Jaakko Suominen, Anna Sivula

A Place for a Nintendo?
Discourse on locale and players' topobiographical identity in the late 1980s and the early 1990s

1. Background: gaming memories as topobiographies

> At first, I got to know Nintendo games before I was at school, at my relatives' and friends' residences, but in the early 1990s, I had my own NES [Nintendo Entertainment System console] as well. Games were played at mine or my friends' homes where there was a gaming device available. At my friends' homes, playing games was usually a social event in such a way that even when someone was playing a single-player game, someone was watching the game, or we took turns playing games. A unique situation, which was often repeated, was playing games on the ferry boats to Sweden (especially the Silja Symphony and Silja Serenade Ferries [between Finland and Sweden]) in the children's room. There I got to know many games and sometimes also played with strangers. Very often it was difficult to get me out of the gaming room, even to go to sleep. (55-M-1984.[1])

The citation above is a single answer to an online inquiry consisting of questions about Nintendo console gaming memories in Finland in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. The particular piece of text is an answer to an open question about where and with whom the play occurred. Most of the answers were very brief, consisting of laconic mentions of place of play and the possible naming of who the informant gamed with, but this specific writer has described his play in a much more comprehensive manner. Thus, the person is portraying the place of play, the situation and the social context in such a way that it sounds like an excerpt from an

---

[1] Coding of research data: id. Number of the participant-Gender-Year of Birth (example: Participant 55, male, born 1984: 55-M-1984). The citations have been translated from Finnish to English by Jaakko Suominen.

autobiographical presentation. [2] The autobiography as a whole, pictures the beginning of the play, and reveals how the change took place. On one hand, it describes the normal routines of gaming situations, and on the other hand, it brings up regular and specific exceptions to mundane gaming conditions. The exception in this case is named with precision (a particular ferry boat from Finland to Sweden) and emphasis is placed on the gaming company and the extraordinary duration of gaming.

Our study methodology resembles a digital oral history. The research data have been produced in digital interaction with the players. The open-ended questions of our online inquiry encouraged the players to tell about their past. These life-stories, which can be referred to as personal media histories or "technobiographies" (Kennedy 2003), are important to the informants themselves as a tool in identity work (Sivula 2015, 57–58) and also provide researchers with multifaceted information on past media experiences. Media anthropologist David Morley (2007, 204) draws attention to "intimate histories of how we live with a variety of media" underlining specifically "how our personal memories – especially of childhood – are formulated around media experiences, such as emblematic programmes and television characters." (See also Lavin 1990; Morley 2003, 444.) While widening this earlier television-oriented conceptualization by Morley and other researchers, typical of late 20th Century media ethnographic studies in anthropology, sociology and cultural history, we argue that emblematic gaming devices, games and game characters also create personal media memories (on the memory work of digital game players, see also e.g. Stuckey et al. 2015).

[2] On the nature of autobiographical sources, see e.g. Marwick 1970, 134–135.

Personal media memories typically attach not only to social networks, artifacts, and a specific time, but to particular places. We can think of these writings as *topobiographies*, a concept that connects places and memories which was introduced by cultural geographer Pauli Tapani Karjalainen (2009).[3] According to Karjalainen (2009), topobiography is "an expression of the course of life as it relates to the places one has lived." Elsewhere he notes that biographical places "are deeply personal and uniquely memory-laden." The process of remembering is not only temporal but also spatial (Karjalainen 2004, 63). Our memories are born from the places we have lived, and we remember those places as images of our life (Karjalainen 2009, 91. See also Karjalainen 2006). Karjalainen states that memories of place are unique and individual. No-one remembers a specific place the same as others, so all remembered places are different from each other. That makes a topobiography an interpretation of the biographical and individual experience of place (Karjalainen 2006, 83).

In this study we respect to the original idea of Karjalainen, but give the concept of topobiography a less existential and less poetic meaning. We want to investigate whether it is possible to use the concept of topobiography as a methodological tool, as a way of connecting an individual's recollection about certain places to the experiences of digital culture in specific locales. The topobiographical memories of playing games may thus be considered geobiographies, or, as we understand them, *autotopobiographical experiences*. When these autotopobiographical experiences are separated from the context of a subject's own identity

---

[3] Formerly, he primarily referred to a similar issue using the term, *geobiography (*Karjalainen 2004). According to Karjalainen, geobiography is a story that one tells about the places of one's life. The idea of telling about certain places is connected to the individual process of working on the subject's identity. (Karjalainen 2004, 64–65). A geobiography seems, according to Karjalainen, always to be produced by the remembering persons themselves.

work, we refer to them as topobiographies, to indicate that they are the construction of researchers.

2. Research data and methods

This study focuses on players' *topobiographical identity* from an oral historical point of view (Fingerroos 2010, 61 and 75; Fingerroos & Haanpää 2006, 25–29) using Nintendo-related source material. Our informants responded to the above-mentioned online inquiry about playing games with early Nintendo consoles and devices in Finland in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. The inquiry was conducted in Finnish in January 2015, comprising thirteen open-ended questions dealing with Nintendo games and devices and cultural practices around them in the late 1980s and early 1990s. 115 players responded to the questions. 42 of the participants were female and 72 male, while one respondent did not answer the gender question. The majority were born in the 1980s or earlier, with seven respondents stating that they were born in the 1990s, even though the inquiry dealt with Nintendo consoles in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Most of the respondents were 6–15 years old during the appearance of Nintendo consoles in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Therefore, the data shows that console gamers were, on average, younger than computer game players, a fact that has also been recognized in contemporary sources such as computer and game magazines (Suominen 2015).

In this analysis, we focus on the ways in which respondents construct their topobiographical identity when they use terms such as "local" and "location" to situate their play activities in specific places. The analysis of the data is interpretive rather than statistical (see Livingstone 1992, 116), though we demonstrate how common certain articulations are. Whilst

we are not able to make generalizations – for example, about how console gaming penetrated Finland and how many players there were in different regions of Finland – we are able to provide examples of various activities and social networks connected to gaming. According to the Italian oral history researcher Alessandro Portelli, oral historical sources do not expressly tell what people did but merely what they wanted to do, what they believed themselves to be doing and what they later thought that they did. Portelli also emphasizes the imaginary, both symbolic and desirable, features of people's interpretations and descriptions (Portelli 2004, 56–58). Such aspects can be observed in our data when analyzing the emotions and affects that have been catalyzed by games and gaming, and recollections of these, as well as how informants make comparisons and valuations between different games, gaming devices, social relations, and how they describe situations in which they obtained game media. Further, when we place emphasis on the connections between these elements and the descriptions of place and space, we are able to conduct an analysis of informants' topobiographical identity, even though the references to places and locations are, for the most part, only brief. Therefore, we operate with a rather simple concept of place. With a different kind of research data, we would have more profoundly analyzed the *practiced places* of gaming.

The chapter critically examines the concept of "the local" in the context of the cultural history of digital gaming. We analyze the significance of locale in the creation (or working, Sivula 2015) of players' identities and their recollections of gaming. The chapter addresses two ways in which something can be considered local, or in which gaming may be situated relative to specific places. The first section of the chapter focuses on gaming's *domestic context* and the social relationships within it. The latter section places emphasis on the *engagement of gaming* in public or semi-public environments, and hence, pays attention not only to gameplay situations

but also to the purchasing of games and gaming devices. We will analyze how and why participants refer to places as well as how and why they mention the specific and singular places where gaming activities occurred.

In addition to Karjalainen's concept of topobiography, we also utilize theories of the domestication of media technologies. Domestication theories (see e.g. Pantzar 1996; Lie & Sørensen 1996; Silverstone at al. 1992; Lehtonen 2003; Morley 2003; Silverstone 2006; Haddon 2007), as well as Igor Kopytoff's (1986) ideas of the cultural biography of things, are used as starting points and for heuristic inspiration when pondering questions of players' topobiographical identity work. The aim is not to develop the domestication of technology theory itself. We share with other scholars ideas about the co-construction of technology: that users and use shape technology while technology shapes users at the same time (Oudshoorn & Pinch 2003). Living within the built environment – which consists not only of digital objects but tangible buildings and other constructions – is a constant interaction between inhabitants and technology. According to Thomas Gieryn (2002, 72) "the play of agency and structure happens as we build: we mold buildings, they mold us, we mold them anew…"

In this vein, we suggest that games and gaming devices have helped to form domestic media such as television (Silverstone 1994), even though television has been portrayed as a family media more frequently than gaming. Likewise, when studying the domestication of digital games, one has to notice their so-called double articulation: consoles are technological objects but at the same time, they are forms of media, for which one has to obtain various contents (games) (cf. Silverstone et al. 1992, 21). On one hand, a user is domesticating a hardware platform while on the other hand, the user is also domesticating game contents. When applying Mikael Hård's and Andrew Jamison's (2005) model of the cultural appropriation of science and

technology, this chapter mostly follows the discursive and user dimensions of appropriation when studying gaming experiences and the ways in which they are recollected.

The local and contingent nature of digital cultures have recently been emphasized in the literature (see e.g. Stuckey et al. 2015). There seems to be some tension between the sociological locality of digital cultures and the local or national characteristics of disembedded and deterritorialized global digital culture (e.g. Hand 2016, 4–7). Even though this chapter offers Finland as a case study, we are not particularly interested in its local or national game history. Rather, in this chapter we are concerned with relating cultural historical and anthropological studies of media and games with the concepts of space and place (e.g. Morley & Robins 1995; Morley 2007; Hand 2016).

3. Early home video game console boom in Finland

Digital gaming only started to become commonplace in Finland after the period that has been called the "Golden Age" of arcade and home console gaming in the United States that ended in "the Video Game Crash" in 1983 (Kent 2001, 123–177; Payne 2008, 52; Eddy 2012; see also Wolf 2012). Even though Finns became familiar with arcade and some console games (see Saarikoski, Suominen and Reunanen 2017) in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the popularity of digital games was based more on electronic hand-held devices (such as Nintendo Game & Watch) and home computers, especially from 1983 onwards (Saarikoski & Suominen 2009). It was easier for households to obtain home computers (such as the Commodore VIC-20, Commodore 64, or Sinclair Spectrum) than videogame consoles, because home computers were compatible with rational consumer ethos. Machines were marketed as being usable for many

purposes and advertised as essential tools for learning the skills needed in the future information society, not only as mere gaming devices. Even though in many cases they were used for playing games, computers had more potential and were considered serious and expensive machines meant for "correct use" as opposed to machines intended only for gaming (Suominen 2015. See also Pantzar 2000, 100–101; Saarikoski 2004).

The arrival of new consoles in the late 1980s – especially the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) and the Sega Master System – changed the situation. Computers and consoles were no longer viewed as alternatives to the same degree. The late 1980s and early 1990s can be referred to as the first console gaming boom in Finland, even though console gaming did not really become mainstream until the late 1990s, with the Sony PlayStation. Positive economic growth in the late 1980s was one reason why the earlier frugal consumer ethos started to fracture and it became socially acceptable to obtain more consumer electronic appliances, for entertainment's sake. Likewise, the playing of computer games raised the potential of a gaming-literate generation interested in trialing new products and willing to introduce these to their younger siblings or their own children (Suominen 2015).

In the early 1990s, the penetration of consoles in Finland was not as high as in Japan, the United States, and Sweden, but it was nonetheless substantial. In its second issue in 1992, *MikroBitti,* a Finnish computer hobbyist magazine, reported on the purchase of the 100,000th Nintendo NES console. The information was probably based on the statistics provided by the Nintendo distributor. According to the news piece, while over 5% of Finnish households had a Nintendo, in Sweden more than 10% had the same console, in the US more than 30%, and in Japan more than 40% owned a Nintendo console (*MB* 2/1992, 8, uutiset, 100 000 x Nintendo).

The first console gaming boom can be roughly divided into two imbricated phases or waves. In the first wave, 1987–1989, the new consoles were introduced to Finnish players – some of whom were so young that they didn't have any recollection of the earlier consoles, such as Atari 2600 or Mattel Intellivision, that were known but not that commonly used in Finland in the early 1980s. To introduce the new Nintendo and Sega consoles, Finnish computer magazines compared the Nintendo and Sega devices to the early 1980s consoles as well as to popular home computers and their games. The strategy was quite obvious but effective, because as in many other countries such as the UK, home computers in Finland had been transformed from multi-purpose machines to the primary digital gaming devices (Haddon 1992, 89). In this way, home computers domesticated digital gaming and provided the standard of gaming to which console gaming was compared. On the other hand, the comparison with the computer was a way to show the limitations of video gaming devices, as consoles were not yet marketed as home media centers such as e.g. the Sony PlayStation 2 was much later; at that time, consoles were still viewed as machines that were used purely for gaming.

In the late 1980s, consoles become a companion of the television set. The home computer no longer competed with television viewing for the use of the household's primary television set, due to the increasing use of secondary television sets and the dedicated computer monitor. Computer magazines created the need for console novelties and mapped potential consumer groups: consoles were able to be used by children while home computers were reserved for other use, and perhaps, also for hardcore gaming.

In the second wave of the first console boom in Finland, 1990–1992, consoles and their games became more popular, even though they did not gain everybody's approval. Some

extreme examples of controversies and conflicts between computer and console gamers were referred to in computer magazines as “console hatred,” and the situation resembled other “machine wars” that had been typical in computer and game hobbyist circles (Saarikoski & Reunanen 2014). However, because of the international boom of console gaming, computer magazines increased their console themed content, and some unique game console-related cultural practices began to emerge, e.g. around console club magazines. Finland’s economic depression (1992–1993) was a major factor contributing to the end of the first console boom. The focus of digital gaming turned toward PC gaming for a few years. In addition, the technological changes in console generations and home computer generations began to shift – as well as the international discussion on video gaming.

4. Places for play

The oral historical material used in this chapter, provides a somewhat different perspective on game history compared to contemporary sources such as computer hobbyist magazines from the 1980s and the early 1990s. People recounting their memories don’t tend to relate contradictions between different game cultures, articulate economic booms or recessions, or focus on dating turning points or shifts in attitudes. Console gaming memories are loaded with references to everyday experiences. Obtaining a game device or game is a turning point, and experiences of social interaction in gaming. Memories of situations in which informants were winning (playing the game through, “beating” the game, etc.) are often partially nostalgized, effecting the ways in which informants perceive changes in gaming cultures. In this context, nostalgization refers to the situation where the informant emphasizes positive gaming experiences and recollects their memories as a gaming fan within a nostalgic discursive

framework of remembrance (on various forms of simple, reflexive and interpretative nostalgia, see Davis 1979; Suominen, Reunanen and Remes 2015).

The places of childhood gaming were often closely attached in our research data to the family home of the lived past. The social context of the topobiographical experiences cannot be reconstructed: “We live in the places. Our memories are made by them and they are nothing but our memories; mnemonic pictures of how we lived.” (Karjalainen 2006, 91.) The last referent behind the memory is the irreversible *pastness,* “*passéité,”* of the past. (Ricoeur 2000, 7.)

Place in social relations – domestic context

One is able to divide places of play mentioned in the online responses, into roughly four groups. Informants variously remembered playing games at home, at friends’ residences, at relatives’ households, and sometimes elsewhere. The descriptions of places that are most often reflected upon with social relations, can be referred to as the *domestic context*. This seems obvious, particularly when answers relate to consumer electronic user experiences, but the domestic context does not only refer to homes or households, even though it usually is related to somebody’s home or family ties. David Morley (2003, 435) writes that one must study technologies that have been domesticated but at the same time, one must still notice how domesticity itself has been dislocated. We therefore argue that domestic context is also relevant when the playing of games has taken place outside of households, for example, during holiday trips and even in public places, which in this research context does not refer to arcade game centers, but rather to hobby clubs and the play rooms of ferries between Finland and Sweden. Such places can be seen as extensions or annexes of domesticity (cf. Silverstone 1994, 24), with

domestic context recognising the video gaming device as a form of family or family-tied social media.

Even though one's home was the most commonly mentioned place for playing Nintendo games (90 mentions in the research material), in many circumstances the earliest gaming experiences took place at somebody else's home, as in this example: "First [I played] with friends because I didn't have a machine, but later [I played] at home when I got my own Nintendo" (51-M-1980). Citations like this demonstrate preferences in playing video games. Game cultural gravity is pulling towards ownership and playing at one's own home, and this gravitational movement is a part of the video game console domestication process.

We can think of domestic video gaming on one hand as the "home as an arcade". The arcadization of the home saw electronic entertainment that had been consumed outside households come to homes. Alternatively, we can refer to Raymond Williams' (1974), Lynn Spigel's (1992) and David Morley's (2003; 2007, 199) concepts of mobile privatization, where media culture provides dual satisfactions: "allowing people to simultaneously 'stay home', safe within the realm of their familiar ontological security and travel (imaginatively or 'virtually') to 'places that previous generations could never imagine visiting'"(Morley 2007, 199). The argument was used occasionally in home console advertising in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, resonating with the ways that television sets were advertised to nuclear families in the 1950s.

Even though playing console games has often been advertised as social, the games were not necessary played in the company of others. Playing alone was mentioned quite often, at informants' own homes (35 mentions). Solo play also appeared in some responses drawing

comparisons between early and current gaming preferences: “[I played] Most of the time alone, I still prefer playing alone compared to online gaming” (41-M-1987). Absent were any accounts of informants playing alone outside their own homes. On the contrary, they were explicit about those situations when they played alone: “Home alone, with others when visiting” (44-M-1976). Sonia Livingstone (1992, 121) has noted how domestic technologies appear to have distinct roles in social interaction. They can facilitate interaction between people or substitute contact with person-object interplay. Our video gaming examples show how these two categories can vary and mix in time and space.

There were 54 references to playing with family members. Participants mentioned playing games with a brother (28 references), sister (14), mother (6) or father (7), as in the photograph in Figure 1. Five of the participants wrote that they had played at home with their cousins. Even more often compared to playing alone, the informants brought up playing with friends (36), not only at home but in other places as well.

Figure 1. Father and child playing Nintendo tabletop electronic game (probably *Donkey Kong JR*) in Orivesi. The flowers on the table indicate that the photo was taken at Christmas time. Courtesy of Tampere Museums / The Finnish Museum of Games. Photo Kirsti Sakko 1986.

Ownership of a video gaming provided an interest factor and produced techno-social capital for its owner. Informants recalled that they had visited their neighbour’s house, even though the neighbours didn’t belong to their normal circle of friends, because the neighbours owned a gaming device that they did not. In these cases, a younger child served as a gaming

companion: “At home, I played with my sister. A boy next door had many more games, so I used to hang around there a lot. Especially when he also got [--] a Super Nintendo!” (17-F-1981). 76 informants mentioned that they played games at their friend’s home, sometimes referring more generally to the joy of playing video games together, as in this example: “It was just great to rent a NES console from a video rental store during a weekend and stay overnight at a friend’s place, or have friends over to our home” (33-M-1977). (On rental situation, see Figure 2.)

Further away from home

When analyzing those answers that touched on playing games in places other than homes and their neighbourhood, we can observe the gradual mobilization of gaming related to journeys. Some informants remembered playing during vacations (6 mentions). The hand-held Nintendo Gameboy device was used during car and train trips (5 mentions): “[I played] Also Gameboy during journeys in trains, cars and wherever”(33-M-1977). The Gameboy was further mentioned in a different context: “I was able to play Gameboy, using a borrowed device, with family friends during the winter holiday and later on, when I had a summer job in the strawberry fields, where I played with a device that belonged to that family’s children”(21-F-1979). Hand-held consoles were part of a more general mobilization of electronic entertainment, seen with the introduction of devices such as the Sony Walkman, and later on with mobile phones and MP3-players (Parikka & Suominen 2006). Media historian Patrice Flichy (1995, 165) calls the Walkman “a sort of prosthesis which changes people’s relationship with music.” In a similar manner, we could name hand held game devices as prostheses that changed people’s relationship with (digital) gaming.

Four informants stated that they had played console games in play rooms during ferry cruises between Finland and Sweden. Whilst probably specific to Finnish and Swedish players, these "Sweden boats" were very specific places for many game cultural experiences. The ferries also had slot machines, roulette tables and arcade video game cabinets that different age groups rarely had opportunities to play on-shore due to the legislative age restrictions of the casino industry as well as social norms. The variety of gaming activities was one of the main attractions of cruises, in addition to tax-free shopping and partying.

Playing video games on "Sweden boats" and other equivalent places, such as amusements parks, are examples of the "ongoing transformation of the relationships between public and private spheres" (Morley 2007, 218). They can be perceived as both privatizing public space and the (re-)escaping of video gaming from homes to public places (Morley 2007, 216–218), or semi-public places that some researchers have referred to as third-spaces or hybrid spaces (E.g. Souza e Silva 2009; Parikka & Suominen 2006).[4] Such hybrid spaces have altered the previous topobiographical experiences for good. The contemporary digital gamer's sense of location will be profoundly different than it was in the times of the Super Nintendo.

Playing while traveling might have been an exception to everyday life, but it was still part of repetitive experience, a sort of recurring play ritual (on everyday life and its connection to media and technology, see e.g. de Certeau 1984; Aune 1996; Silverstone 1994). On these ferries, the young informants had permission to play more, and in some playrooms, they were able to trial games they would not have had the opportunity to play at home.

[4] According to Souza e Silva (2009, 421.), hybrid reality games are widening the game environment, so one can see the change in the environment from the situation in the 1980s.

Family visits provided a very common occasion for remembering play experiences: 20 participants recollected playing games with their cousins. The slightly broader family circle – compared to nuclear families – was something we did not foresee when conducting this study. It demonstrates that social ties between relatives of a similar ageprovided important occasions and locations for play. Some of the participants described how they had even prepared for a specific gaming session with cousins at their grandparent's home:

> More than one cousin also had a Nintendo (NES, SNES) and lots of games, so we exchanged and borrowed them many times and also brought our own gaming stuff to grandmother's place where we were able to play days and nights round. (18-F-1981)

> The mobile gaming experience was not that important, because we didn't own handheld Nintendo consoles. However, I remember how our NES was carried by car to granddad's farm located in the district of Northern Karelia, I remember that because there we could show it to the family. (29-M-1979)

Several informants visited shops to play promotional games (3 references). As one of them remembers, such playing sessions could be long and repetitive: "There was not a console at home. At stores, there were consoles 'for trial' and then we always 'trialed' them for couple of hours" (8-M-1980). Single informants mentioned various other places, such as a local sports center, a Nintendo bus (used by the Finnish Nintendo distributor for marketing (Suominen 2015)), a game center, video rental stores and a gas station. In one case, the gas station doubled as the rental store: "[I played] at the Kesoil gas station where there was also a rental place for

VHS videos and NES games. They had a NES on a table and one was able to play it as much as one wanted. We sat there occasionally with friends and played Super Mario" (11-M-1979).

Five informants mention playing at school or at a school club. In his study of UK computer gaming in the 1980s, Leslie Haddon refers to school clubs as occasional game-playing locales. He adds though that "since school on the whole provided only limited opportunities for playing games in company, meeting in the homes of friends or visiting relatives was a key way to try out the latest themes" (Haddon 1992, 88).

A recurring theme in the answers is the urge to play freely and for a long time, which seems to have been the ideal playing situation for many, even though informants do not explicitly articulate restrictions on game contents or the amount of playing time. When browsing the data using the key word *"paljon"* (a lot), one finds both references to persons with many games and possibilities to spend a lot of time playing. Players seemed to gravitate to such places where they could consume content in large doses and/or for long periods of time. This is a second gravitational effect in addition to the previously mentioned tendency towards playing games at home with one's own devices.

As pointed out earlier, some kids became familiar with playing Nintendo somewhere other than at home with their own devices: "I got to know Nintendo games in the first place at my relatives' and friends' homes before I was seven years old" (55-M-1984). Even after a home console was purchased, play often continued elsewhere as well: "The local sport center also had a waiting room for kids, there one could find Nintendo, Super Nintendo and later, Playstation. With a few Finnish marks, one could play the game one wanted for one or a few hours" (32-M-1987).

The localization of procurements

One question in the inquiry dealt with where games and devices were purchased and by whom. In this analysis, we focus on places. While some informants did not mention places at all, most of them referred, to purchasing their games from department stores, consumer electronics stores, home appliance stores, and in certain cases, from bookshops or from game or toy stores. In Finland – like in the United States – the Nintendo console was labeled as a toy, even though Nintendo tried to market the console as a home entertainment system, as one can see from the name (Sheff 1994, 159–167). For instance:

> My siblings bought the SNES – they might have had some help from our parents (I don't recall). Purchased at the Citymarket in Joensuu (84-F-1980).

> The games had perhaps been obtained from department stores. In Tampere, there was also a game shop called Gamehouse, which was popular (56-M-1986).

> Devices and games were purchased by friends' parents, etc. I would also recall that at R-Kiosk (or from video rental store) one was able to rent a console (?) but it might have also been a SEGA. This is sort of a blurred memory. With this friend who had a Game Boy, we rented a game console together to bring to their place (87-F-1980).

One thing we didn't expect from the data, was the detailed information on informants offered on alternatives to buying games and game devices. In some cases, this meant borrowing games and sometimes trading used games, but more often, in about 20 responses, renting games

and devices was referred to. According to the informants, one could rent game products from R-Kiosks, video rental stores and even a pizzeria: “Dad bought [games]. Games were bought at game stores, which there used to be more of. One also rented games. Even pizzerias rented Nintendo games” (10-M-1985). It seems that game rental was one marketing strategy that the Nintendo importing company used, and in Figure 2 you can see how boldly children with rented Nintendo in a Nintendo bag could stroll in the streets. The Nintendo Club Magazine published a list of the top rented games (alongside lists of top sales) and lists of games that were only available as rentals.

Figure 2. Kids with a rented Nintendo on Bulevardi Street Helsinki. Courtesy of Tampere Museums / The Finnish Museum of Games. Photo Pekka Elomaa 1990.

Game and machine rental was a method to get to know new media technology. In some ways, rental made it possible to enjoy the novelty many times over.

Some of the respondents to the inquiry were able to connect purchases in an exact way to a specific place. One means for that is to use the “local” epithet (15 answers) when referring to procurement:

> I don’t know from where the Famicom [Japanese name for NES] clone was bought, but I was rather young then, so the devices and games were purchased by my parents. The local electronic store had some games for sale as well, but the prices were quite high (32-M-1987).

> In our household, mum and dad obtained devices and games. Most likely, they were purchased via mail order (we lived in a small town), and the local Info bookstore sold new products and used items. Games were also actively rented from an R-Kiosk and borrowed from friends (83-F-1983).

Using the term “local” like this would be partially subconscious phraseology, but it was also used when delineating the difference between current and past purchase situations. The word “local” was used when making comparisons between products and pointing out differences: part of the procurements took place locally, while part of them, as the previous citation shows referring to mail order, somehow differently.

Some informants directly named the store or chain from which they made their procurements. Those so named – R-Kioski (kiosk), MustaPörssi (consumer electronics), Sokos (department store), Anttila (department store), Info (book store), Makuuni (video rental) – were chains operating all over Finland. Only a few of these corporations still exist today and references to them are expressions of cultural memory. The period in question, the late 1980s and the early 1990s, was good for most of these corporations. They were able to expand their businesses because of new product categories and the economic upswing. But what went up, eventually came down, and many of these companies’ situations later changed. Musta Pörssi, Anttila and Makuuni have decreased their retail network. Thus, mentioning the names of these corporations can imply nostalgic overtones, because when mentioning these names, the informant creates a bittersweet perception of change that has occurred in consumer culture and the consumption environment.

A few informants mention a particular town or county, or in two cases named a foreign country when responding to questions about where games and devices were obtained, though we did not explicitly ask informants to mention a specific place. It is difficult to give an explanation for why informants have mentioned a specific town or country. Most likely, the place has been, for some reason, unique (as in the case of a foreign country). Perhaps the informant had moved away from the place they mentioned. The informant might have thought that this particular place is worth mentioning. In any event, it is obvious that there are several individual reasons for mentioning the name of a place. In future, more research could be done on this issue.

5. Conclusion: Remembering Gaming as a Topobiographical Phenomenon

Digital game cultures are, amongst other things, about the experience of place. The topobiographic remembering of the domestication and the later ubiquitous turn in digital game culture opens new questions for future research. The main object of this chapter has been to show that one is able to think of locality in game history in ways other than in reference to specific geographical regions or states. When we talk about “local game histories,” we have to critically examine the concept of place itself as well as the meanings attached to given places.

In the age of mobile phones and hybrid realities, digital gamers’ topopbiographical identity is obviously in transition. That’s why it is therefore important to trace the history of the cultural experience of the place of gaming, before all the oral history, traces and memories of the time of the Nintendo Entertainment System are lost.

In this chapter, we have noticed modes of force that cluster around two things. On one hand, informants have placed emphasis on the process of how gaming came to their home, even

though it was combined with play in other places as well. On the other hand, many of the informants wanted to remember the kind of playing situations in which they were able to spend extra time playing many different sorts of games. These kinds of situations were not mundane and were the expected highlights of gaming, and this sort of seeking extra in many cases required them to move from one place to another for playing games.

We can only speculate on what the recollection of console video gaming experiences might have meant for the participants nearly twenty-five years after the original playing situations. Oral history is always a project of interactive, twofold participation. The historian obtains information and the informant works on her or his identity and strengthens a biographical consciousness of a historical self. The act of gaming is connected to the past age and past places. From the space of private memories, the informant of an oral historian enters to the documentary phase of historiographical operations.[5] In the 2020s, the location of digital gaming has not entered oblivion; nor does it exist only in individual memories, but in a third, historized space.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Academy of Finland for funding the Centre of Excellence in Game Culture Studies (decision #312396).

[5] On historiographical operations, see Ricoeur 2000. On historicizing identity work, see Sivula 2015.

References

Certeau, Michel, de. 1984/1988. *The Practise of Everyday Life*. The first paperback printing. Translated by Steven Randall. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

Eddy, Brian. 2012. *Classic Video Games. The Golden Age, 1971–1984*. Oxford: Shire Publications.

Aune, Margrethe. 1996. The Computer In Everyday Life. Patterns of Domestication of a New Technology. In *Making Technology Our Own? Domestication Technology into Everyday Life.* Ed. Merete Lie & Knut H. Sørensen. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.

Davis, Fred. 1978. *Yearning for Yesterday. Sociology of Nostalgia*. New York: Free Press.

Donovan, Tristan. 2010. *Replay. The History of Video Games.* Lewes: Yellow Ant.

Fingerroos, Outi, and Ulla-Maija Peltonen. 2006. Muistitieto ja tutkimus. In *Muistitietotutkimus – Metodologisia kysymyksiä*, ed. Outi Fingerroos, Riina Haanpää, Anne Heimo, and Ulla-Maija Peltonen, 7–24. Tietolipas 214. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.

Fingerroos, Outi, and Riina Haanpää. 2006. Muistitietotutkimuksen ydinkysymyksiä. In *Muistitietotutkimus – Metodologisia kysymyksiä*, ed. Outi Fingerroos, Riina Haanpää, Anne Heimo, and Ulla-Maija Peltonen, 25–48. Tietolipas 214. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.

Fingerroos, Outi. 2010. Muisti, kertomus ja Oral history -liike. In *Medeiasta pronssisoturiin – Kuka tekee menneestä historiaa?*, ed Pertti Grönholm, and Anna Sivula, 60–81. Turku: Turun Historiallinen Yhdistys.

Flichy, Patrice. 1995. *Dynamics of Modern Communication. The Shaping and Impact of New Communication Technologies.* Translated by Liz Libbrecht. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

Gieryn, Thomas F. 2002. What buildings do. *Theory and Society* 31, 2002, 35–74.

Haddon, Leslie. 1992. Explaining ICT consumption: the case of the home computer. In *Consuming Technologies – Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*, ed. Roger Silverstone & Eric Hirsch, 82–112. London and New York: Routledge.

Haddon, Leslie. 2007. Roger Silverstone's Legacies: Domestication. *New Media and Society*, 9, 16–24.

Hand, Martin. 2016. *Making Digital Cultures. Access, Interactivity, Authenticity*. London & New York: Routledge.

Herz, J. C. 1997. *Joystick Nation. How Videogames Gobbled Our Money, Won Our Hearts and Rewired Our Minds.* London: Abacus.

Hård, Mikael & Jamison, Andrew. 2005. *Hubris and Hybrids. A Cultural History of Technology and Science*. New York: Routledge.

Karjalainen, Pauli Tapani. 2004. Ympäristö ulkoa ja sisältä: Geografiasta geobiografiaan. In *Paikan heijastuksia. Ihmisen ympäristösuhteen tutkimus ja representaation käsite*, ed. Raine Mäntysalo, 49–68. Jyväskylä: Atena kustannus.

Karjalainen, Pauli Tapani. 2006. Topobiografinen paikan tulkinta. [Topobiographical interpretation of place] In *Paikka: Eletty, kuviteltu, kerrottu*, ed. Knuuttila, Seppo, Pekka Laaksonen and Piela, Ulla, 83–92. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.

Karjalainen, Pauli Tapani. 2009. "Topobiography: remembrance of places past" *Nordia Geographical Publications* 38: 5, 31–34.

Kennedy, Helen. 2003. Technobiography: Researching Lives, Online and Off. *Biography* – Volume 26, Number 1, Winter 2003, 120–139.

Kent, Steven L. 2001.*The Ultimate History of Video Games: From Pong to Pokemon. The Story Behind the Craze That Touched Our Lives and Changed the World*. Roseville, CA: Prima.

Kopytoff, Igor. 1986. The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process. In *The Social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai, 64–91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lavin, Maud. 1990. The Design. In *From Receiver to Remote Control: The TV Set*, ed. Matthew Geller. New York: New York Museum of Contemporary Art.

Lehtonen, Turo-Kimmo. 2003. The Domestication of New Technologies as a Set of Trials. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol 3(3): 363–385.

Lie, Merete and Knut H. Sorensen (Eds.). 1996. *Making Technology Our Own? Domesticating Technology into Everyday Life.* Oslo, Oxford, and Boston: Scandinavian University Press.

Livingstone, Sonia. 1992. The meaning of domestic technologies: a personal construct analysis of familiar gender relations. In *Consuming Technologies – Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*, ed. Roger Silverstone, and Eric Hirsch, 113–130. London and New York: Routledge.

Marwick, Arthur. 1970. *The Nature of History.* London: Macmillan and co LTD.

Morley, David. 2003. What's 'home' got to do with it? Contradictory Dynamics in the Domestication of Technology and the Dislocation of Domesticity. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, November 2003, vol. 6, no. 4, 435–458.

Morley, David. 2007. *Media, Modernity and Technology – The Geography of the New.* London and New York: Routledge.

Morley David & Robins, Kevin. 1995. *Spaces of Identity. Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries.* The International Library of Sociology. London: Routledge.

Oudshoor, Nelly & Pinch, Trevor. 2003. Introduction: How Users and Non-Users Matter. In *How Users Matter. The Co-Construction of Users and Technologies*, ed. Nelly Oudshoor, and Trevor Pinch, 1–25. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press.

Pantzar, Mika. 1996. *Kuinka teknologia kesytetään. Kulutuksen tieteestä kulutuksen taiteeseen.* Helsinki: Hanki ja jää.

Pantzar, Mika. 2000. *Tulevaisuuden koti. Arjen tarpeita keksimässä.* Helsinki: Otava.

Parikka, Jussi & Suominen, Jaakko. 2006. Victorian Snakes? Towards a Cultural History of Mobile Games and the Experience of Movement. *Game Studies*, volume 6 issue 1, December 2006. http://gamestudies.org/0601/articles/parikka_suominen. Accessed 13 August 2020.

Payne, Matthew Thomas. 2008. Playing the Déjà-New: 'Plug it in Play TV Games' and the Cultural Politics of Classic Gaming. In *Playing the Past. History and Nostalgia in Video Games*, ed. Zack Whalen, and Laurie N. Taylor, 51–68. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Portelli, Alessandro. 2006. Mikä tekee muistitietotutkimuksesta erityisen? In *Muistitietotutkimus – Metodologisia kysymyksiä*, ed. Outi Fingerroos, Riina Haanpää, Anne Heimo, and Ulla-Maija Peltonen, 49–64. Tietolipas 214. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.

Ricoeur, Paul. 2000. *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli.* Paris: Seuil.

Saarikoski, Petri. 2004. *Koneen lumo. Mikrotietokoneharrastus Suomessa 1970-luvulta 1990-luvun puoliväliin* [The Lure of the Machine. The Finnish Microcomputer Hobby from the 1970s to the Mid-1990s]. Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopiston nykykulttuurin tutkimuskeskus.

Saarikoski, Petri, and Markku Reunanen. 2014. Great Northern Machine Wars: Rivalry Between User Groups in Finland. *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing*, Issue No. 02 - Apr.-June (2014 vol. 36), 16–26.

Saarikoski, Petri, and Jaakko Suominen. 2009. Computer Hobbyists and the Gaming Industry in Finland. *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing*, July-September 2009 (vol. 31 no. 3), 20–33.

Saarikoski, Petri, Jaakko Suominen, and Markku Reunanen. 2017. Pac-Man for the VIC-20: Game Clones and Program Listings in the Emerging Finnish Home Computer Market. *Well Played*, Volume 6, number 2 (European videogames of the 1980s), 7–31.

Sheff, David. 1994. *Game Over – How Nintendo Conquered the World.* First Vintage Books Edition. First published by Random House 1993. New York: Vintage Books.

Silverstone, Roger. 1994. *Television and Everyday Life.* London and New York: Routledge.

Silverstone, Roger. 2006. Domesticating domestication. Reflections on the life of a concept. In *Domestication of media and technology*, ed. Thomas Berker, Maren Hartmann, and Yves Punie, 229–248. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Silverstone, Roger, Eric Hirsch, and David Morley. 1992. Information and communication technologies and the moral economy of the household. In *Consuming technologies: media and information in domestic spaces*, ed. Roger Silverstone, and Eric Hirsch, 15–31. London: Routledge.

Sivula, Anna. 2015. Tilaushistoria identiteettityönä ja kulttuuriperintöprosessina. Paikallisen historiapolitiikan tarkastelua. In *Kulttuuripolitiikan tutkimuksen vuosikirja 2015*, 56–69. Jyväskylä: Kulttuuripolitiikan tutkimuksen seura.

Souza e Silva, Adriana de. 2009. Hybrid Reality and Location-Based Gaming: Redefining Mobility and Game Spaces in Urban Environments. *Simulation and gaming*, Vol. 40, N:ro 3, 404–424.

Spigel, Lynn. 1992. *Make Room for TV. Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Stuckey, Helen, Melanie Swalwell, Angela Ndalianis, and Denise de Vries. 2015. Remembering & Exhibiting Games Past: The Popular Memory Archive. *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association* (ToDiGRA), Vol 2, No 1 (2015). http://todigra.org/index.php/todigra/article/view/40/79 . Accessed 13 August 2020.

Suominen, Jaakko. 2015. Suomen ensimmäinen konsolipelibuumi 1988–1994 tietokonelehdistön ja pelaajien muistitiedon kautta tarkasteltuna. [The first console gaming boom in Finland 1988–1994 from the perspectives of computer hobbyist press and oral history of players] In *Pelitutkimuksen vuosikirja 2015* [Finnish Yearbook of Game Studies 2015], ed. Raine Koskimaa, Jaakko Suominen, Frans Mäyrä, J. Tuomas Harviainen, Usva Friman, Jonne Arjoranta. Tampere: University of Tampere, http://www.pelitutkimus.fi/vuosikirja2015/artikkeli-suomen-ensimmainen-konsolipelibuumi-1988-1994-tietokonelehdiston-ja-pelaajien-muistitiedon-kautta-tarkasteltuna . Accessed 13 August 2020.

Suominen, Jaakko, Markku Reunanen, and Sami Remes. 2015. Return in Play: The Emergence of Retrogaming in Finnish Computer Hobbyist and Game Magazines from the 1980s to the 2000s. *Kinephanos – Canadian Journal of Media Studies.* http://www.kinephanos.ca/2015/emergence-of-retrogaming/. Accessed 13 August 2020.

Williams, Raymond. 1974/2003. *Television. Technology and cultural form.* Routledge Classics edition. London and New York: Routledge.

Wolf, Mark J. P. (Ed.). 2012. *Before the Crash: Early Video Game History*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.