Copyright

by

Rachel Simone Weil

2014

The Report Committee for Rachel Simone Weil
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following report:

No Bad Memories: A Feminist, Critical Design Approach to Video Game Histories

APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Supervisor: _____
Gloria Lee

_____
Carma Gorman

_____
Mary Celeste Kearney

No Bad Memories:
A Feminist, Critical Design Approach to Video Game Histories

by

Rachel Simone Weil, B.A.

Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2014

Dedication

To my grandparents.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my thanks to my Design faculty—Jett Butler, Kate Catterall, Colin Frazer, Carma Gorman, Gloria Lee, Dan Olsen, and Riley Triggs—for their sharp minds, critical eyes, and passionate hearts. I also thank my fellow graduate students—Mariana Cano, Brent Dixon, Amanjot Kaur, Jesse Kinbarovsky, Alexis Kraus, Robin McDowell, Becky Nasadowski, José Perez, and Claire Thong—for their insights, inspiration, wit, and friendship. I also thank the University of Texas College of Fine Arts and Department of Art and Art History for offering financial support through a number of generous scholarships and grants that made my work possible. Finally, I wish to thank a few others who have helped along the way: Chika Kojima Bradshaw, Brandon Boyer, Barry Brummett, Craig Campbell, Skot Deeming, Mary Celeste Kearney, Elizabeth Lovero, Daniel Eduardo Martinez, John McKenzie, Jiwon Park, Sawa Matsueda Savage, kt shorb, Nancy Stalker, Zoya Street, Claire Sweet, Peter Swimm, Wiley Wiggins, all my friends and family, and especially my husband and parents for their unending support and kindness. Thank you.

Abstract

No Bad Memories:
A Feminist, Critical Design Approach
to Video Game Histories

Rachel Simone Weil, M.F.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Supervisor: Gloria Lee

Certain unique sights and sounds of video games from the 1980s and 1990s have been codified as a *retro game* style, celebrated by collectors, historians, and game developers alike. In this report, I argue that this nostalgic celebration has escaped critical scrutiny and in particular omits the diverse experiences of girls and women who may have been alienated by the tough, intimidating nature of a twentieth-century video-game culture that was primarily created by and for boys. Indeed, attempts to attract girls to gaming, such as the 1990s girls' game movement, are usually criticized in or absent from mainstream video-game histories, and girly video games are rarely viewed with the same nostalgic fondness as games like *Super Mario Bros.* This condition points to a larger cultural practice of trivializing media for girls and, by extension, girlhood and girls themselves. My critical design response to this condition has been twofold. First, I have recuperated and

resituated twentieth-century girly games as collectible, valuable, and nostalgic, thereby subverting conventional historical narratives and suggesting that these games have inherent cultural value. Second, I have created new works that reimagine 8-bit style as an expression of nostalgia for twentieth-century girlhood rather than for twentieth-century boyhood. This report contains documentation of some relevant projects I have undertaken, such as the creation of a video-game museum and an 8-bit video game called *Electronic Sweet-N-Fun Fortune Teller*. In these projects and in future works, I hope to disrupt dominant narratives about video game history and nostalgia that continue to marginalize and trivialize girls' and women's experiences and participation in contemporary game cultures.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

"Well, yeah, back in the days when we made the first Donkey Kong, that was a game we first made for the arcades, the arcades were not places girls went into often. And so we didn't even consider making a character that would be playable for girls." –Shigeru Miyamoto[1]

I was born in 1984, the year that Apple released its first Macintosh computer. Not long thereafter, Japanese video-game giant Nintendo brought to North America a video-game console that would become massively popular and influential: the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). My childhood coincided with an exciting era of growth for personal computers and video games. But I soon became aware of certain fences erected upon the terrain; computers and video games were decidedly "for boys." Girls could and did play games when permitted, myself occasionally among them, but the arcades seemed to *belong* to boys, as did video-game consoles. Television and print advertisements for NES games *(Figure 1)* made this clear, alternatingly taking place in boys' bedrooms, war zones, and smoky warehouses. Like many girls who were interested in video games but disheartened by the competitive and intimidating culture surrounding them, I found other ways to participate or rerouted my energy toward other pursuits.

I have shared some of the ideas expressed in this report in speaking engagements (cited in later chapters) and in an article for *Memory Insufficient.* Rachel Simone Weil, "Gender-bending Allohistories," *Memory Insufficient,* June 2013, accessed April 29, 2014, http://zoyastreet.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/memory-insufficient-gender-sexual-diversity2.pdf.

1. Stephen Totilo, "Shigeru Miyamoto and the Damsel in Distress," Kotaku, June 20, 2013, accessed April 20, 2014, http://kotaku.com/shigeru-miyamoto-and-the-damsel-in-distress-520259897.

Figure 1. Print advertisements for NES games *Gun.Smoke (top left), The Punisher (top right), Smash TV (bottom left),* and *Jackal* and *Contra (bottom right).* Advertisement scans from vgmuseum.com, "NES Game Ads," accessed April 25, 2014, http://www.vgmuseum.com/ads/nes/.

As a teenager, I found an entry point into gaming: I began collecting discarded game consoles that had been recently deemed outdated or obsolete. They were affordable and plentiful at garage sales and thrift shops, and because tough-guy game culture had nucleated around newer technologies, older video games seemed somehow less intimidating to me. And so I became interested in the NES not during its period of incredible popularity in the late 1980s and early 1990s but rather nearly a decade later, after gamers had largely abandoned it in favor of newer, more advanced game consoles and

retailers had begun to sell the last of their NES stock for pennies on the dollar.

In the roughly fifteen years that have elapsed since that time, I have observed with great interest the reemergence of the NES in contemporary American video-game culture. The NES has become retro, vintage, collectible, immortalized in historical texts and museum exhibitions at the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the Museum of Modern Art. NES games such as *Super Mario Bros.* and *The Legend of Zelda* have been rereleased for contemporary platforms and revisited by academics and online critics alike. And the games' blocky graphics and limited color palettes have been codified as an *8-bit* or *retro game* style, reproduced in a variety of goods ranging from t-shirts to decals to beverages *(Figure 2)*.

Figure 2. Beer can design featuring several visual conventions of NES games and box art. Photograph courtesy of Tallgrass Brewing Company.

The retro game aesthetic has been particularly widespread in independently produced ("indie") games *(Figure 3),* resulting in a popular association between the two. Indie game developers have employed retro aesthetic conventions such as pixel art so frequently that it has become the subject of some online parody *(Figure 4).*

Figure 3. The contemporary indie game *Fez,* according to designer Phil Fish, was "inspired by a lot of classic NES games […] it's a lot of childhood and nostalgia."[2] Screenshot provided by author; *Fez* (Linux version), Polytron (Polytron/Trapdoor, 2013).

2. Patrick Murphy, "Road to the IGF: Kokoromi's Multidimensional *Fez,*" Gamasutra, December 18, 2007, accessed April 25, 2014, http://www.gamasutra.com/php-bin/news_index.php?story=16698.

Figure 4. The Twitter account @optimisticindie parodies indie games and developers. Screenshot provided by author; The Optimistic Indie, Twitter post, November 19, 2012, accessed April 20, 2014, http://www.twitter.com/optimisticindie.

Academic interest in retro games has generated some insightful work on identity, counterculture, and nostalgia.[3] But my own experiences suggested that gaps remained in the scholarship. These were boys' games, after all, weren't they?[4] Indeed, to date there has been little investigation of the gendered nature of the retro game aesthetic and how this aesthetic is employed by and thus genders contemporary game development, academic and historical texts, museums and archives, industry- and fan-led cultural production, and, more broadly, the whole of game cultures and game studies.

3. There exist numerous academic texts on retrogaming. A small sampling includes Zach Whalen and Laurie N. Taylor, eds., *Playing the Past: History and Nostalgia in Video Games* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008); Jaako Suominen, "The Past as the Future? Nostalgia and Retrogaming in Digital Culture," *The Fibreculture Journal,* no. 11 (November 2008), accessed April 14, 2014, http://eleven.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-075-the-past-as-the-future-nostalgia-and-retrogaming-in-digital-culture/; David S. Heineman, "Public Memory and Gamer Identity: Retrogaming as Nostalgia," *Journal of Games Criticism* 1, no. 1 (2014), accessed April 14, 2014, http://gamescriticism.org/articles/heineman-1-1. There are also numerous popular texts on retrogaming such as magazines (*Retro, Retro Gamer)*, podcasts (*Retronauts, Retrogaming Roundup)*, and community websites *(Racketboy, NintendoAge).*

4. For more on the links between video games and boyhood, see Derek A. Burrill, *Die Tryin': Videogames, Masculinity, Culture,* Popular Culture and Everyday Life 18 (New York: Peter Lang, 2008); and Henry Jenkins, "'Complete Freedom of Movement': Video Games as Gendered Play Spaces," in *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games,* ed. Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins (Boston: MIT Press, 1998), 262-297.

I believe that the relatively unexplored territory of gender and retro game aesthetic is ripe for analysis, particularly given current interest in female game developers, critics, and players, the accompanying backlash to their presence, the increasing body of academic studies of video games, and the aforementioned popularity of retro aesthetics in contemporary games. The content of this report does not seek to comprehensively be such scholarship, though I hope my work might inspire it. Rather, as a design student who seeks to reach both academic and popular audiences, I have instead chosen to take a *critical design* approach, producing certain working methods and artifacts that comprise a design- or arts-oriented critique of retro game style and the production of collective memory of 8-bit gaming.

Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby define critical design as "a critique of the prevailing situation through designs that embody alternative social, cultural, technical or economic values."[5] Through a critical design approach, I seek to question the prevailing situation: the contemporary American engagement with video-game nostalgia. What is suggested by visual tropes as seemingly apolitical as pixelated typefaces, and what might happen when these visual tropes are intermixed with the visual tropes of girly femininity, so frequently reviled as regressive or merely bad taste?[6]

---

5. Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Design Noir: The Secret Life of Electronic Objects* (London: August, 2001), 58.

6. Further reading on aesthetics and the cultural delegitimization of femininity can be found in Penny Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* (London: Pandora, 1995); and Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction* Understanding Feminist Philosophy (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Chapter 2: What Is a Girls' Game?

The word *game* encompasses a variety of play activities, and its use with respect to video games is a subject of ongoing debate. In their book *Rules of Play,* Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman work to pin down a definition, ultimately concluding that "sometimes the answer to the question of whether or not a game is a game rests in the eye of the beholder."[7] Indeed, collectors who seek to categorize and classify video games often rely on experience and common practice within the community. In a talk presented in 2013,[8] I cited an example of this negotiation that took place in an online forum for the video-game collecting website VGCollect. In the course of a thread titled "More Missing Consoles," user oshaboy asks why mobile-phone games are not included in VGCollect's games database. The response from community member darko indicates that "most people who collect games don't consider smartphone apps a real gaming experience,"[9] despite the fact that mobile phones are one of the most popular gaming platforms in the US.[10] The notion of what is considered a "real gaming experience" to hobbyist game collectors is not trivial, given that they enact much of the online recordkeeping for game collection websites such as VGCollect that is then dispersed to broader repositories like Wikipedia.

---

7. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play* (Boston: MIT, 2001), 58.

8. Rachel Simone Weil, "Printer Jam: Ink-Enhanced Video Games of the 1990s" (video of lecture, Nerd Nite 50: Technoarchaeology, Austin, September 11, 2013), accessed April 25, 2014, http://vimeo.com/87237762.

9. darko, post to "More Missing Consoles," July 30, 2013 (11:03:24 a.m. ET), VGCollect forum, accessed April 24, 2014, http://vgcollect.com/forum/index.php/topic,74.285.html.

10. "2013 Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry," The Entertainment Software Association, June 11, 2013, accessed April 25, 2014, http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/esa_ef_2013.pdf.

For the purposes of this report, I use the word *game* as shorthand for *video game* to refer to electronic software designed for play on arcade machines, home game consoles, portable game consoles, computers, mobile phones, and electronic toys. By extension, a *girls' game* or *girly game*[11] is a game designed to appeal to girls through its appearance, advertising strategy, gameplay elements, or association with existing girls' toy and entertainment franchises *(Figure 5).*

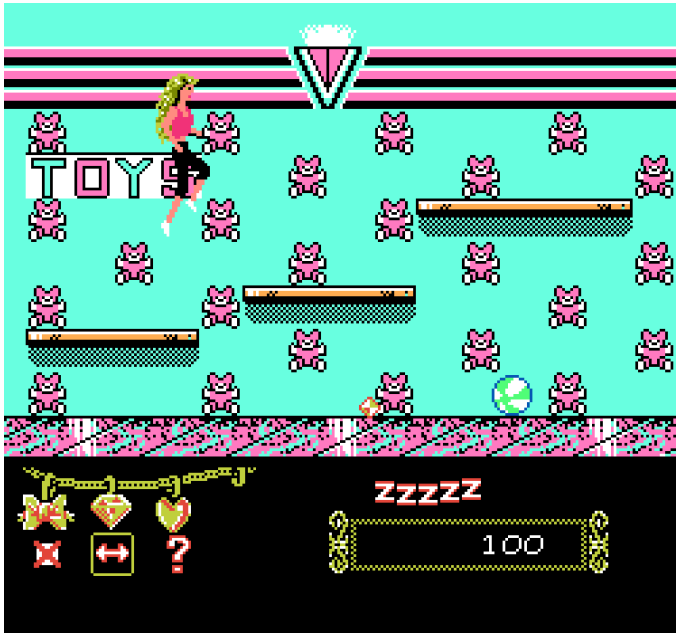

Figure 5. *Barbie* is one of the few girly games released for the NES in North America. Screenshot provided by author; *Barbie* (NES version), Imagineering (Hi-Tech Expressions, 1991).

11. The phrase *girls' game* appears more frequently in popular and academic discourse. However, because these games are designed to appeal to girls via a stereotypical femininity that neither attracts all girls nor repels all boys, the phrase *girls' game* seems to me somewhat flawed. I find the phrase *girly games* more fitting because it focuses on the observable aesthetic and thematic trappings of the game rather than its presumed audience. For example, we cannot know whether all girls or most girls like or play or prefer a game like *Barbie Super Model*. Therefore, why call it a "girls' game?" We could perhaps more easily agree that the game is *girly* because it observably contains stereotypically girly appeals in its box art color scheme, associated toy franchise, gameplay ties to fashion modeling, etc. This distinction between player gender and visual language is revisited in later chapters.

A cursory glance at video game history as told through academic and popular texts such as books, exhibitions, and online forums reveals little about twentieth-century girls' games. What did players like about these games? How many units were sold? Did they even exist? Such research is difficult to conduct, and having undertaken it for several years, I still have unanswered questions.

Chapter 3: My Design Values and Goals

During the course of my research and conversations with gamers, I have observed a certain shame associated with games about fashion or games that come in pink boxes. For example, after giving talks on my research, I am often greeted by women who paradoxically admit to me that while they have never considered themselves to be gamers, they did secretly enjoy girly games in their youth. From experience, I recognize this hesitation: the feeling that stereotypically girly media are trivial, that they don't count or matter, and that none of us should really even talk about them. It is the sinking feeling that a woman's every attempt to achieve cultural legitimacy—in gaming culture and elsewhere—is an emulation of masculinity.

As a designer, I work toward two corrective measures: (1) to find and make evident the cultural value of girly video games that were produced in the twentieth century and (2) to call into question the production of hegemonic video-game history by creating new allohistorical video-game artifacts that blur the boundaries of fact and fiction and of authenticity and inauthenticity. In so doing, I reveal my own underlying feminist values and communicate my belief that the absence of girly media from collective memory renders it culturally unavailable, falsely promoting the idea that gaming has always been "for boys" while further reinscribing the cultural superiority of masculinity that places women at continued systematic disadvantage.

My body of work consists of methods and artifacts that undo or challenge historical texts, archives, retrospectives, retro cultures, and other

forms of collective memory and meaning making that are mediated through video games. In so doing, I hope to whimsically yet critically

- illustrate that the marginalization of girly video games—even when enacted as feminist critique—points to a larger practice of censoring, discrediting, editing, and erasing mainstream American girlhood and, by association, the voices and experiences of girls and women (Chapter 4),

- suggest that the contemporary popularity of retro game aesthetics may function to symbolically reject the introduction of female playership and feminist inquiry that largely emerged in the twenty-first century (Chapter 5), and

- challenge the ways in which many popular and scholarly monuments to video-gaming's past are largely reproductions of existing narratives and beliefs rather than objective truths[12] (Chapters 6-7).

The theory, methods, and artifacts I've created during my design study are described in further detail in the following chapters.

12. In his study of reissued plug-and-play video games, Matthew Thomas Payne notes that "collective memory is not interested in researching 'objective' histories, but rather *how* a group re-presents its past and how it propagates and disseminates this narrative […] gaming communities are largely defined by their choice of core games and the social practices that contribute to their 'imagined community' (Anderson)." Matthew Thomas Payne, "Playing the Déjà-New: 'Plug it in and Play TV Games' and the Cultural Politics of Classic Gaming" in *Playing the Past: History and Nostalgia in Video Games,* ed. Zach Whalen and Laurie N. Taylor (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008), 53-65.

Chapter 4: Feminist Inquiry

"[A]s Segel (1986) notes, the gender segregation of children's literature was almost as damaging for boys as it was for girls: 'In a society where many men and women are alienated from members of the other sex, one wonders whether males might be more comfortable with and understanding of women's needs and perspectives if they had imaginatively shared female experiences through books, beginning in childhood' (p. 183). Boys may need to play in secret gardens or toy towns just as much as girls need to explore adventure islands." —Henry Jenkins[13]

The first girls' game movement of the mid-1990s was closely accompanied by critiques of the girls' game movement. Critics argued that games like *Barbie Fashion Designer*, released in 1996, depicted a narrow, stereotypical kind of girlhood and comprised a stigmatized "pink ghetto" of games that would ultimately alienate or harm girls.[14] These lines of criticism continue today. One such example is the online outcry that followed Sony's "Girlz Play Too" campaign, designed to encourage girls to purchase Sony's Playstation Portable (PSP) handheld game console and accompanying "girl-friendly" games. The campaign coincided with the release of a lilac-colored version of the PSP *(Figure 6)* bundled with a game based on the Hannah Montana franchise. Media response to Sony's campaign and the lilac PSP was unfavorable. Kotaku's Brian Ashcraft poked fun at the six titles Sony chose to promote in the campaign, sarcastically referring to them as "fine titles" and

13. Jenkins, 291-292.

14. Justine Cassell, "Genderizing Human-Computer Interaction" in *The Human-Computer Interaction Handbook: Fundamentals, Evolving Technologies and Emerging Applications,* ed. Julie A. Jacko and Andrew Sears, Human Factors and Ergonomics (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 402-412; and Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins, "Chess for Girls? Feminism and Computer Games," in *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games,* 2-45.

"gamez."[15] Joystiq's Andrew Yoon admonished "Girlz Play Too," which he characterized as a move to "belittle [girls'] intelligence and turn them into stereotypes."[16] And John Funk's review on The Escapist calls the campaign "mind-blowingly silly," a "misstep," "very, very uncomfortable," and a "PR fiasco."[17]

Figure 6. Advertisement for the Hannah Montana PSP Entertainment Pack. Advertisement screenshot from Andrew Yoon, "OMG Lilac PSP! Sony Says 'Girlz Play Too'," Joystiq, August 4, 2009, accessed April 25, 2014, http://www.joystiq.com/2009/08/04/omg-lilac-psp-sony-says-girlz-play-too/.

15. Brian Ashcraft, "Sony Says Girlz Play Too," Kotaku, August 3, 2009, accessed April 27, 2014, http://kotaku.com/5328457/sony-says-girlz-play-too.

16. Andrew Yoon, "OMG Lilac PSP! Sony Says 'Girlz Play Too'," Joystiq, August 4, 2009, accessed April 25, 2014, http://www.joystiq.com/2009/08/04/omg-lilac-psp-sony-says-girlz-play-too/.

17. John Funk, "Sony Reminds Us: OMG! Girls (Sorry, Girlz) Play Games Too," The Escapist, August 3, 2009, accessed April 27, 2014, http://www.escapistmagazine.com/news/view/93614-Sony-Reminds-Us-OMG-Girls-Sorry-Girlz-Play-Games-Too.

In the case of Sony's "Girlz Play Too" campaign, it is unclear exactly *what* about the games or advertising approach was "silly" or "belittling," and data were not provided as evidence that the campaign was unsuccessful with its target audience. The unwritten implication in these reviews is that the triviality of the campaign and associated products is related to their perceived "girlyness." The game reviews recall Kenneth Burke's description of literary criticism, which so often "convey[s] the *attitude of the person making the reference"* while seeming "objective, as though the critic were saying, 'X is doing so-and-so'; but too often it became merely a strategic way of saying, 'I personally don't like what X is doing.'"[18] While this scenario may describe games criticism in general, it disproportionately affects girly games, which by their very existence challenge perceptions that gaming is a boyish or masculinized pastime.

Games researcher Justine Cassell describes the complexity of feminist inquiry in gaming:

> [W]hen we try and do something to equalize opportunities for women, there have always been two approaches: to value traditional femininity or to deny differences between men and women. We're seeing exactly the same thing in technology. Do we encourage girls to beat boys at their own game, or do we construct a girl-only space? The problem is that both sides ultimately start from the assumption that computers are boys' toys, and thus both scenarios can result in the pejorativization of girls' interests. What can we do?[19]

Here, Cassell offers two approaches, each with its own pitfalls: one in which girls are encouraged to enter into a new gamespace marked by

18. Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change,* 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 8.

19. Cassell, 411.

traditional femininity/girlhood and another in which girls are encouraged to enter into an existing mainstream gamespace populated by boys and marked by traditional masculinity/boyhood. I suggest a third approach that does not, as Cassell notes, "pejoritivize" girls' interests: encourage girls *and boys* to enter into an existing mainstream gamespace marked by traditional femininity/girlhood. Such an approach, which borrows from the work of the early twentieth-century writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman, experimentally places femininity as an ideal or norm *for all* in order to suggest correction for a hypermasculinized world, making central our common humanity.[20] As I think Gilman might agree, the point of this exercise is not to make femininity the norm at the complete expense of masculinity or to recreate the existing condition with gender roles reversed. Rather, it is a way for us to see how a hypermasculinized video-game culture constrains us all, whether by keeping us on the defensive against what might make us appear weak or inauthentic, by setting us up to feel alienated, or by illustrating how we fall short of a masculine ideal.

In my design work, I seek to promote the idea of a game culture in which femininity and girlhood are situated as norms rather than aberrations. My goal is not to overtake a video-game culture of masculinity with one of femininity, but to suggest that both can exist as points on a spectrum and with equal legitimacy and value. I am particularly interested in offering visions of a *girly retro game culture* that recuperates twentieth-century girly

20. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Our Androcentric Culture, or the Man-Made World* (Project Gutenberg, 2009), accessed April 27, 2014, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3015/3015-h/3015-h.htm. Gilman's interest in "gyneacocentric theory" and a focus on "common humanity" is discussed here and perhaps also explored in her fictional work *Herland* (1915).

games and informs new works that reimagine 8-bit style as an expression of nostalgia for twentieth-century girlhood rather than twentieth-century boyhood. In so doing, I engage with the spectra of good taste/bad taste and high culture/low culture that act on history making, curation, authority, authenticity, and collective memory.

Chapter 5: Nostalgia

Svetlana Boym's work on nostalgia and off-modernism inform my approach to redesigning contemporary video-game history and retro aesthetics. In her 2007 essay "Nostalgia and Its Discontents," Boym describes the paradoxical dangers of nostalgia and the desire to "return home":

> The promise to rebuild the ideal home lies at the core of many powerful ideologies today, tempting us to relinquish critical thinking for emotional bonding. The danger of nostalgia is that it tends to confuse the actual home and the imaginary one. In extreme cases it can create a phantom homeland, for the sake of which one is ready to die or kill. Unreflective nostalgia can breed monsters. Yet the sentiment itself, the mourning of displacement and temporal irreversibility, is at the very core of the modern condition.[21]

Boym's sentiment handily maps onto the nature of the contemporary discord between gamers and feminist critics. One pitfall of the typical feminist critique of video-game culture is that while it often seeks to reach members of video-game communities, the critique is not always well received by the people who comprise them. The outcry surrounding Anita Sarkeesian's 2012 campaign to fund a video series about sexist tropes in video games was among the most sensational examples. News of violent rape threats, death threats, and racial slurs made against Sarkeesian by some contingent of gamers reached mainstream media outlets such as *The New York Times.*[22]

---

21. Svetlana Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents," *The Hedgehog Review* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 9-10, accessed April 27, 2014, http://www.iasc-culture.org/eNews/2007_10/9.2CBoym.pdf.

22. Amy O'Leary, "In Virtual Play, Sex Harassment Is All Too Real," *New York Times,* August 2, 2012, accessed April 27, 2014 http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/02/us/sexual-harassment-in-online-gaming-stirs-anger.html.

One notable aspect of this response is that Sarkeesian had not yet created her critique of video games; the anger seemed to be in response to the *idea* of feminist intervention in gaming. In a sense, Sarkeesian's critics were "ready to kill" her in defense of games, their "phantom homeland." While the backlash to Sarkeesian's campaign serves as an extreme example, it illustrates the complexity of enacting an overtly feminist critique of video games; as Burrill notes, video games may provide players with "escape, fantasy, extension, and utopia, a space away from feminism."[23]

As I have previously argued,[24] the use of a retro game aesthetic can function as a subtle way to reject feminist intervention in gaming. This position draws from John Vanderhoef's study of gamers' distinction between the notoriously hard-to-define categories of "hardcore" and "casual" games[25] as a means by which to separate authentic, masculine gaming experiences from inauthentic, feminine gaming experiences.[26] I suggest that retro games can function in a capacity similar to that of hardcore games. They can act as a call to return to a twentieth century before *Wii Sports,* mobile games, and other contemporary games that appealed to and brought mainstream visibility to adult female gamers. The use of retro game style erects barriers to entry that often fall along gender lines. Games like *Fez* and the NES-inspired *Retro City Rampage,* for example, have a memorable or parodic

23. Burrill, 2.

24. Rachel Simone Weil, "Breaking out of 8-bit Hell: The Retropolitical in Game Design," (lecture, Dames Making Games, Toronto, ON, February 22, 2014).

25. Tim Poon, "The Hardcore Gaming Myth," Kotaku, September 23, 2011, accessed April 21, 2014, http://kotaku.com/5843253/the-hardcore-gaming-myth.

26. John Vanderhoef, "Casual Threats: The Feminization of Casual Video Games," *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology,* no. 2 (June 2013), accessed April 27, 2014, http://dx.doi.org/10.7264/N3V40S4D.

pleasure for players familiar with NES games. As described previously, the NES was largely marketed as a boys' toy, and so women may engage with these games in a different, perhaps less nostalgic manner. But just as retro game style can celebrate the often-invisible connections between twentieth-century gaming and mainstream boyhood, so too can it illuminate and subvert them.

Chapter 6: Methods

The work of Svetlana Boym offers promising insight on how nostalgia might be used as a tool to correct its own damages. "In the end," she writes, "the only antidote for the dictatorship of nostalgia might be nostalgic dissidence"; she concludes by describing nostalgia as a tool for the marginalized:

> an individual mechanism of survival, a countercultural practice, a poison, or a cure. It is up to us to take responsibility for our nostalgia and not let others "prefabricate" it for us. The prepackaged "usable past" may be of no use to us if we want to co-create our future.[27]

When applied to video-game culture, Boym's framework may suggest that the use of mainstream retro game style can function as both a cause of social discontent and a potential solution. This solution, I argue, lies in subverting mainstream expressions of video-game nostalgia through countercultural—and even *counterfactual*—practices. By uncovering true histories and designing false ones, I hope to disrupt mainstream collective memory about video games that marginalize girls' and women's experiences and limit their participation.

Because the girls' game movement did not emerge until the mid- to late-1990s and centered on PC gaming, women may have difficulty identifying with mainstream retrogame nostalgia rooted in 8- and 16-bit console gaming, a nostalgia that has largely been constructed by and for men. Uncovering certain "true" histories (that is, girls' and women's real but marginalized experiences with games) and designing "false histories" (that is,

27. Boym, 18.

imagined games that could or should have been) constitute a whimsical critique of mainstream game history and collective memory that welcomes girls' participation in retrogame cultures and game cultures as a whole. I argue that being nostalgic for girly game histories, both real and imagined, is a rebellious act, a suggestion that girly games have some cultural value worth reclaiming.

UNCOVERING TRUE HISTORIES

Reconsidering marginalized histories and literary and artistic canons is an important means of conducting feminist work.[28] Vanderhoef has examined the relationship of the video-game canon to gendered notions of taste and authority. In "Canon Fodder: Taste, Gender, and Video Game Culture(s)," he argues that video-game journalists and critics help "form canon and taste through a largely masculinized historical memory and practice, a practice that too often erases through neglect the contributions female game designers have made to the industry."[29] While feminist inquiry of the canon can help to uncover forgotten participants, so too can it uncover marginalized and forgotten themes within genre, product design, gameplay, and so on. Such an endeavor is not unlike the contemporary feminist engagement with soap operas and romance novels, an undertaking that Lynn Spigel describes as a move "to authenticate, or at least take seriously […]

28. Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory,* 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 134.

29. John Vanderhoef, "Canon Fodder: Taste, Gender, and Video Game Culture(s)," (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Boston, March 21-25, 2012), accessed April 27, 2014, http://pressstarttodrink.blogspot.com/2012/03/canon-fodder-taste-gender-and-video.html.

genres that the canons of male-centered literary and art criticism deemed unworthy of study."[30] This movement, Spigel continues,

> was an attempt to see these forms as cultural spheres in which women could extract not only individual narrative pleasure, but also could enter into an interpretive community that operates both in terms of, but also at times against the grain of, everyday female experience in Western patriarchies.[31]

I endeavor to uncover "unworthy" girls' games and frame them in the language and aura of cultural value that encourages others to reflect on them with nostalgic fondness.

DESIGNING FALSE HISTORIES

A parallel technique to uncovering true histories is designing false ones. Whereas true histories elicit the sentiment "I remember…", false histories elicit "I wish…" They act as alternate timelines, allohistories, what-if scenarios, intentionally false interpretations of true events, and utopias. The creation of imagined histories and their imagined nostalgia recalls the work of artists such as Marc Hundley, whose 2011 exhibit *Joan Baez Is Alive* explored remembrance of a false past, "cloud[ing] the margins between fantasy and authenticity, past and present, and lived and felt, with a nostalgic fog."[32]

A subtle but compelling pop-culture example of this false-nostalgia approach can be found in the *Kevin Keller* comic books published by Archie

30. Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 313.

31. Ibid.

32. "Joan Baez Is Alive," Team Gallery, accessed April 27, 2014, http://www.teamgal.com/artists/marc_hundley/exhibitions/212/joan_baez_is_alive.

Comics. Since at least the 1980s, Archie Comics has incorporated nostalgia for bygone decades into its visual style. The comic books it produces are situated in Riverdale, a city perpetually in a contemporary-yet-classic neverland whose high school students, without the slightest suggestion of irony, have for decades worn letterman cardigans and frequented Pop Tate's soda fountain, the Chok'lit Shoppe. While the use of this visual language perhaps once aligned the comic with social conservatism and wholesomeness,[33] Archie comic books have in recent years taken on socially progressive issues. The *Kevin Keller* series focuses on the life of an openly gay high school teenager. Notable are the comic books' variant covers, which often recreate specific Archie Comics covers from the 1940s, 1950s, or 1960s with Kevin in place of another character *(Figure 7)*. The combination of a retro (and often conservative, Americana) visual style with contemporary social issues seen as controversial within some conservative groups[34] serves as nostalgia for a history that never was, posing certain questions in the mind of the viewer, *e.g., What if the contemporary work toward achieving gay rights had occurred in the 1950s or 1960s? What would our nostalgia for these eras look like today?* It makes visible the often-unseen connections between Archie, nostalgia, sexuality, and "wholesomeness" by visually suggesting an alternate American history in which a mainstream, mid-century children's comic book offered an openly gay character in a starring and prominent role.

33. Charles Phillips, *Archie: His First 50 Years* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), 126.

34. "Toys 'R' Us Selling Same-Sex Marriage 'Archie' Comics," One Million Moms, accessed April 21, 2014, https://web.archive.org/web/20120422141655/http://onemillionmoms.com/IssueDetail.asp?id=442.

Figure 7. The 2012 variant cover of *Kevin Keller,* Issue 2 *(left)*, is based on the 1942 cover of *Archie,* Issue 1 *(right)*. *Kevin Keller* cover art scan from "Kevin Keller #3 – May I Have This Dance?" Comic Vine, accessed April 25, 2014, http://www.comicvine.com/kevin-keller-2-may-i-have-this-dance/4000-331038/. *Archie* cover art scan from "Archie Classics," Archie Digital Comics, accessed April 25, 2014, http://digital.archiecomics.com/group_comics.php?group_id=47.

In my own work, designing false histories has taken the form of the production of contemporary NES artworks and games that appear to have emerged in the 1980s or 1990s. I include thematic and visual conventions of 1980s and 1990s mainstream girls' material culture—pastel colors, hearts, ribbons, and the like—into games for the fondly-remembered NES console to

illustrate and critique the cognitive dissonance of displays of femininity in 8-bit gaming. One of the NES games I've created, *Electronic Sweet-N-Fun Fortune Teller,* is described in the following chapter.

DELIVERING PLAYFUL, ADDITIVE CRITIQUE

The *Kevin Keller* comics are powerful in part because they are not didactic calls for social equality but entertaining, lighthearted stories about high school kids that illustrate what that equality might look like. To circumvent conflict and hopefully create successful interventions, a design constraint that I have imposed on my work is that it be playful, engaging, attractive, and accessible to those who study, critique, make, or play games. My critiques do not seek errors, faults, or culprits; indeed, I do not want them to look like critiques but rather like attractive additions to or tonics for video-game culture. This approach is inspired by Camille Lewis's work on fundamental sectarian rhetoric, which she characterizes as a persuasive method that operates "not through victimage or criticism but through wooing—that irresistible beauty."[35] Given that my design interventions deal with video games, using playfulness and fun to woo my audience seems only natural.

35. Camille Lewis, *Romancing the Difference: Kenneth Burke, Bob Jones University, and the Rhetoric of Religious Fundamentalism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 128-129.

Chapter 7: Works

The works I've undertaken as a design student employ this approach of playful wooing. Each work uncovers true histories and/or designs false ones.

FEMICOM, THE FEMININE COMPUTER MUSEUM

In 2012, I founded a physical and online archive called the FEMICOM Museum. The name FEMICOM is a portmanteau of the words *feminine* and *computer,* and is also a play on *Famicom,* the name of the NES in Japan. The FEMICOM Museum website features some articles and other materials but is largely an information repository for twentieth-century software, web-based media, video games, and electronic toys that "feature feminine design elements."[36] What exactly constitutes a "feminine design element" is left intentionally vague, though examples listed range from Hello Kitty Game Boys to electronic paper dolls.[37] The site works to uncover true histories by providing primary-source data and media such as gameplay footage, screenshots, and box-art scans that are absent from other game databases. It also establishes an authoritative tone that is free of the mockery that typically accompanies online content about girly games.

Case Study: The Casio Loopy Collection

The Casio Loopy is a 32-bit video-game console released in Japan in 1995. By many accounts, it was not particularly successful: only eleven games were ever released, and plans to release the console internationally

36. "Hello, World! Introducing FEMICOM," FEMICOM, March 25, 2012, accessed April 27, 2014, http://www.femicom.org/about/index.php.

37. Ibid.

were cancelled in the face of declining domestic sales. However, it has received a meager amount of attention among English-speaking collectors as "an interesting oddity and side attraction" that was "marketed strictly towards females, featuring a lavender, pink, and purple color scheme and a box covered in cartoon hearts."[38] Games database RF Generation uses some of the authoritative language of gaming expertise to conceal gender-based criticism with phrases like "technically unimpressive due to the nature of the software," but also more informally muses that "the Loopy game library is almost a joke in itself […] painting, dress-up/makeover, and romance stories are all that were offered."[39]

In the summer of 2013, I traveled to Japan to collect Loopy hardware and software *(Figure 8)* and to talk with collectors, resellers, and developers. I created a virtual "wing" of the FEMICOM Museum website for sharing information about the Loopy. Unexpectedly, I discovered that much of what I had read online about the Loopy was inaccurate. As evidenced by the proliferation of misleading information such as a photograph in which the Loopy console appears purple (it is, in fact, gray),[40] individuals' expectations about what a girls' console *is* or *does* can supersede direct observation, especially when that observation is made difficult by factors such as rarity and language barriers.

---

38. "Casio Loopy 101: 32-bit Japanese Console for Girls," Racketboy, November 19, 2010, accessed April 27, 2014, http://www.racketboy.com/retro/casio-loopy-101-32-bit-japanese-console-for-girls.

39. "Girly Console Review: Casio Loopy – My Seal Computer SV-1000," RF Generation, November 17, 2007, accessed April 27, 2014, http://www.rfgeneration.com/news/classic-gaming/System-Overview-Casio-Loopy-My-Seal-Computer-362.php.

40. "The Casio Loopy Collection: FAQs and Mythbusting," FEMICOM, accessed April 27, 2014, http://loopy.femicom.org/faq/index.php.

Figure 8. Casio Loopy games collected during field research in Tokyo. Photograph provided by author.

Japanese games like those in the Casio Loopy Collection have been valuable additions to the FEMICOM Museum collection. It is debatable whether Japanese games featuring cute art styles and female playable characters such as Hello Kitty and Sailor Moon were "just for girls" or if such assumptions arise from incorrectly mapping American views of femininity onto Japanese artifacts. However, as Mizuko Ito notes in her work on the Japanese media mix, cross-cultural (mis)interpretation allows for a sort of gender fluidity and room for making new meaning. Ito writes:

> The contemporary post-*Pokémon* Japanese media mix embodies representational and structural features that suggest a certain fluidity in how gender is coded. These features of Japanese gaming have proven attractive to both boys and girls in a wide range of cultural contexts. Japanese media complicate Euro-American understandings of how representations and play mechanics get identified as masculine or feminine. They also complicate any lingering assumptions we might have about whether boys can identify with cute and girls can identify with geek cultural forms. A close look at the cultural context and content of Japanese games can denaturalize (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995), or make less commonsensical, some of our assumptions about gender representation.[41]

She continues by pointing out that, "unlike U.S. girlie culture of pink ponies and Barbie dolls, kawaii [Japanese cute] culture is not as strongly ghettoized as *just* for young girls" but is enjoyed by boys and girls alike.[42] By including Japan-only titles in the FEMICOM Museum collection, I have not only offered "true histories" that are lesser known to American audiences, but I have also suggested alternative histories, ones in which cute, girly aesthetics were culturally available to boys and girls as they were in Japan.

Response to the FEMICOM Museum has been largely positive, resulting in speaking engagements and interviews with a variety of print and online media outlets. My interview with Becky Chambers for geek culture blog The Mary Sue was particularly interesting because Chambers was initially skeptical of girly games and the premise of the FEMICOM Museum but came to better understand my approach through the course of the

41. Mizuko Ito, "The Gender Dynamics of the Japanese Media Mix," in *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives on Gender and Gaming,* ed. Yasmin B. Kafai, Carrie Heeter, Jill Denner, and Jennifer Y. Sun (2008; repr., Boston: MIT Press, 2011), 98.

42. Ibid., 101-109.

interview.[43] The following year, her new perspective on girly games helped inform her review of the game *Long Live the Queen.*[44]

ELECTRONIC SWEET-N-FUN FORTUNE TELLER

In 2013, I developed and released an original NES game called *Electronic Sweet-N-Fun Fortune Teller (Figure 9).* Because the NES console is nearly thirty years old and presents challenging development constraints such as the use of 6502-based assembly-language, the creation of contemporary NES games is a niche hobby taken up by only a handful of individuals. (What's more, to my knowledge, I am the only female in the world to have released original homebrew NES games.) Homebrew NES games are frequently contextualized as novel, "authentic," and "hardcore," making them an ideal medium for my own playful, feminist interventions.

Electronic Sweet-N-Fun Fortune Teller is a girly game, evidenced by its cheery soundtrack, pastel colors, and romance-centered gameplay. In the game's "Horoscope" mode, users enter their name, birthday, blood type, if known, and current date. Based on these data, five pre-programmed sentence fragments are joined together to display a horoscope *(Figure 9).* In "Love Test" mode, users enter two names and receive a compatibility score.

---

43. Becky Chambers, "Girly Games, Games for Girls, and Girls Who Game: A Conversation with FEMICOM's Rachel Weil," The Mary Sue, May 11, 2012, accessed April 21, 2014, http://www.themarysue.com/girly-games-games-for-girls-and-girls-who-game-a-conversation-with-femicoms-rachel-weil/.

44. Becky Chambers, "Long Live the Queen: A Game of Strategy, Intrigue, and Horrible, Adorable Death," The Mary Sue, July 5, 2013, accessed April 21, 2014, http://www.themarysue.com/long-live-the-queen-game-review/.

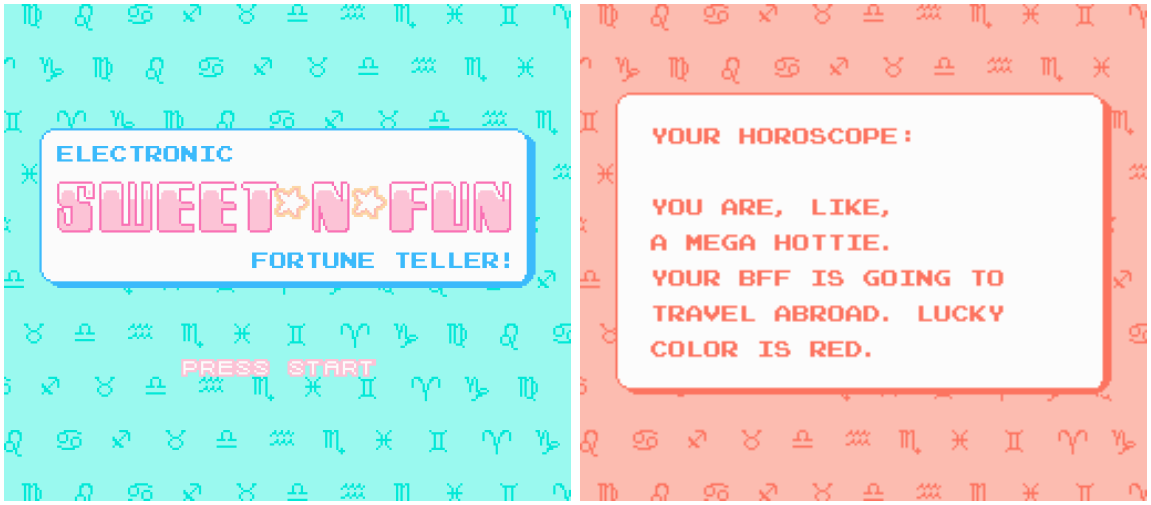

Figure 9. *Electronic Sweet-N-Fun Fortune Teller* title screen *(left)* and horoscope result *(right)*. Screenshot provided by author; *Electronic Sweet-N-Fun Fortune Teller,* Party Time! Hexcellent! (Electronic Love Operation, 2013).

Electronic Sweet-N-Fun Fortune Teller makes overt reference to girls' electronic fortune-telling toys *(Figure 10)* and horoscopes found in girls' teen magazines. The game is also inspired by riot grrrl zines and Angela McRobbie's robust study of the girls' weekly magazine *Jackie,*[45] both of which call into question the teaching of traditional femininity through mainstream media. *Electronic Sweet-N-Fun Fortune Teller* follows some magazine conventions while subverting others; for example, the game refers to potential love interests with gender-neutral terms such as "your crush" and "dreamboat," which, unlike mainstream girls' horoscopes, leave open the possibility for male or female love interests.

45. Angela McRobbie, "*Jackie* Magazine: Romantic Individualism and the Teenage Girl" in *Feminism and Youth Culture,* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 67-117.

Figure 10. 1985 commercial for the Herpit electronic fortune-telling toy, released in Japan by Bandai. Screenshots provided by author; Bandai commercial recording from KingorouChannel, "【懐かCM】バンダイ ふたりのときめき占い ハーピット（1985年）," YouTube, March 14, 2014, accessed April 27, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgpeYjmnkek.

Electronic Sweet-N-Fun Fortune Teller illuminates the differences between stereotypically feminine, passive narratives and stereotypically masculine, active narratives. By creating a girly, romance-centered game for an obsolete, "classic" game console, I offer an alternative history in which the NES game library appealed more strongly to a variety of female players.

Distribution

Electronic Sweet-N-Fun Fortune Teller was part of a video-game collection given to over 10,000 supporters of a crowdfunding campaign for a video-game arts center called LA Gamespace. Game websites Giant Bomb and Indie Statik published reviews of the video-game collection, including *Electronic Sweet-N-Fun Fortune Teller*. The two sites described the game as amusing, if "a complete enigma to most"[46] and expressed excitement that the

46. "LA Game Space Round-Up: Part 1," Giant Bomb, September 16, 2013, accessed April 21, 2014, http://www.giantbomb.com/profile/mento/blog/la-game-space-round-up-part-1/103107/.

game was distributed as an authentic, 8-bit NES ROM.[47] Since its initial release, the game has been part of another crowdfunding gift pack for gaming news site Tiny Cartridge. The game has also been featured in three exhibitions: *Queer Arcade* in Toronto, Ontario, *Fortuna's Arcade* in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and *Playgrounds,* described in further detail below.

MINT IN BOX

From March 28 to May 10, 2014, I exhibited selected works at *Playgrounds,* a design exhibition at the Visual Arts Center at the University of Texas in Austin, Texas. My portion of the exhibition was titled *Mint in Box* and contained two works: *Game Room* and *The Barbie for Girls Portable Arcade Collection.*

The title *Mint in Box* is a phrase familiar to video-game collectors; it refers to an item that is in mint condition and in its original packaging or box. The articles displayed in *Mint in Box* investigate the cultural value of girly games by using the formal language of the gallery or museum space to reframe what some may consider trashworthy games to instead be seen as collectible, valuable, rare, or exemplary. Additionally, through the repeated use of a minty, pastel green color within the space, a more feminine reading of the word "mint" is offered to viewers.

47. Ibid.; and "The Strange Cool, Experimental Games of LA Game Space," Indie Statik, September 17, 2013, accessed April 21, 2014, http://indiestatik.com/2013/09/17/la-game-space/.

Game Room

Game Room explores nostalgia for girlhood and video games through a collection of objects situated in a small recreation of a girl's bedroom as it might have appeared in the early 1990s *(Figure 11)*. Alongside 1980s and 1990s ephemera such as video-game posters, a pink 110-film camera, and Judy Blume paperbacks, the room includes a CRT television decorated with girly stickers and puffy paint. *Electronic Sweet-N-Fun Fortune Teller* is connected to this television, allowing visitors to play the game inside the "bedroom." Authentic NES-era game posters appear on the walls of the bedroom, often in contrast to the girly setting and to humorous and transformative effect. For example, a poster for the NES game *Gauntlet* that features a muscular, bare-chested hero resembles a *Tiger Beat* pinup poster when placed in the context of a girl's bedroom.

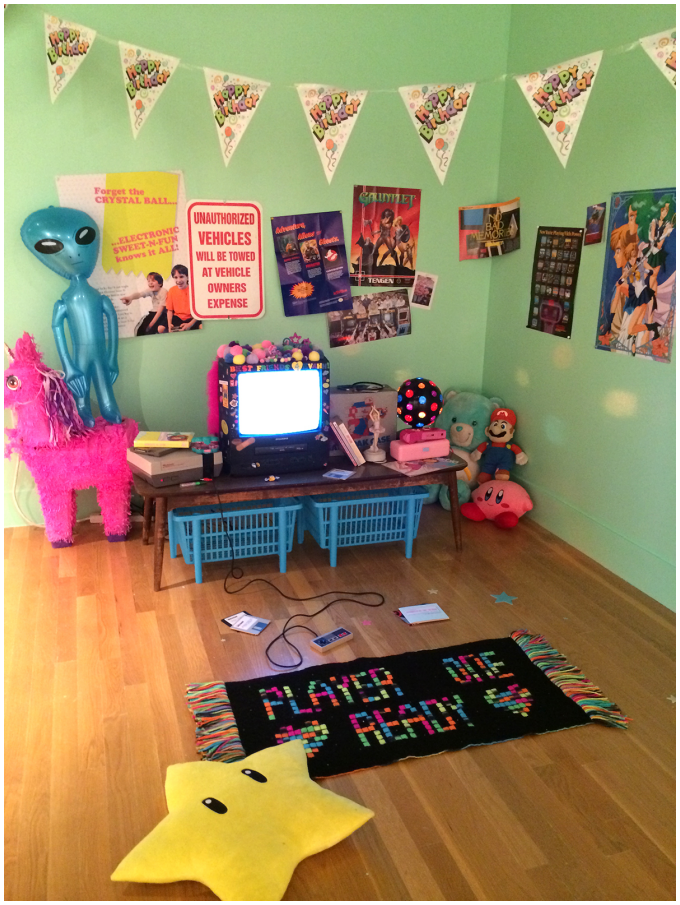

Figure 11. *Game Room*. Photograph provided by author.

Game Room contains a number of false histories such as *Electronic Sweet-N-Fun Fortune Teller* and a cutesy, pixelated floor rug intended to look like game-themed girls' room décor that never was. The museum placards also play a role in generating false history. The placard for *Game Room* states that *Electronic Sweet-N-Fun Fortune Teller* came out in 1991. It also suggests that *Game Room* represents the bedroom of a typical gamer despite being overtly girly and thus seemingly atypical.

The Barbie for Girls Portable Arcade Collection

The second work in *Mint in Box* is titled *The Barbie for Girls Portable Arcade Collection (Figure 12).* It is a set of six handheld LCD video games released by Mattel in the 1990s: *Barbie for Girls Beach Adventure, Barbie for Girls Hearts and Stars, Barbie for Girls Shopping Adventure, Barbie for Girls Soccer, Barbie for Girls Softball,* and the *Barbie for Girls Game Wizard*. Each game appears in its original, unopened blister pack and is displayed within a museum-style vitrine display. *The Barbie for Girls Portable Arcade Collection* challenges the current cultural and economic devaluation of twentieth-century girls' games by presenting a series of conflicts. The games are pristine, untouched, behind a plastic package that is itself behind glass, conferring a sort of authority, prestige, or rarity to the games. This is contrasted with preconstructed notions of what a girls' toy like *Barbie for Girls Shopping Adventure* is: trifling, superficial, valueless, and even harmful. The unopened blister pack incites the viewer's desire to open it and play the game, while the idea that Barbie and pink fashion toys are shameful dampens this desire.

Figure 12. *The Barbie for Girls Portable Arcade Collection.* Photograph provided by author.

The gallery signage for *The Barbie for Girls Portable Arcade Collection* indicates that the items are important historical pieces on loan from the FEMICOM Museum. Like the vitrine, the suggestion that the items are "on loan" from another museum evokes a fine-art tradition, suggestion that the games are precious, rare objects, thus challenging their low value within the video-game canon and among collectors.

The Barbie for Girls Portable Arcade Collection represents a true history in that it shows real video games from the 1990s. Its presentation, however, subtly suggests a false history: one in which these games *mattered.*

Observations from Opening Night

The opening-night response of visitors to *Mint in Box* seemed generally positive. Anonymous written feedback left by visitors varied; one remarked that she felt that her "ladylike and pink childhood is/was meaningful," while another wondered what other histories in the world were false. I was personally moved upon seeing young girls enter the space and express excitement about the games on display. One young girl excitedly exclaimed "Barbie!" as she ran toward the vitrine containing the LCD games. For these girls, the critical aspect of the work was invisible or irrelevant. It was not only rewarding but also a measure of success to see that these fictions could be taken up as fact, and that a young girl could feel welcomed to play with an NES, a video-game console that seemed intimidating and off limits to me in the early 1990s. To my delight, the girly aesthetic of *Game Room* did not keep young boys out, either. I feel that my approach to creating whimsical, additive critique within the confines of a gallery space was successful and worth continuing in future work.

Chapter 8: Future Work and Final Thoughts

I hope that this report and the works contained herein might help further feminist interest in reclaiming, resituating, and subverting traditionally girly interests and aesthetics through the use of nostalgia for real and imagined pasts. I see this body of work as a bridge between some of the feminist studies of gaming (the 1998 book *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat* being among the most interesting and rigorous in its scholarly defense of girly games) and the study of nostalgia in gaming, which I have found problematic in its optimism and suggestion that memories of twentieth-century gaming are all wistful remembrances of the childhood freedom to play. I, like other women my age, associate the NES with resistance and boundaries. These memories are not all *bad,* and clearly I have found much pleasure in "reclaiming" the NES for myself, but neither are they represented in retrospectives or mainstream archives or art shows. As I continue to pursue this line of inquiry beyond graduation, I keep in mind certain areas in which refinement or more study would be beneficial.

GIRLS' MEDIA STUDIES

I have chosen in my work to employ the visual language of mainstream girlhood to illuminate its conspicuous absence within histories of twentieth century video games. But in so doing, I necessarily engage with and embrace commercially-produced girls' media and material cultures that are problematic with respect to matters such as race, class, sexuality, political

messages, and consumerism. How might the pleasures of nostalgia for mainstream girlhood be reconciled with its faults?

There is compelling academic study of girls' media of the twentieth-century. Texts such as Emilie Zaslow's *Feminism, Inc.* provide a look at girl power media and its surrounding culture in the West, brought into being "in the late 1990s at the apex of the popularization of feminist psychosocial studies of girls, the conservative backlash against second-wave feminism, third-wave feminism, and the subcultural riot grrrl movement."[48] There are, likewise, analogous studies of girls' media cultures in 1990s Japan, found in works such as *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan.*[49] While these studies have influenced my work, there certainly remain opportunities to draw further from American and Japanese girls' media studies.

QUEER READINGS AND GENDER EXPRESSION

In preparing the *Mint in Box* works for the *Playgrounds* exhibition, I considered how visitors might see *Game Room* as a queer space that confuses normative ideas about "girls' play" and "boys' play."[50] I am curious as to how this line of inquiry might be extended. For example:

- What commentaries on sexuality and gender expression might emerge in response to work that employs the visual language of mainstream girlhood?

48. Emilie Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 13.

49. Lise Skov and Brian Moeran, eds., *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996).

50. In their introductory chapter to *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat,* Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins refer to works by Ellen Seiter, Erica Rand, Lynn Spigel, and others that offer diverse readings of stereotypically feminine play. Cassell and Jenkins, 22.

- How would a queer reading of retro game aesthetic and twentieth-century games compare to the one presented in this report?

- How does this work speak to (or where does it fall short in speaking to) the experiences of transgender and genderqueer individuals?

"NO BAD MEMORIES"

In 1985, *Popular Computing* ran a print advertisement for Opus floppy disks featuring a young woman wearing a t-shirt with the company's slogan: "No Bad Memories" *(Figure 13).* The advertisement and slogan struck me in the context of my own work. "No Bad Memories" is a computing pun situated in corruption/disruption and a nod to the ideas that memory—namely, collective memory—can be curated. It is also reconciliatory, reminiscent of the phrase "no hard feelings." Finding the slogan cleverly reflective of the body of design work I have done with respect to true and false histories, I made my own version of the now-defunct wordmark by replacing the Opus brand with "HXLNT," a reference to an online alias I have used to release game modifications and artwork. I also now maintain nobadmemories.com as an online portfolio of my work and personal online presence. I plan to use the "No Bad Memories" slogan going forward as a simple and whimsical analogy for future work. Such work may include community efforts to support video game development, the creation of longer-form girly video games, additional public exhibitions of the FEMICOM Museum collection, longer-form written works, product and packaging design, and further study of the visual tropes that represented American girlhood of the 1990s.

Figure 13. Advertisement for Opus floppy disks featured in the February 1985 issue of *Popular Computing*. Photograph provided by author.

Bibliography

Ashcraft, Brian. "Sony Says Girlz Play Too." Kotaku. August 3, 2009. Accessed April 27, 2014. http://kotaku.com/5328457/sony-says-girlz-play-too.

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. 2nd ed. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.

Boym, Svetlana. "Nostalgia and Its Discontents." *The Hedgehog Review* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 7-18. Accessed April 27, 2014. http://www.iasc-culture.org/eNews/2007_10/9.2CBoym.pdf.

Burke, Kenneth. *Permanence and Change*. 3rd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

Burrill, Derek A. *Die Tryin': Masculinity, Videogames, Culture*. Popular Culture and Everyday Life 18. New York: Peter Lang, 2008.

Cassell, Justine. "Genderizing Human-Computer Interaction." In *The Human-Computer Interaction Handbook: Fundamentals, Evolving Technologies and Emerging Applications,* edited by Julie A. Jacko and Andrew Sears, 402-412. Human Factors and Ergonomics. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002.

Cassell, Justine and Henry Jenkins. "Chess for Girls? Feminism and Computer Games." In *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games,* edited by Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins, 2-45. Boston: MIT Press, 1998.

Chambers, Becky. "Girly Games, Games for Girls, and Girls Who Game: A Conversation with FEMICOM's Rachel Weil." The Mary Sue. May 11, 2012. Accessed April 21, 2014. http://www.themarysue.com/girly-games-games-for-girls-and-girls-who-game-a-conversation-with-femicoms-rachel-weil/.

———. "Long Live the Queen: A Game of Strategy, Intrigue, and Horrible, Adorable Death." The Mary Sue. July 5, 2013. Accessed April 21, 2014. http://www.themarysue.com/long-live-the-queen-game-review/.

Dunne, Anthony and Fiona Raby. *Design Noir: The Secret Life of Electronic Objects*. London: August, 2001.

Entertainment Software Association. "2013 Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry." June 11, 2013. Accessed April 25, 2014. http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/esa_ef_2013.pdf.

FEMICOM. "The Casio Loopy Collection: FAQs and Mythbusting." Accessed April 27, 2014. http://loopy.femicom.org/faq/index.php.

———. "Hello, World! Introducing FEMICOM." March 25, 2012. Accessed April 27, 2014. http://www.femicom.org/ about/index.php.

Funk, John. "Sony Reminds Us: OMG! Girls (Sorry, Girlz) Play Games Too." Escapist. August 3, 2009. Accessed April 27, 2014. http://www.escapistmagazine.com/news/view/93614-Sony-Reminds-Us-OMG-Girls-Sorry-Girlz-Play-Games-Too.

Giant Bomb. "LA Game Space Round-Up: Part 1." September 16, 2013. Accessed April 21, 2014. http://www.giantbomb.com/profile/mento/blog/la-game-space-round-up-part-1/103107/.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Our Androcentric Culture, or the Man-Made World.* Project Gutenberg, 2009. Accessed April 27, 2014. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3015/3015-h/3015-h.htm.

Heineman, David S. "Public Memory and Gamer Identity: Retrogaming as Nostalgia." *Journal of Games Criticism* 1, no. 1 (2014). Accessed April 14, 2014. http://gamescriticism.org/articles/heineman-1-1.

Indie Statik. "The Strange Cool, Experimental Games of LA Game Space." September 17, 2013. Accessed April 21, 2014. http://indiestatik.com/2013/09/17/la-game-space/.

Ito, Mizuko. "The Gender Dynamics of the Japanese Media Mix." In *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives on Gender and Gaming,* edited by Yasmin B. Kafai, Carrie Heeter, Jill Denner, and Jennifer Y. Sun, 97-110. 2008. Reprint, Boston: MIT Press, 2011.

Jenkins, Henry. "'Complete Freedom of Movement': Video Games as Gendered Play Spaces." In *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games,* edited by Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins, 262-297. Boston: MIT Press, 1998.

Korsmeyer, Carolyn. *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction.* Understanding Feminist Philosophy. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Lewis, Camille. *Romancing the Difference: Kenneth Burke, Bob Jones University, and the Rhetoric of Religious Fundamentalism*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007.

McRobbie, Angela. "*Jackie* Magazine: Romantic Individualism and the Teenage Girl." In *Feminism and Youth Culture*. 2nd ed., 67-117. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Murphy, Patrick. "Road to the IGF: Kokoromi's Multidimensional *Fez*." Gamasutra. December 18, 2007. Accessed April 25, 2014. http://www.gamasutra.com/php-bin/news_index.php?story=16698.

O'Leary, Amy. "In Virtual Play, Sex Harassment Is All Too Real." *New York Times*. August 2, 2012. Accessed April 27, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/02/us/sexual-harassment-in-online-gaming-stirs-anger.html.

One Million Moms. "Toys 'R' Us Selling Same-Sex Marriage 'Archie' Comics." Accessed April 21, 2014. https://web.archive.org/web/20120422141655/http://onemillionmoms.com/IssueDetail.asp?id=442.

Payne, Matthew Thomas. "Playing the Déjà-New: 'Plug it in and Play TV Games' and the Cultural Politics of Classic Gaming." In *Playing the Past: History and Nostalgia in Video Games,* edited by Zach Whalen and Laurie N. Taylor, 53-65. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008.

Phillips, Charles. *Archie: His First 50 Years*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1991.

Poon, Tim. "The Hardcore Gaming Myth." Kotaku, September 23, 2011. Accessed April 21, 2014. http://kotaku.com/5843253/the-hardcore-gaming-myth.

Racketboy. "Casio Loopy 101: 32-bit Japanese Console for Girls." November 19, 2010. Accessed April 27, 2014. http://www.racketboy.com/retro/casio-loopy-101-32-bit-japanese-console-for-girls.

RF Generation. "Girly Console Review: Casio Loopy – My Seal Computer SV-1000." November 17, 2007. Accessed April 27, 2014. http://www.rfgeneration.com/news/classic-gaming/System-Overview-Casio-Loopy-My-Seal-Computer-362.php.

Salen, Katie and Eric Zimmerman. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Boston: MIT Press, 2003.

Skov, Lise and Brian Moeran, eds. *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996.

Sparke, Penny. *As Long as It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste*. London: Pandora, 1995.

Spigel, Lynn. *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001.

Suominen, Jaako. "The Past as the Future? Nostalgia and Retrogaming in Digital Culture." *The Fibreculture Journal,* no. 11 (November 2008). Accessed April 14, 204. http://eleven.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-075-the-past-as-the-future-nostalgia-and-retrogaming-in-digital-culture/.

Team Gallery. "Joan Baez Is Alive." Accessed April 27, 2014. http://www.teamgal.com/artists/marc_hundley/exhibitions/212/joan_baez_is_alive.

Totilo, Stephen. "Shigeru Miyamoto and the Damsel in Distress." Kotaku. June 20, 2013. Accessed April 20, 2014. http://kotaku.com/shigeru-miyamoto-and-the-damsel-in-distress-520259897.

Vanderhoef, John. "Canon Fodder: Taste, Gender, and Video Game Culture(s)." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Boston, March 21-25, 2012. Accessed April 27, 2014. http://pressstarttodrink.blogspot.com/2012/03/canon-fodder-taste-gender-and-video.html.

———. "Casual Threats: The Feminization of Casual Video Games." *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology,* no. 2 (June 2013). Accessed April 27, 2014. http://dx.doi.org/10.7264/N3V40S4D.

Weil, Rachel Simone. "Breaking out of 8-bit Hell: The Retropolitical in Game Design." Lecture, Dames Making Games, Toronto, ON, February 22, 2014.

———. "Gender-bending Allohistories." *Memory Insufficient,* June 2013. Accessed April 29, 2014. http://zoyastreet.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/memory-insufficient-gender-sexual-diversity2.pdf.

———. "Printer Jam: Ink-Enhanced Video Games of the 1990s." Lecture, Nerd Nite 50: Technoarchaeology, Austin, September 11, 2013. Accessed April 25, 2014. http://vimeo.com/87237762.

Whalen, Zach and Laurie N. Taylor, eds. *Playing the Past: History and Nostalgia in Video Games*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008.

Yoon, Andrew. "OMG Lilac PSP! Sony Says 'Girlz Play Too'." Joystiq. August 4, 2009. Accessed April 25, 2014. http://www.joystiq.com/2009/08/04/omg-lilac-psp-sony-says-girlz-play-too/.

Zaslow, Emilie. *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.