper understanding of historical developments. One way of doing this, is by constructing genealogies. Suominen (2016) writes that the construction of genealogies is linked to "common traditions in art studies of making style historical taxonomies producing typically familiar pedigrees of games in general or games within a specific genre" (p. 11). This type of study is informed by an interest in identifying "variations and evolutions" of, for example, a genre or mechanic (ibid.) While Suominen goes on to explicate that this type of genealogy-construction is also performed by "hobbyists or amateurs" (ibid, p. 11), I don't mean to suggest that my respondents construct actual genealogies, but that it's something that informs their way of playing. Gaining historical knowledge about the evolution of videogames is the primary pleasure for this type of engagement. It's possible to construct genealogies about a wide variety of things. For my respondents, this can relate to characters, objects and mechanics. Thomas describes his motivation to play the first *Dragon Quest* (Enix, 1986) in the following way:

> "[…] [I] just have to see where things come from. Exactly with this game it's something historical. Because right at the start of the game you meet this monster that's just a slime. The way it looks has become an icon, uhm, and I think that's super fascinating." (Thomas, age 33, A34)

Thomas, an aficionado of Japanese roleplaying games, wants to personally experience the first appearance of the iconic Slime character, that has become synonymous with the genre itself. For Helge, this going back

to the roots functions as an act of self-education. His collecting habits are in part informed by an interest to collect the first game of a given genre:

> "[…] [B]ecause then you get the history of, how this series started being so
> popular, you know. Then you also educate yourself. I've searched back to some
> things I didn't know to begin with, for example, I'm a big Resident Evil fan."
> (Helge, age 40, A14)

For Helge, his interest in old games evolved into an exploration of the *Resident Evil series* (Capcom, 1996-), which in turn made him look further into the survival horror genre. Bent, a lifelong Nintendo fan, enjoys collecting hardware and games from before his time, to properly understand the evolution of certain series:

> "The latest [Mario Kart game] I bought, was the very first (laughs), for the Super
> Nintendo. That's the newest Mario Kart to me you know. Since I have almost all
> Mario Kart games up to 8, I also get… I'm learning a lot more about how that
> series has evolved. Where, okay, this thing I thought was new in *Mario Kart 8*
> [Nintendo, 2014] is something they had back in the first one you know […]" (Bent,
> age 26, A4)

Some of my other respondents aren't as focused on constructing genealogies, but instead explore the canon of games, since they see it as a fundamental part of appreciating videogame history. Also, it seems to be considered a necessary part of being a member of the Danish retrogaming community. Ulrik, who grew up with Sega consoles, formulates his need to play Nintendo games in the following way:

> "[I] think to appreciate things, which you do as a collector, and when you're
> interested in history and game design and what inspired these games and so on.
> Then I think… Nintendo is probably what most people would associate with classic
> videogames" (Ulrik, age 24, A24)

What this statement implies, is that you must have played Nintendo games to call yourself a proper aficionado. Ulrik's quote also helps to illustrate another key difference between the archaeologist and art historian. While the archaeologist may derive some form of ironic pleasure, the art historian's attitude is characterized by reverence and respect, that goes beyond personal preferences. This meshes well with Assmann's conceptualization of the canon, describing it as "independent of historical change and immune to the ups and downs of social taste" (Assmann, 2008, p. 100). Indeed, all respondents except one expressed great affection towards Nintendo games, both old and new. This appreciation can also relate to

the games of individual designers. Talking about his reasons for buying *Mole Mania* (Nintendo, 1996), a less well-known game by Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto, Bent explains:

> "[I] thought, this is interesting, that he made a puzzle game for the Game Boy
> which hasn't turned into a big franchise. [...] I guess it was uhm… I'd almost say a
> historical interest… [...] I think many players look up to Miyamoto for everything
> he's done for the industry and I know he's a fantastic game designer, so I thought
> to experience one of his early works, one I hadn't heard about before, would be
> an interesting experience." (Bent, age 26, A32)

Bent referring to Mole Mania as an 'early work', makes it clear how he places the games of Miyamoto inside the canon of videogames. Through this wording, Bent frames the engagement as one befitting the art historian, who is interested in understanding the development of a particular artist. Mole Mania is perceived as a game that may reveal new perspectives on the evolution of Miyamoto's design practices and philosophy. Exploring the canon of videogame history can also be motivated by an interest in playing those games that have inspired more recent titles. For Bent, the revered roleplaying game *Earthbound* (HAL Laboratory, 1994) is a must-play after having completed *Undertale* (Fox, 2015):

> "[I] know that Undertale is heavily inspired by Earthbound and I saw that as soon
> as I opened it. I was like wow I'm getting a lot of Undertale vibes, that's pretty
> cool. [...] It's fun to see the source of inspiration for a game I love so much"
> (Bent, age 26, A31)

At this point, it's important to note that while my respondents are actively engaged with the history of videogames, external sources are very important to make these historical reflections possible. As Christian explains, there is rarely something inherent in the games that make you reflect on historical developments:

> "[Y]ou only get what you are presented with in the form of packaging and
> interface. I can't dig into who worked on this… or… where they came from and
> where they went on to. I need other sources to do that. I don't actively think
> about these things when I play. Only when I find something in a book or online,
> then ooooh yeaaah, now I see the connection." (Christian, age 39, A34)

On the other hand, Vincent argues that it is possible to gain historical insights simply by playing games.

> "It's all about having the right perspective. […] [Y]ou have to know you're looking
> at videogame history when you're playing. […] It's easy to do this when you play
> *Final Fantasy 1* [Square, 1987] and *Final Fantasy 15* [Square Enix, 2016], you can
> see a clear difference when you have it in your hands" (Vincent, age 20, A84)

Throughout his interview, Vincent makes his reverence for the Final Fantasy series very clear. His historical investigation is based on playing both the old and the new simultaneously. In this way, he argues, he is able to develop a videogame historical perspective, where he focusses on the evolutions and variations throughout the series. With that said, only Vincent and Bent place themselves in these semi-experimental play situations. While Bjarne also contends that there is historical knowledge inherent in old games when you play them side by side, for example *Doom* (id Software, 1993) next to *Half-Life* (Valve, 1998), external sources remain the most important.

> "[Y]ou become too caught up in playing the game as you are playing it. Then you
> just concentrate about playing. […] So I would say it's best to have someone else
> tell the history, if it's on film, book, vinyl doesn't really matter. But, it's a better
> way to learn the history than playing it is." (Bjarne, age 30, A27)

The primary history-use of the art historian is scientific, since it primarily concerns itself with placing games that are considered classics in its proper historical context. In this context of play, the player is primarily perceiving the game from a formal perspective, as a step in the evolution of videogames.

4.1.4 Engaging with technologies past

In this context, the motivation for engaging with old games is based on technological interest and an appreciation of the physicality of old games. In this context, the games and hardware are primarily perceived as techno-historic artefacts. This helps elucidate how this type of motivation is different from the art historian. In the set of motivations I have established, the art historians focus is on things such as game design and textual elements but not technology. It could be argued that this technological focus also belongs with the art historians, since art historians traditionally also focus on technological developments and constraints (Lowery & Niver, 2016, p. 71). For this thesis however, it was deemed salient to make a distinction between these two types of motivations, since the respondents themselves made distinctions between appreciating the technology and appreciating the design.

A recurring theme across most of my respondents, was their appreciation of the durability and reliability of the old hardware.

> "[I]t usually always works. When you have to rely on… internet and downloads
> right, then there are files you can delete. It's more difficult to delete something
> physical." (Charlie, age 34, A44)

For Thomas, his appreciation of old hardware is only magnified by the lacking durability of modern
hardware.

> "Well the Nintendo was made in the 80's and then they stopped making those
> […]. They still work. Then you have a console like the PlayStation 3, how many
> haven't gotten the yellow light of death […]" (Thomas, age 33, A38)

On another note, Bjarne, an IT-professional, has certain concerns about current online distribution systems:

> "The problem with that is that the producers can control your game collection.
> What happens if Valve says we don't want to run Steam [a major PC gaming
> platform] anymore? Then you lose everything. […] If you have a Super Nintendo
> and Super Mario World, you can always play it, no problem." (Bjarne, age 30, A17)

While Bjarne's appreciation of old games' physicality is very pragmatic, it cannot be understated how this
appreciation of physicality is an integral part of playing old games for many of my respondents.

> "There's also some charm in putting a cartridge into an old Megadrive and turning
> it on with that big 'clunk' button that no one would make today. It would all be
> fingertouch […] [A]ll this having it in your hands and pushing it before you're
> sitting down." (Helge, age 40, A7)

While Helge appreciates the physicality of the hardware, Thomas also has a fondness for the physicality of
old games. Sitting with a recently acquired unopened, boxed copy of *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*
(Nintendo, 1998), he explains:

> "You had a box. There is something on each side. Today you get a dvd case… if you
> even get that. Back then there was at least an instruction guide and a map. You
> almost got a guidebook and you needed that because [games] were… hard and
> you got stuck all the time." (Thomas, age 33, A26).

The appreciation of technology can also provoke certain historical explorations, where the interest is based
on experiencing techno-historic landmarks or exploring the technological evolution of a particular platform.

Christian, who still plays and codes on his old Commodore 64, is interested in collecting those games that pushed the platform to new heights and to "put them in context" (Christian, age 39, A26). When asked to explain what he meant by context, he answered:

> "[I]t's the technological development, what you could get out of the chips at that time, [19]85 contra [19]91. *Guldkorn Expressen* [Silverrock Productions, 1991] would have looked completely different in 85. It's fun to see how a machine like the [Commodore] 64 has been a benchmark for so many years and been a part of shaping generations of people that are making games today" (Christian, age 39, A26)

For Christian then, the exploration of videogame history is based on putting technological developments into a greater historical context, and to understand its influence on contemporary game development. We could call him a historian of technology. While Christian explains that nostalgia was part of the reason for him going out and buying an old Game Boy, he also said:

> "[I] have an interest in the technical side of it. What type of games could you make with the technology back then, I mean how much could you squeeze out of the systems. […] For me it's fun to see what evolution there's been with the Game Boy relating to that." (Christian, age 39, A2)

This exploration of old technologies can also be less systematic. Bjarne, encountering a *Star Wars arcade game* (Atari, 1983) with Vector graphics, was intrigued by the now outdated technology:

> "[I]t's nothing compared to modern games, but the way that it just worked, these Vector graphics and the first-person view… it really impressed me. […] I think what impressed me was that it was from 83. I actually think the graphics are nice to look at, because it's really, uh, Vector graphics light up a lot, so it just looks cool." (Bjarne, age 30, A7)

In this situation, the encounter with the old technology has the potential to open up new ways of thinking about the virtues of old gaming technology, and to reflect on current technological developments. For Bent, playing old games is motivated by an interest in understanding what the technological capabilities were at a certain point in time.

> "I want to see what games were popular back then and what was the craziest shit.
> A game like *Super Mario Kart* [Nintendo, 1992] for the SNES, if you haven't tried it
> before and pick it up now, then you get insights into how new games were in the
> year 1990. […] You get an insight into what was wild back then […] [T]hat's an
> image of what technology you had back then, and what it could do. Uhm… and I
> think that's really cool, just to experience, these images." (Bent, age 26, A10)

Bent exemplifies a view of technological development within games, that isn't necessarily interested in putting things into a larger context. Instead, the old games limited technologies provoke reflection on the current cutting-edge developments in videogame technology. Reflecting on the developments in graphics in the Final Fantasy series, Vincent says about *Final Fantasy 6* (Square, 1994) that:

> "[W]hen I look at it, I look at it like art, with what they've done within the
> limitations. But If I was 8 years old again, I would say this isn't very pretty, have
> you seen Final Fantasy 15 where they throw their weapons around and walk
> realistically? […] And they do but considering the constraints it [Final Fantasy 6] is
> incredibly beautiful. […] But you still see people saying, why can't they just do a
> remake? […] [T]he problem is that we have a tendency, that if it isn't top-notch,
> then it isn't optimal." (Vincent, age 20, A47)

For Vincent, Final Fantasy 6 is a classic in part because of it overcoming the technological constraints of its time. What his quote also highlights, is how he points out that these older games deserve recognition, namely because they are a result of the technological constraints. According to him, a remake isn't necessary, because a graphical upgrade would take away an essential aspect of its status as a classic, namely its innate pastness, which is hard to overlook when you can compare the graphical fidelity of older and newer games. Finally, it should be noted how normal gameplay sessions can provoke an interest in exploring and understanding technological limitations.

> "[Y]ou learn a lot of fun facts, you have three lives and then it's bloody game over.
> I think there are a lot of things you encounter that make you think why the hell is
> it like that? Then when you start investigating it, there is a logical explanation.
> They were limited technologically." (Helge, age 40, A33)

I would say that the history-use going on here is scientific, but also somewhat existential. For Christian, who has the technological knowhow to consider technological advancements in depth, the use could be called

scientific. For less technologically knowledgeable players such as Vincent and Bent, the older technology functions more like a prompt to reflect on the current state of technology, which makes it more existential.

4.1.5 Challenge and/or simplicity contra modern games

The final motivation for playing old games is the most pragmatic one. Simply put, some of my respondents, paradoxically, find modern games to be overly complex and not challenging enough. This overcomplexity may manifest itself in a variety of ways and works as a barrier for the respondents to even interact with newer games. When they claim that modern games aren't challenging enough, this is meant in comparison to the challenging difficulty of older games, where players aren't able to save the game state as often. This dissatisfaction with modern games is only strengthened by a growing disillusionment in the face of modern game publisher practices.

One way that modern games may be too complex, is based on their controls. Modern controllers have too many buttons and according to Thomas, this development towards overcomplexity began around 20 years ago.

> "The Super Nintendo is just perfect. You had four buttons, analogue stick and shoulder buttons. You actually don't need more than that. Then the Nintendo 64 came along and that's a fine console but fuck man there's like, who the hell makes a game where you need 20 buttons? […] [With the Gamecube] It seemed like they understood they didn't need 28 buttons. I like this that they keep it simple and you can make a really really good game even if it's simple." (Thomas, age 33, A3)

Christian echoes this sentiment.

> "[I]t's just more cozy and de-stressing not having to use 57 controller buttons to make your guy jump over something. That is one of my primary drives to play old games, it's easier to engage with. We have a PS3 and PS4, but I don't play them that much. I may be getting too old but there are just too many buttons."
> (Christian, age 39, A5)

Anthropy (2012) has written eloquently on the subject of how developments in controller design from the Nintendo Entertainment System to the Xbox 360 has managed to alienate anyone who hasn't been able to keep up with the growing complexity (pp. 12-15). While Anthropy argues that these developments are keeping non-players from engaging with videogames, it would seem that they simultaneously manage to

disengage certain lifelong players. Another thing that some of my respondents found unnecessarily complex, where the graphics. Talking about the *FIFA* series of football games (EA Sports, 1993-), Helge said:

> "[T]hey [FIFA developers] just get away with it too damn easily. When my friends sit with their Playstation 4's, which I don't have, they sit and look at… greenish grey swamp fog which is a tiny bit better looking than in the previous edition. Because of course it has to be as realistic as possible. I don't play consoles for the realism […] [F]or example one of my favourite games […] is Crazy Taxi [Sega, 1999]. […] [The game] has bright colours, arcade style right. That's something that can totally absorb me." (Helge, age 40, A3)

Helge, as well as other respondents, lament the fact that modern games all strive towards becoming more and more realistic, since they like to use videogames as an escape from reality. Finally, the gameplay itself may be what some respondents find overly complex and overwhelming. By gameplay I am referring to the underlying gameplay systems and possibilities of interaction within the gameworld.

> "Many of the titles I see commercials for are these immersive… now you're on this planet and it's free-roaming you can do anything. You can dig a hole and go down there or crawl up a tree and jump out. Okay… it doesn't have to be a game on rails where I'm guided. There can just be too much freedom." (Christian, age 39, A22)

This modern AAA game design, that wants to create progressively bigger and more complex gameworlds, is not only overwhelming for those of my respondents that are over 30. Discussing modern Ubisoft games such as *Assassin's Creed* (2007-) and *Far Cry* (2004-), Ulrik says:

> "It's so overwhelming, it's so big that 5 hours pass before you really get going with the game. You're confronted with a map, in the game, that's stuffed with things you must do, can do. The possibilities are overwhelming, so although I've been looking forward to this game [*Far Cry 5,* Ubisoft, 2018] for months and when I start it and have played for 5-6 hours, then it doesn't mean that I don't want to play it, if I start playing something else also." (Ulrik, age 24, A60)

All in all, these complexities of modern games contra older games, makes certain players want to keep playing older games.

> "It's just that arcade element, you can just (snaps fingers) pick it up quickly, that
> learning curve isn't usually that steep and if it is, it isn't insurmountable" (Charlie,
> age 34, A18)

Challenge is another thing that some respondents feel are lacking in modern games.

> "There's no challenge anymore. I don't know if game developers don't have the
> guts to be creative anymore, what the hell is Miyamoto doing? There is some
> famous example, one of the modern Mario games where you can get a powerup
> that just completes the stage for you… it's ridiculous [….]" (Charlie, age 34, A27)

According to several respondents, this lack of challenge is also caused by the existence of multiple save states in most modern games. This means that the player is able to save their progress frequently and doesn't have to redo large parts of the game if their player-character dies.

> "[T]oday you're a bit too… spoiled by autosaves. There wasn't any of that back in
> the day. In *Crash Bandicoot* [Naughty Dog, 1996], if you die, there are
> checkpoints, but if you're game over then it's back to the beginning." (Bjarne, age
> 30, A27)

Hans, a younger player who chose to keep playing on the Playstation 1 even after his brothers acquired a Playstation 2, also thinks that modern games have become too easy.

> "[Y]ou have the opportunity to load and save all the time so if you by accident go
> into a new stage with too little life, then I'll just go back into my old save. I don't
> think that's fun, then it gets too easy that way." (Hans, age 21, A3)

For Helge, a game without challenge isn't a game at all.

> "[N]ow, I am this old school type, but everything doesn't have be fed to you with a
> silver spoon right. Uhm… A game is a challenge, it's not a game if you can just
> waltz through it. That's a waste of money." (Helge, age 40, A10)

Helge represents one approach to the old games-modern games dichotomy: He chooses not to engage with modern games anymore. Old games become the antithesis to modern games. The same approach is shared by Christian and Charlie. With Charlie, the decision to disconnect from modern games is also partly motivated by a general disillusionment with modern game development and publishing practices.

> "[T]here's all this fucking DLC [downlodable content]. […] You're basically buying
> some completely unfinished demo […]. And then there's all this […] freemium
> right. All this, yes, it's free but if you want to do anything you either have to wait
> 12 hours or pay a little. […] It's just this pure suit mentality. How can we lure
> money out of families with children?" (Charlie, age 34, A27 + A56)

Around the time of interviewing, *Star Wars Battlefront 2* (EA DICE, 2017) had been released and was universally criticized for its problematic and predatory loot box system, where players were incentivized to pay real money for the chance to unlock weapons, playable characters and upgrades (Gamespot, 2018). Nearly all respondents were to a greater or lesser extent critical of modern AAA game development. With that said, there were also some respondents, mostly those under 30 years old, that didn't disconnect with modern games. Instead, they use old games as a pause from modern games, when they become too overwhelming. When asked to elaborate why he had recently bought *Ape Escape* (SCE Japan Studio, 1999) and *Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy* (Naughty Dog, 2001), Ulrik answered that these where the games he used as a pause from his current modern game (Ulrik, age 24, A56). When asked why he needed a pause, he answered:

> "They're still more simple than modern games I think. Ape Escape is built around
> some stages where you catch some monkeys. Very colourful, very sweet. You can
> easily play it 45 minutes without any problem. Right now I'm playing Tomb Raider
> on the Playstation 4. […] For that I feel you need to spend 2-2,5 hours. I don't
> have that time. I do have the time, but you also have to be in the right state to
> play it. You shouldn't play just to do it. That's something I save for the weekend."
> (Ulrik, age 24, A57)

In this context, I would say the history-use is purely for entertainment purposes. The games are not approached as historical artefacts, but as simpler and/or more challenging games.

4.2 Privileging the 'authentic' experience

This part of the analysis will focus less on why the respondents play old games, but instead present the data that says something about *how* they play old games. Here it will be shown how some players prefer to play on hardware setups that mimic the 'authentic' experience. Having an 'authentic' experience optimally means playing the original release of the game, on the original console, with an original controller. However, it will also be shown that certain players actually prefer emulation and rereleases for a variety of

reasons. In the context of this thesis, emulation refers to the illegal playing of old games on free emulation software, whereas rereleases refer to company-sanctioned repackagings or remasters of old games.

In an article about the preservation of digital media and artefacts, Lowood (2016) writes about the problematic notion of users having an 'authentic' experience with old software. Lowood points out that we can distinguish between two types of authenticity: 1) the authenticity of playback and 2) the authenticity of experiencing the software. Writing about authentic experiences with software, Lowood states that: "Authenticity here means that the use experience today *is* like it *was*" (Lowood, 2016). He is quick to debunk the possibility of having this kind of authentic experience, based on the observation that:

> "Authenticity is a concept fraught not just with intellectual issues, but with registers ranging from nostalgia and fandom to immersion and fun. […] Authenticity is always constructed. Whose lived experience counts as "authentic" and how has it been documented? Is the best source a developer's design notes? The memory of someone who used the software when it was released? A marketing video? The researcher's self-reflexive use in a library or museum? If a game was designed for kids in 1985, do you have to find a kid to play it in 2050?" (Lowood, 2016)

While Lowood makes a salient point, it's hard to overlook how much it means for some of my respondents to be playing on the 'correct', original hardware, in order to be as close to the original play context as possible.

For some respondents, the playing on original hardware is informed by restorative nostalgia.

> "You can play Gamecube games on the Wii, but I wouldn't think of playing Gamecube games on that long controller for the Wii. […] It's just got something to do with it having to be the way it was when you were little, and you can't change that in any way. […] It's not because it's wrong, it's just simpler. It's also got something to do with things being easier back then. […] Today you have to pay bills and be a grown-up […]" (Hans, age 21, A10)

Playing on original hardware serves as a kind of escapist activity for Hans, who holds on to a simpler time, almost literally, by still playing on original hardware.

When asked why he still plays on his old Commodore 64, Christian answers:

"[B]ecause it's my own from when I was a child (laughs). There's something nostalgic about it. Not all emulators are 100 percent valid. So I want to make sure I get the optimal gameplay experience, also to sit with a physical joystick […]. (Christian, age 39, A17)

For Christian it seems the engagement with original hardware is in part motivated by nostalgia, but also by notions of having an optimal, 'authentic' experience. As a software engineer, he is very aware of the subtle differences between emulators and cares about whether it's "100 percent correct, instead of 99,3" (Christian, age 39, A39). Another reason for respondents longing for the 'original' experience, is based on the notion that playing on original hardware brings them closest to the developer's intentions. When asked why he plays on original hardware, Bent answers:

"For the authentic experience, and I want, I want to play the game with the input it was designed for, meaning the controller. […] Because then you get… the way, then you play it the way it was designed to be played, therefore it has to be the best experience. […] I think it would be awkward to play Mario with a keyboard. So there I would rather like to play it with the controller Nintendo has designed Mario to be played with" (Bent, age 26, A25)

For much the same reasons, Christian stays away from buying rereleases of old arcade games.

"[I] have tried to buy collections of old arcade classics and it just doesn't feel right to sit with a small [smartphone] screen or a complex controller and play them. Then I prefer having the experience on the right hardware again. […] It's probably the authenticity surrounding it. It was intended to work on this platform and maybe it works on the other, but it just… isn't the same experience." (Christian, age 39, A20)

In Christian's quote, the developer's original intentions are again framed as a reason to play on the original hardware and have an 'authentic' experience. However, several of my respondents, including Christian and Bent, also use emulators. Emulators may be used for research purposes, when a respondent is unsure of whether a particular old game is worth purchasing.

"So, it's just the best way to test a game. I know it's illegal, but you can play games that you own on an emulator, you're allowed to do that. But it's a great way to just test what kind of game is this before you buy it." (Ulrik, age 24, A42)

This type of research may also relate to playing certain games that are very expensive or hard to get a hold of.

> "It can be fun sometimes, if you know there's some game you know… that's probably difficult to get your hands on. Then you can just give it a try, if there's a ROM of it you know." (Charlie, age 34, A43)

In this way, emulation is a convenient way for the individual collector to check if a certain expensive or rare game is in fact also worth playing. Another reason for the respondents to play on emulators, is for economic or practical reasons.

> "We live on almost 92m^2, 6 people you know. Uhm… so the space is quite limited for uh… storing games and stuff like that, that's why I began using SD-cards on the Dreamcast. But of course there are still some original gems you want to have in your collection. But sadly it just gets more and more expensive." (Helge, age 40, A4)

Helge originally had a much larger collection of consoles and games, which he had to sell for economic reasons and because his family needed more space in their home. Because of this, he has to rely on playing old games with illegal emulators on his modified Sega Dreamcast console. For Bjarne, illegal emulation was a necessary evil earlier in his life, when he didn't have the money to collect old games and hardware.

> "*Super Metroid* [Nintendo, 1994], when I played it back then, was on an emulator, totally illegal, but that was back when I was a student and didn't have that much money. But that's not something I do anymore, I would actually rather have the game. I'm sort of against illegal emulators today." (Bjarne, age 30, A15)

It is interesting to observe how some respondents stressed the need to get as close to the original input method, when they did engage with emulators. Since Bent would rather play the original Super Nintendo version of *Chrono Trigger* (Square, 1995), than the remake for Nintendo DS, he has done what he can to have as 'authentic' an experience as possible with an emulator.

> "[I] run it through an emulator and onto the TV, and then it's with a Playstation controller, it has more or less the same button overlay as the Super Nintendo controller." (Bent, age 26, A23)

Here we see to what lengths some players are willing to go, in order to have what they deem an 'authentic' experience. On the other hand, two of my respondents prefer to play rereleases and on emulation software. For Vincent, emulation of games he already owns has its conveniences:

> "When you're bored at a lecture you can play some Pokémon and get better at it and I think it's great that you can speed it up and it doesn't matter if you fail because you can try again." (Vincent, age 20, A5)

For Vincent, the emulated Pokémon game has certain convenient functionalities, such as the ability to speed up gameplay and save the game state at any time. With regards to rereleases, he prefers playing Playstation 1 and 2 rereleases bought from the online Playstation Store.

> "[I]t's charming of course, but it's a little wonky to play PS1 games on a PS1 with a SCART plug, when you can play a PS1 game on the PS3 with an HDMI cable. It's prettier, the sound is better, you can save your data easier, the controller is wireless […]" (Vincent, age 20, A5).

While it is quite clear that the players I have interviewed want to play on original hardware, there is also a small subset of them that embrace the conveniences of emulation and rereleases. However, as Ulrik explains, his use of rereleases to play old Sega games is primarily due to his current living conditions:

> "[T]here is this Megadrive Collection for PS3. I would prefer playing that over the originals, but that's just because it's more practical I think. It's because you have to do so many things to go back and play on the old stuff. […] [I]f I had the option to have it set up all the time, then I would play it on that. But I think there is a major convenience factor to do it via that disc." (Ulrik, age 24, A53)

4.3 Playing and collecting old games between the public and the private

This final part of the analysis will concern itself with the ways that the practice of retrogaming is situated between private and public spheres. Kate Egan (2007), researching collectors of old slasher films on VHS, observes how there exists a tension between the private rituals and meaning-making of an individual, and the surrounding public sphere, that has its own collectively shaped rituals and meanings (p. 200). While the practice of retrogaming may involve more than just collecting, I find it salient to begin this part by highlighting Egan's research, since many of the processes she identifies in the video collector can also be observed in the collector of old games. Egan writes that every collection can be an illustration of how

"personal meaning and culturally determined meaning" are interweaved (Egan, 2007, p. 206). This tension, which makes the collector take on several roles such as researcher, archivist and restorer, is a major part of what makes the collector "the creator of his or her own alternative economic and cultural sphere" (ibid., p. 217). This part will present the data, that shows how my respondents private habits and rituals are shaped by the public discourse on retrogaming in general.

To begin with, it cannot be overstated how much of an influence Youtube has on the collecting habits of my respondents. For Ulrik, Youtube was the place that kickstarted his interest in collecting old games.

> "[T]he first one that everybody knows is the Angry Video Game Nerd. When he
> started doing all his videos, that's when I began to think it was interesting to have
> it physically instead of digitally. […] [I] was 14-15 years old, but certainly when I
> was 16… that's where it began in earnest." (Ulrik, age 24, A16)

The Angry Video Game Nerd and other Youtube channels such as *Snesdrunk* and *Gamesack* have been mentioned by several respondents as their preferred source to find out more about so-called "hidden gems" or must-have classics.

> "He [Snesdrunk] looks at certain, kind of obscure games and asks is this worth
> playing today? Sometimes I just stumble upon stuff, or a top ten best Super
> Nintendo games where the protagonist is a dog. It can be all kinds, I like all those
> hidden gems videos." (Charlie, age 34, A38)

Another online resource that is prominently used by most of the respondents, are top-10 lists, that can be presented in writing or as a Youtube video. For Thomas, an avid collector of Japanese role-playing games for the Super Nintendo, these lists have a tremendous influence on his collecting habits, making him go so far as to purchase a Super Nintendo Classic Mini, a modern rerelease of the Super Nintendo console that he actually dislikes.

> "[T]here are these top-10 lists where it's always the same 10 [games] that show
> up again. And on that list, I was missing three, and that was Earthbound, I don't
> have that because it's fucking expensive. […] The last one was Final Fantasy [6],
> that was the first thing I did when I got my SNES classic, okay, what's the hype?
> Because I have everything else, things like Chrono Trigger and stuff like that."
> (Thomas, age 33, A11)

The top-10 lists become a shopping list for collectors and this marks an interesting point in their collecting habits, when the collecting of old games turns into something connected more with public conceptions of valuation and appreciation, than it does personal taste or nostalgia (Egan, 2007, p. 211). With that said, online reviews and recommendations aren't followed blindly. For several respondents, there was a certain allure to games that were very badly reviewed.

> "[I] mean the internet is one big database and if there are a lot of good reviews I'm going to buy it and if there aren't any reviews, I'd probably also buy it. And if there are a lot of bad reviews then I'm pretty damn sure I'll buy it too. […] Because it's fun. A bad game can be just as fun when you know how good another game can be." (Vincent, age 20, A48)

Unsurprisingly, these online retrogaming communities are an integral part of constructing certain games, or sequences in games, as cultural heritage. One specific instance of this can be found in the way that Thomas discusses what is colloquially called "the opera scene" from Final Fantasy 6.

> "You can't talk about Final Fantasy 6 without mentioning the opera scene […]. I've of course always known about this opera scene, without having played it. But you can't find a single person talking about this game on Youtube that doesn't mention the opera scene. When you see it, it's just, then it's everything. It's… the song that isn't really there, the music, the graphics […]. I sort of got goosebumps when I saw it the first time, because the melody in itself is fantastic. It's really… yeah… I went on to Youtube afterwards and found, there are a lot of examples of people that play the melody on the violin." (Thomas, age 33, A10)

Final Fantasy 6's opera scene is a fascinating example of, to use Suominen & Sivula's (2013) terminology, heritageization. The scene has been mentioned by several of my respondents at some point during their interviews, and they haven't played the game in their childhood or youth either. Here we see how the culturally determined meanings of the public sphere may have a great influence on how the individuals appreciation of a certain artefact manifests itself. This also relates to the culture of retrogaming itself, where knowing certain things and owning a particular game endows a person with a certain prestige within that culture. As Shaw (2013) argues, gamer identity is performatively constructed by committing a certain amount of time to playing games, but also by playing the "right" games. This endows a certain person with the cultural capital that, in some contexts, make them self-identify as gamers (Shaw, 2013). It should be no surprise that the same holds true for the current subculture of retrogaming. In that subculture, the cultural

capital is primarily based on owning rare games, having a certain amount of historical knowledge, and/or owning and playing on old hardware.

> "[I]f I put a picture up on Facebook of what I'm playing then… then I'm definitely going to show a picture of my Super Nintendo, to show that I have the original. I would never take a picture of my SNES classic. It's just this, me having the original is just cool in some way." (Thomas, age 33, A38)

For Thomas, projecting the image of a "true" retrogamer is manifested by him publishing an image of the old hardware, since he, if the intention were to simply show what he was playing, could just as easily have taken a photograph of the screen. In performing his retrogamer identity this way, he is reproducing a particular discourse about what constitutes retrogaming. Subcultural capital can also be gained by being a shrewd collector.

> "[I]t's a great feeling to own it [the game Suikoden], of course it's about getting a kick. All of that going out and looking for rare games and if you can get it cheaper […]. When I also really like *Suikoden* [Konami, 1995], that makes it even more of a feat and a sort of medal. Just like people have a painting hanging, then I have a cool game that says this is the most expensive European PS1 game in existence."
> (Vincent, age 20, A7)

Vincent's relationship to Suikoden is interesting, due to it having two concurrent significances for him, one personal and the other public. On the personal level, the game is a personal favourite of his and he still plays it in a digital rerelease edition, to ease the strain on his prized physical copy. On top of that, Suikoden is also appreciated as a rare collector's item by the surrounding community, giving Vincent a certain amount of cultural capital simply by owning it. This shows how fluently a member of the retrogaming community may switch between being an archivist and a curator, with the former being more focused on the personal level of engagement and the latter being focused on accumulating or displaying their cultural capital in a public sphere.

5. Discussion

This part of the thesis will discuss the findings of the analysis. First, the main findings will be synthesized, and a typology of player types will be presented. Next, two new concepts, *historical play* and *nostalgic play*, will briefly be sketched out and their implications for the study of retrogaming, and the playing of old games in general, will be made clear. In the third part of the discussion, the limitations of the research will be explicated and discussed. Finally, it will be reflected upon, in what respects the methodology has been flawed.

5.1 Synthesizing the main findings

It is now time to consider how the results of this thesis might have implications for how the subject of contemporary playing of old games is researched. This part will present two models, that serve to succinctly visualize what this thesis has discovered. Furthermore, these two models may serve as analytical tools for future research endeavours. The first model relates to the types of engagement that have been observed in my respondents and how they may interrelate.

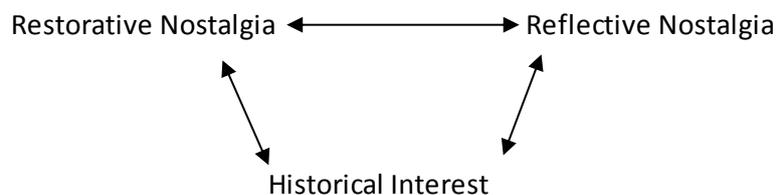Restorative Nostalgia ⟷ Reflective Nostalgia

Historical Interest

Figure 1. Triangle of engagement with old games. Made by the author

What this model is meant to represent, is how an individual player of old games might change between different types of engagement with the game or hardware at hand. At the top of the model we have the two types of nostalgia conceptualized by Boym, that are used to describe an individual's relationship to their own past. Below them, we have the engagement called *Historical Interest*. This is meant to represent an interest in the broader history of videogames, that goes beyond personal experiences with certain videogames. It seems salient to visualize it in the following way, to go against the explicit and implicit notions in the current literature, that the playing of old games is exclusively motivated by nostalgia. What this model is meant to represent, is that restorative nostalgia is a part of engaging with old games, but it is not a static property of the experience. Instead, as the findings suggest, it's one of several lenses that the player may have on a particular game. While the player may begin a particular session with a game in a restorative nostalgic state, it may at a later point veer more towards a reflective engagement, which from there may either move back to the restorative state or towards a historically interested mood, where the

player reflects on the broader history of videogames. As was shown with Thomas, his interest in old games was initially motivated by nostalgia, that in time developed into a broader historical interest. However, this doesn't mean that he stops playing *Super Mario Bros. 3* (Nintendo, 1988) and appreciating it for the restorative nostalgia it evokes about his earliest memories of playing videogames. The problem thus far in the research on the phenomenon of playing old games, is that it has been distorted by the notion that restorative nostalgia is the end goal for the player of old games. This model is meant to serve as a reminder that things become more difficult and complex, as we begin researching the actual experiences of these players.

The next model that will be presented, is meant to function as a typology of player types, based on this thesis' findings. It is by no means meant to be a comprehensive list of all types of players that play old games. Instead, it's meant to serve as a condensed visualization of my findings.

Types	Perceptions of old games (prioritized order)
Restorative nostalgists	1. Nostalgic objects, 2. Antithesis to modern games
Reflective nostalgists	1. Nostalgic objects, 2. Temporary break from modern games
Art historians	1. Steps in the evolution of videogames, 2. Techno-historic artefacts, 3. Nostalgic objects
Archaeologists	1. Curiosities, 2. Steps in the evolution of videogames, 3. Nostalgic objects
Historians of technology	1. Techno-historic artefacts, 2. Steps in the evolution of videogames, 3. Nostalgic objects

Figure 2. Typology of retrogaming player types. Made by the author

Here, the three engagements presented in the previous model are broken down into types of players. The three types after the nostalgists are part of the Historical Interest engagement. While the art historians and archaeologists have been properly presented in the analysis, the historian of technology is represented in my data by Christian, who is primarily interested in the history of technological developments surrounding videogames. Written next to each type, is the ways that these types perceive old games, in a prioritized manner. It has been decided to list the perceptions this way, to highlight that the perception is multi-faceted and not reduceable to a single perception. This way of visualizing the perceptions also helps me make an important point. All categories have the perception of old games as nostalgic objects. This is meant to highlight that all old games have the potential to be perceived as nostalgic objects, even if the player approaches it as, for example, an art historian. Some elements in the game might make the player think about a beloved game from their childhood. Then the engagement becomes nostalgic, if only for a moment. However, this still distinguishes it from the two nostalgist types at the top, where the old game is

primarily perceived as a nostalgic object. Also, this prioritized listing lets me acknowledge the complexities of each category. For example, while the archaeologist type may primarily be interested in unearthing curiosities of the past, they may also at times perceive a certain game as a step in the evolution of videogames, in this case an overlooked step. Finally, it should be pointed out that the types are not mutually exclusive, far from it. As the perceptions show, there is some overlap between the categories and an individual player may change between perceiving the same game in a number of different ways. This change in perception may then shift the player from one type to the other. Let me point out once again that this model of player types is not meant to be comprehensive. Instead it can function as a springboard into a more nuanced discussion of what the playing of old games can mean for different people in different contexts.

This typology also allows me to identify the type of player that other researchers have identified again and again, i.e. the compulsively nostalgic retrogamer that only plays old games to relive their past. If we were to use the vocabulary presented in the typology above, the retrogamer would be the restorative nostalgist. While I have just argued that an individual player may switch between the different types, it has not been my intention to negate the existence of players that can primarily be described as restorative nostalgists. One of my respondents, Hans, fits the description of the restorative nostalgist rather well. While he doesn't perceive old games to be the antithesis to modern games, the only old games he plays are the ones from his childhood, because they give him the ability to return to a simpler time. He also didn't express any interest in the history of games, stating that he once fell asleep to a documentary about videogame history (Hans, age 21, A53). The research that has been criticized until now isn't wrong in conceptualizing of *a* retrogamer, the problem is that they have conceptualized this type of player as *the* retrogamer, implying that this is the only type of player. Coupled with the discourses produced by marketing departments, developers and game journalists, it perpetually constructs the contemporary playing of old games as a nostalgic activity.

Finally, it will be argued that concepts stemming from history didactics could be used to better analyse what happens when a contemporary player engages with old games. As has been mentioned earlier, history didactics is a field within the larger discipline of history, that examines how contemporary societies and individuals relate to and use the past. It views history from an existential perspective, focussing on how the past manifests itself in everyday life and how the past is used by individuals and societies for a variety of reasons (Karlsson, 2008, pp. 25-26). While game studies scholars such as Suominen (2007, 2012) have used concepts from history didactics, such as historical culture and history-use, they are still mostly used to describe how playing old games is a nostalgic activity. As the data presented in this thesis suggests, the

engagement with old games is not necessarily motivated by an interest in somehow reconnecting with the past, but to understand, among other things, old development practices, or to play with forgotten curiosities, or to experience and understand the roots of a popular game series that still continues today. Moving on from these more personal uses of the past, it also seems fair to suggest that the past can be used as a resource to gain a certain cultural capital within certain circles and that this use of the past manifests itself mainly on the internet. The main takeaway from viewing the retrogaming community and the playing of old games through a history didactics lens, i.e. as a historical culture that is constantly negotiating its relation to the past, is the flexibility this gives the researcher to understand the practices they observe in a variety of different ways. If we choose to view the playing of old games as the manifestation of a certain historical culture, the concepts of historical consciousness and history-use would be useful to begin examining how the members of that culture understand the history of videogames differently, and what effect this has on the ways they engage with old games. This opens up new avenues of inquiry, where empirical research can be conducted to explore and perhaps identify the different historical consciousnesses that players of old games carry within them.

With that said, there are certain problems surrounding the use of concepts stemming from history didactics. Firstly, the concepts historical culture and history-use appear to be conceptualized markedly different from scholar to scholar. Karlsson (2008), defines a historical culture as a "chain of communication" between groups and individuals, where each receiver may also be a sender, that centres on the past (p. 38). Adriaanssen & Grever (2017), instead define it as "people's relationships to the past" (p. 73). These two conceptualizations seem to discuss the same thing but do so from very different points of origin. Where Karlsson's definition sees a historical culture as the sum of all overt communication between groups and individuals, Adriaanssen & Grever's definition seems to focus more on the individual's encounters and uses of the past, that aren't explicitly communicated to a receiver. Each conceptualization has its own methodical implications. Where Karlsson's broader study of a historical culture's communications implies the need to adopt a media studies approach, Adriaansen & Grever's implies a more phenomenological approach that focusses on the experiences of the individual. The same kind of problem can be identified in the ways different scholars define the concept of history-use. Bøe & Knutsen (2016) define history-use as something relating to "how a culture or society use the past in the form of memorials, holidays, festivals and other markings […]" (p. 16). Karlsson, on the other hand, conceives of history-use as something also done by individuals and may be something of a "highly private nature" (p. 60). While Nordgren (2016) agrees that history-use as a concept can be used to interrogate an individual's everyday uses of history (p. 6), he defines history-use as a "performative act conducted through communication" (p. 7). This conceptualization of history-use as an act of communication is in conflict with Karlsson's understanding of

history-use as something that could be done in privacy. Could this private history-use not simply be something an individual does to shape or expand their own historical consciousness? This focus on acts of communication probably stems from the fact that history didactics itself is primarily interested in investigating texts to gain insights into historical cultures, consciousnesses and uses (Karlsson, 2008, p. 54). There are some fundamental distinctions that haven't been made yet by history didactics scholars, which makes it harder for game studies scholars to smoothly adapt their concepts. Based on the new perspectives this thesis has unearthed, I find it salient to continue the phenomenological study of different players' everyday uses of old games. If history didactics concepts are to be used in such future investigations in a theoretically sound way, that implies that a systematic tweaking of the existing concepts from history didactics needs to be performed, so that they mesh theoretically with a phenomenological inquiry.

5.2 Historical play, nostalgic play and retrogaming

In this part of the discussion, it will be suggested that the field of study that researches contemporary engagements with old games, must broaden its scope and conceptual vocabulary to move beyond the notion, that all engagements with old games are inherently nostalgic. I would like to begin by taking a closer look at the three historically interested player-types, which I have called the art historian, the archaeologist and the historian of technology. What distinguishes these types of players from the nostalgists, is their motivation to play old games, based on an interest in the history of videogames. I find it salient to highlight these player types, because they indicate a particular way to play old games, that, to my knowledge, hasn't been identified in the literature before. I am suggesting that we could call their type of play activity *historical play*. This concept is meant to be understood as the antithesis to what we could call *nostalgic play*, where the playing of old games is motivated by the desire to engage with nostalgic emotions surrounding a particular game from an individual's past. Nostalgic play is to be understood as something different from retrogaming. Making these distinctions has certain implications. It suggests that we should consider the study of contemporary engagements with old games as a broader field of inquiry. If we want to understand why contemporary players engage with old games, we need to broaden our vocabulary.
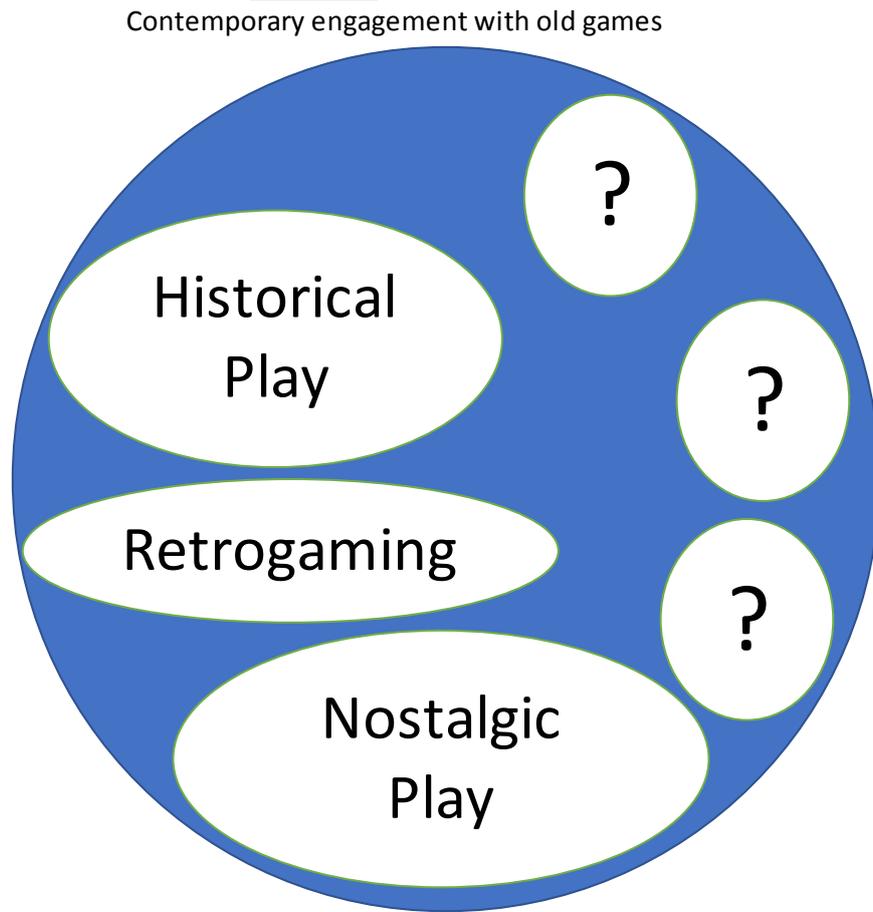
Contemporary engagement with old games

Figure 3. The field of study, contemporary engagement with old games. Made by the author

The above figure is meant to represent the field of study that concerns itself with researching the contemporary playing of old games. By introducing the concepts of historical play and nostalgic play, it is meant to highlight that there are several ways that players choose to engage with old games, implying that researchers may approach the subject from a variety of perspectives. The circles with question marks inside them are meant to refer to the potentially limitless types of engagements not yet identified by researchers. Also, this model is meant to challenge the current use of retrogaming as the catch-all term to refer to the contemporary playing and collecting of old games. It is quite simply a very imprecise term. As Garda (2013) has highlighted, the term *retro* conflates so many different aspects of games into a single, vague term that it almost becomes meaningless (p. 9). In the current literature, the concept of retrogaming is closely linked with notions of restorative nostalgia. However, when one considers Guffey's (2006) description of retro as a trend that denotes irreverence and non-seriousness towards the past (p. 14), it might be that the term retrogaming is an unfit term to describe the nostalgic engagement with old games. Based on the collected data and the characterization of the retrogamer by other scholars, there is little to suggest that the nostalgic engagement with old games has an irreverent tone. In fact, this irreverence is more in tune with

some aspects of the archaeologist player type. Perhaps we should consider the archaeologist as an irreverent retrogamer? Due to the somewhat incoherent use of the retro concept in game studies, nostalgic play might actually be a more precise term to describe what has thus far been called retrogaming. All in all, the main point of this paragraph and the above model, has been to highlight how the concept of retrogaming might be useful to describe certain aspects of the contemporary engagements with old games, but with the introduction of the concepts historical play and nostalgic, it is necessary to consider how the contemporary playing of old games can be researched from many different angles. The activity of historical play will now be described in more detail.

Historical play is meant to be understood as more than playing the game according to the way it's designed, and implies that the player is in a mood, where they are acutely aware of the videogame's age, and its place in the broader history of videogames. As Newman (2005) has argued, there is a difference between playing games and playing *with* games, with the latter referring to the myriad ways that players may "explore games and gameworlds as material for play rather than necessarily restrictive, rule-bound structures that push gamers down prescribed paths." (p. 60). When engaging in historical play, the games and gameworlds are not explored to come up with new challenges, but instead to gain a deeper understanding of a certain aspect of videogame history. This can be observed in Bjarne's retelling of his play experience with E.T. on the Atari 2600. His playing of the game isn't structured by the goals described by the game, but is primarily informed by his interest in understanding the failed floating mechanic (Bjarne, age 33, A10). Furthermore, this playing made him reflect on the design of a later more successful game, *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo, 1986). This suggests that the playing of a particular game, when it is approached with the intention of having it put into historical context, makes it a markedly different play experience. Arjoranta (2015) distinguishes between two types of hermeneutic relationships a player may have with a videogame. He calls the first one *real-time hermeneutics*, which is the "interpretation that is necessary to continue playing the game", referring to the constant interpretative process the player engages in, to understand what happens on-screen (Arjoranta, 2015, p. 65). The other relationship he calls *game hermeneutics*, where the game is interpreted as a meaningful object, and where the interpretation "may range from the aesthetic to the critical" (ibid., p. 65). While a player may be continually changing between the two hermeneutics, I would argue that the historical player has a certain predisposition for the game hermeneutic, and that their interpretation will be informed by their knowledge of game history. The player engages with the game hermeneutically, critically, to understand it in a historical context, as both an object and a gameplay experience that has been shaped by certain historical developments.

As the findings of this thesis have shown, the playing of old games, unsurprisingly, doesn't take place in a vacuum. Complex interactions are taking place between the past and present in the moment of play, physically as well as in the players mind. In Acland's (2007) words, the old and the new become materially entwined (p. xvii), creating new meanings and contexts that engender new experiences and perspectives. Lizardi's image of the player of old games as a subject transfixed by Harry Potter's Mirror of Erised is a gross oversimplification of the physical and mental processes involved in playing old games. Historical play exists at the intersection between the old games and the new, between the player's personal memories of videogames past and the whole of videogame history itself, not to mention the popular representations of the past found on Youtube, online forums and in books. While the writing on videogame history itself has evolved a critical perspective on the normative and unreflective histories produced in the past (Huhtamo, 2005; Therrien, 2012; Wade & Webber, 2016), it's time that studies into contemporary engagements with old games move away from describing these interactions as retrogaming. The concept of historical play is meant to highlight the fact that there is more to contemporary engagements with old games than nostalgic hyperbole and narcissism. Also, while historical play is meant to highlight the existential complexity of playing old games, it is also meant to highlight the interactions between the playing individual and the surrounding culture. As was shown in the analysis, certain games or moments in games are, to use Suominen & Sivula's words (2016), monumentalized by online retrogaming communities and thus become parts of videogame history that every member of the community should have knowledge of, or even better, have played. This can relate both to games that are universally praised, such as *Final Fantasy 6*, and those that are scorned, such as *Bubsy 3D* (Eidetic, 1996). This implies two different ways of approaching the study of historical play. The first is the one employed by this thesis, going out into the world and collecting data from players through interviews. That is the approach that provides new understanding and perspectives on the experience of playing and collecting old games. In this approach, semi-structured interviewing is particularly useful in producing as much data as possible in a single interview. However, research designs involving observation and/or contextual inquiry, would also be interesting to use, since they could provide more detailed data on aspects of retrogaming such as the social activity of playing old games. The second approach is the one already employed by Heineman (2014), Stuckey et al. (2015) and Suominen & Sivula (2016), namely discourse analytical research into the discourses about the past that take place on the internet and in the mass media. Right now, the discourse analytical approach is by far the most prolific one. I believe that both of these approaches may help to inform one another and produce new avenues of inquiry, since findings from one type of research project will have implications for the other. In doing so, new understandings will continually be produced that relate both to private and public engagements with videogame history.

5.3 Limitations of the research

5.3.1 Lack of possibility to determine causes

While it has been explained earlier how the phenomenological approach is unable to "explain or identify causes for phenomena" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 57), it should be highlighted as a limitation of the results. By engaging with the subject matter of retrogaming in the way this thesis has done, I believe that new perspectives have been unearthed, but due to the small sample size, it cannot be generalized. In the context of this thesis' scope, a sample of 9 is an acceptable size. However, due to the complex interactions between player and game, player and hardware, individual memory and collectively constructed heritage, it's difficult to say if I would identify the same motivations for playing old games, had I recruited 9 other respondents. With that said, even with 9 other informants, I still believe I would have identified motivations besides nostalgia for playing old games. To return to the topic at hand, it is worth considering how one would even determine the cause for people playing old games. Who decides what a plausible cause for the emergence of retrogaming is? Is an economic, sociological or perhaps a socio-economical perspective the right way to approach this question? A recent study by the Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE) and Ipsos Connect's GameTrack, which collected quantitative data from players in the UK, Spain, Germany and France, found that 49% of game consumers in those countries cited nostalgia as a motivation for engaging with old games and consoles, as well as their rereleases (Dring, 2018). Another interesting finding from that study, was that of those 49%, "66% like to revisit games from their youth, while 67% like to play older games that they missed" (Dring, 2018). It's interesting to note that the two categories of players just mentioned, have fundamentally different motivations. While the former is engaging in something motivated by personal nostalgia, the latter could be motivated by a general interest in videogame history. However, the wording "older games that they missed" is implying that these players were alive when these older games were released. Once again, a discourse is being reproduced where a player of old games cannot be below a certain age, based on normative assumptions.

5.3.2 Sole focus on the Danish retrogaming community

I decided early on in the project, that I wanted to focus on the Danish community of retrogamers. This was mostly done for practical reasons. I was most interested in interviewing respondents face-to-face, to have as rich an interaction as possible with them. As has already been made clear, it wasn't possible for me to exclusively perform face-to-face interviews. There has been very little research on the retrogaming community in Denmark, and the only paper I have been able to uncover frames the activity in the context of a museum exhibition (Mortensen & Kapper, 2015). Due to this lack of research, it has been very difficult

for me to contextualize how a Danish member of the retrogaming community might be different from a French or Japanese one. Schiermer & Carlsen (2016) have researched a phenomenon they call ironic nostalgia, based on their analysis of online communications surrounding the yearly, primarily Scandinavian ritual of watching the Disney Christmas Show. They describe this type of nostalgia to be directed at so-called "failed objects" of the recent past (Schiermer & Carlsen, 2016, p. 4). Does this mean that an ironic view of the past is a more predominantly Scandinavian phenomenon? This could have implications for the viability of my archaeologist player type, who particularly enjoys playing "bad" or "broken" old games. Due to the exploratory nature of this thesis' investigation, it is difficult for me to say whether there is something particularly idiosyncratic about my respondents, due to their national and cultural backgrounds as Danes. Is a Pole perhaps less inclined to engage ironically with the past? To properly identify differences, comprehensive research would need to be done on retrogaming cultures in other regions. It would be surprising if similar qualitative studies of regional retrogaming cultures wouldn't unearth a host of new perspectives on why players choose to engage with old games.

Another lacking aspect of my inquiry into the Danish retrogaming community should be mentioned. As I found out through my interviews, there are quite physical manifestations of the Danish retrogaming community in the streets of Copenhagen. The first is a combined hairdresser, old game shop and arcade called *Ruben og Bobby*, the other is an immensely popular bar and arcade called *Bip Bip Bar*, that recently moved into bigger accommodations on Nørrebro. 7 out of 9 respondents mentioned either one or both of these places. Had I known about these establishments before, it could have been interesting to investigate the Danish retrogaming community through them. It could potentially have made recruitment easier, it would however also risk that I got too much of a Copenhagen-centric view on the playing of old games. From a methodological perspective, it could have been interesting to mix observation and interviewing methods, to investigate how old games are perceived and used in the context of a bar. Interviewing in a controlled context would still be the main data collection method, but field observation mixed with *ethnographic* interviewing (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 176) would possibly unearth even more perspectives on the uses of old games.

5.3.3 Lack of focus on archivist and curator roles

Another aspect where the results show their limitations, is in the lack of focus on the archivist and curator roles. I have only mentioned these types in passing in the final section of the analysis, but for this thesis I have chosen to focus on the playing of old games. I became aware of my lacking results relating to my respondents collecting practices, when I read Egan's (2007) article on horror VHS collectors, which was used in the final section of the analysis, to contextualize my results. While I do touch upon collecting and

curation habits throughout the analysis, it would have been salient to give these practices more attention. The choice to focus on the playing of old games, was motivated by several things early on in the process. As is probably abundantly clear by now, the major motivation to embark upon this exploratory study, has been to argue, based on qualitative data, that contemporary players play old games for reasons other than nostalgia. Also, while Heineman's (2014) paper on retrogaming has been criticized for framing it as an inherently nostalgic practice, it argued convincingly how playing old games is another kind of historical experience than with other media.

> "[O]ne can (re)consume items from the past and (re)experience, (re)create, and more directly interact with historical artefacts than is possible through other forms of media. Purchasing a used Nintendo Entertainment System and playing the original *Final Fantasy* game more than twenty years after it was initially released results in a much different kind of nostalgic experience […] than can be provided by more passive nostalgic experiences, such as viewing a film or playing records" (Heineman, 2014, p. 15, original emphasis)

Having read Heineman's article early in the thesis process, this paragraph helped me decide to focus on the activity of playing old games, since it is a unique aspect of engaging with old games. This informed the wording of the questions in the interview guide, which all put on an emphasis on playing rather than collecting. With that said, investigations into collection and curation habits deserve as much attention as playing. Further research into these topics could provide insights into how the archivist and curator roles interact, and what distinguishes them. Another interesting aspect of these types is how an individual may fluently change between the two roles. Further research into these practices will also help to determine, whether the current terminology is the most fitting.

5.3.4 Broad problem statement

Finally, it will be argued that the limitations of the results are the consequence of an overly broad problem statement. As an exploratory study into something not previously researched through interviewing, it is no surprise that a very wide net has been cast. This is especially clear when looking at the interview guide, that mostly consists of nondirective questions, which allow the respondent to "talk in an unconstrained manner" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 207). This is of course also a consequence of choosing to conduct a semi-structured interview. While the scope of the study and number of participants is acceptable for a master's thesis, if this where an actual study, it would perhaps be better to refer to this particular research project as a *pilot study*. Kim (2010) defines a pilot study as a "small-scale methodological test conducted to

prepare for a main study and is intended to ensure that methods or ideas would work in practice" (p. 191). Kim goes on to write that "a pilot study can test a research protocol, such as a data collection method and a sample recruitment strategy" (ibid., pp. 191-192). Viewed as a pilot study, it becomes easier to identify this thesis' merits. I would argue that this thesis has shown that qualitative interviewing is a powerful data collection method. The collected data suggests that people may play old games for a variety of reasons, and this is especially helpful for potential future interviewing, where specific interview guides could be prepared for interviewing different types of players. Due to the broad problem statement, this thesis has merely scratched the surface in identifying a variety of practices that all deserve to be researched further.

5.4 Methodological reflections

5.4.1 Lack of female respondents

While I was in contact with two potential female respondents, I failed to recruit them. Both wrote on my Facebook post that they were interested in participating, but never responded to the follow-up e-mail. I am unsure about what made them decide not to participate. I regret not having female respondents for a number of reasons. It would have been interesting to hear about their experiences, since female player perspectives are non-existent in the literature on retrogaming culture and the playing of old games in general. It is a well-established fact that women get systematically marginalized in videogaming culture (Paaßen, Morgenroth & Stratemeyer, 2016). This happens during the playing itself, especially in online games (Kaye & Pennington, 2016), but also in the discourses on gamer identity produced by game reviews (Ivory, 2009) and marketing (Chess, Evans & Baines, 2016). This is the case even though the population of players in several western countries are almost evenly split between male and female players (Jayanth, 2014). I realize now that what I should have done, was to post a Facebook post asking specifically for female players who play old games. In my two recruitment posts, I wrote a headline where I stated I was looking for "RETROGAMERS/COLLECTORS". At that point in time, I found the term 'retrogamer' to be an acceptable shorthand to refer to players of old games. Thinking about it now, I can see how using the term 'gamer' might connote something misogynistic, in the wake of the GamerGate controversy, where parts of the player community, self-identifying as 'hardcore gamers', threatened and systematically harassed visible women in videogame culture, including several female researchers (Mortensen, 2016). The fact that I as a male make a post where I ask only gamers to respond, could be interpreted by a potential female respondent, that she is not welcome. Due to recent events such as GamerGate, it is quite understandable if my use of the gamer term has scared them away.

5.4.2 Lack of coherence in interview context

While most of my interviews were performed face-to-face in a small meeting room at the IT-University, two were performed at the respondent's residence, one was interviewed via telephone and another via Skype. Let me begin by considering the problems surrounding interviewing respondents in their homes. In one of my interviews, the respondent sometimes lost focus because he wanted to show me a game or piece of hardware from his collection. While this had the positive effect of helping the respondent to think about new things to say, the audio recording fell short in recording the interaction properly. With that said, I had a positive experience at the other in-residence interview, when a respondent began telling a personal narrative about the loss of game boxes throughout his childhood. Here, the co-existence of his collection gave him the ability to use the boxed games as props for his story, which helped deepen my immediate understanding of his experience of loss. With that said, I would now have preferred to have conducted all of my interviews at the ITU. When comparing the data from in-residence interviews with that collected at the ITU, it's clear that there were more unproductive digressions in the in-residence interviews. At the more neutral interview site of the meeting room, it was easier for me to direct the flow of the interview and to identify subjects of interest. There were several problems surrounding the telephone interview. For unknown reasons, the respondent's phone kept shutting off. This meant that the interview started and stopped several times, until it was decided that the interview would be continued at a later date, when the phone was in working order. While Lindlof & Taylor (2011) highlight, that data gathered from telephone interviewing is highly comparable with data gathered in a face-to-face interview (pp. 189-190), it is obviously highly problematic to abruptly stop an interview mid-question and to continue 4 days later. Due to my extensive note-taking, it was possible for me to begin the interview again at about the same point where it was prematurely terminated. However, it is impossible for me to say whether the respondent would have answered the same way if the initial interview had been conducted smoothly. While there are a lot of practical reasons for the interviews to take place in different places and through different means, I would have liked to keep it more stringent. A consistent interview context would also help make the data more comparable.

5.4.3 Need for more probing during interviews

Looking at the interview data now, it has become clear how fragmented much of it is. While I certainly have collected thick descriptions, I have collected very few narratives from my respondents. Although I have gained a lot of insight into how the respondents relate to certain aspects of playing old games, I haven't necessarily gained a clear picture of why their relations are the way they are. Reflecting on it now, I can identify several places where further probing into a particular experience could have deepened my

understanding of their engagements with old games. With that said, for the purposes of a study on this scale, the shallowness of the data is acceptable. To my knowledge, this type of qualitative interview study into the playing of old games is the first of its kind. Because of this, it can be expected that a first inquiry will need to ask a lot of broad questions, to identify what aspects of the phenomenon would be interesting to study further. If this were not the end of this study, it would be prudent to schedule new interviews with all respondents and to develop new interview guides, that were tailored towards probing deeper into the practices and types of engagement that the respondent expressed in their initial interview. Lindlof & Taylor (2011) define rapport as a mutual respect of each other's viewpoints and an understanding of the interview context and stress the importance of developing rapport with respondents of an interview study (pp. 193-194). It is difficult for me as the interviewer to say whether rapport was actually developed but based on the lack of awkward silences and many laughs during the interviews, I think it went well. Because of this, it would be interesting to perform another round of interviews, since the respondent hopefully would feel even more comfortable in the interview context and communicate even more about their interactions with old games.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has interviewed 9 Danes that self-identify as retrogamers, to gain a deeper understanding of why they play old games and how they play them. By employing a phenomenological perspective, it has been the intention of this thesis to investigate how old games manifest themselves in the lifeworlds of the people interviewed. This has been done in an attempt to move beyond the current academic discourse on the playing of old games, that exclusively characterizes the playing of old games as a nostalgic activity, performed by individuals aged 30 and above.

As was shown in the analysis, five motivations for engaging with old games were identified. The first one was nostalgia, where the playing of old games was motivated by an interest in engaging with nostalgic emotions. The second motivation, called the amateur archaeologist, was mainly interested in unearthing curiosities and overlooked games from the past, to appreciate their weirdness. The third motivation, called the amateur art historian, chose to delve into the canon of videogame history, playing those games that have been deemed classics, to get a deeper understanding of textual and design developments. The fourth motivation was informed by an interest in the technological development of games, as well as an appreciation of the physicality and durability of old games and hardware. The fifth motivation to engage with old games, was based on the pragmatic use of older games as simpler and/or more challenging playing experiences. Based on the identification of the three motivations that are historically motivated, the concepts of historical play and nostalgic play were presented in the discussion. These concepts were introduced to broaden the vocabulary of the field of research, that investigates contemporary engagements with old games. It was argued that the concept of retrogaming is an unfit term to use when referring to all engagements with old videogames and that the current research is marred by describing all of these play activities as retrogaming.

6.1 Future research

As has been mentioned earlier, the results of this thesis have the potential to open up new avenues of inquiry in research on contemporary engagements with old videogames. The typology presented in the discussion could be used as the basis for a series of new interview studies, that could give the typology a more stable empirical foundation. The typology would hopefully be expanded as well as problematized by such research. Another type of research endeavour could investigate what type of knowledge is actually produced by those players, that engage in historical play. This thesis has suggested that historically interested players engage in a type of informal genealogy-construction. However, this is mere speculation. This thesis has done little more than observe that some players play old games to get a deeper historical

knowledge. By interviewing players in more depth about their historically based motivations to play, more data could be gathered on what they perceive as a learning experience in and around the context of play. Finally, on a more theoretical level, a thorough theoretical review of history didactics concepts and discussion about its applicability to game studies scholarship would be useful to get a clearer picture of whether these concepts could be useful in the future.

For now, I think it would be advisable to prioritize the empirical research into the players themselves, to actually go out and collect data about their practices, experiences and perspectives. In the introduction to his book, Guins describes how, in his case, videogame history researchers need to get their hands dirty, to go out into the world "where the inhalation of dust and the need to wipe away the grime from your brow go hand in hand with researching game history" (Guins, 2014, p. 27). Those researchers that want to investigate how the history of videogames manifests itself in everyday lives of players, also need to get their hands dirty, conceptually, theoretically and methodically. Based on the interesting data my own humble journey into the lifeworlds of 9 Danish players has produced, I see the phenomenological, qualitative inquiry into the everyday lives of players to be a very fruitful approach. It makes it possible for us to understand more about what importance old games have for certain players and how differently they may engage with them. In the same way that Guins has given a voice to the discarded videogames of the past, it is high time that the silent players of old games, those that don't make their opinions known online, are given a voice in the literature.

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