

## **EPISODE 1 Part 2: What constitutes a game?**

Some games are dead or dying.<sup>1</sup> \*horror scream\* But, we can still save many of them or bring back others to life. So get your Phoenix Downs or start casting your resurrection spells. \*intro fade in song\* Let's go! \*intro fade out\*

Hello and welcome to Deadplay, a podcast on videogame preservation and analysis! My name is Dany Guay-Belanger, and I'll be your host. Last time, we talked about the origins and goals of this project, why I chose to create a podcast, and what questions I am trying to answer. In this episode, I try to answer the question "What's a videogame?"

When I started this project, I thought my first step would be to determine how dead or alive a videogame was. But the more I thought about how games can die, the more obvious it became that the life or death of a videogame was not a dichotomy – there are too many factors to consider. We have to think of it more in the sense of degrees of deadness, rather than if a game is entirely dead or alive. Let's take *Night Flight* as an example again. Say I was able to play the game, but only on its original hardware, the TRS-80. How dead is that? What if someone made a copy somewhere, and miracle of miracles, it ended up being emulated: but only if I figure out how to download and install the right emulator to play it. How dead is that? What if it's been archived by the Internet Archive, and can be played in a browser – a format its creators never imagined. How dead is that? Is there a continuum of 'deadness' from fully dead to zombie<sup>2</sup> to not quite alive? When we play a game under emulation, how is that experience different in a meaningful way from the original experience? What are those meanings? These 'degrees of deadness' have implications for not only how we store old games, but how we play them, and how we understand them as cultural objects with complex lives and afterlives. As I was asking myself these questions, I quickly realised that I needed to start at the very beginning and define what I meant by videogame.

**It's just a videogame, you play it on a computer or a console. The only difference is that it's digital and it's more involved than reading a book or watching a movie.**

Well, yes and no. Though, you're onto something. Videogames are interactive, that's what makes them interesting. It's not just the physical, or even digital, object, but the fact that you interact with them actively, it's the fact that you play them. Consider this, there's a whole team who worked on a videogame. That team produces a lot of documents that can tell us so much about why certain things are, or aren't, in the game. Also, when a new game comes out, there's a whole marketing campaign. On top of that, there's reviews, people play them and post videos online, communities of players form. You can even find fanfics, and let's be honest, so much porn. I mean *Overwatch*? *Sonic the Hedgehog*?

**There's Sonic porn?**

Yeah, Rule 34 of the internet, "If it exists, there's porn of it."<sup>3</sup> Anyway, I'm not bringing in porn simply for comedic effect. I actually believe that it contributes to how some people see and interpret a game. It's an interesting subculture within the gaming community. Now, porn can be, and very often is, incredibly problematic. There's already a lot of literature on how sexist the gaming industry and community can be. Gamergate anyone? If you don't know about it, I suggest you look it up. It would not be surprising that many of those issues would also make their way in the erotica or downright pornographic material inspired by some games – be it drawings, animation, or fanfics. Some people love these games so much that they spend a lot of time and energy to create something new with it, even porn. That material can tell us so much about games and their players. Doesn't matter if it's canon or not.

**But if it's not canon and not part of the game, why would you preserve that?**

Because it tells you something about how people understand and interpret the game. And this also applies to other mediums by the way, be it film, books, whatever. I don't rank official material as being more important or "better" than fan produced material. Whether official or unofficial, everything related to games has the potential to bring life to a videogame, and contributes to the greater idea of the game.<sup>4</sup> Whether it's machinima, walkthroughs, mods, ads, or, yes, porn, no part is more important or better than another. In fact, none of these work independently; they are intertwined and complement one another.<sup>5</sup> In essence, I expand on James Newman's question of which game among the multiple versions of a videogame is the "authentic" version?<sup>6</sup> Like him, I think every version contributes to what we understand as the game and brings it meaning. I just also include all of the other stuff, even the porn.

Before we keep going though, I think we need to define authenticity. Sometimes, in heritage institutions, there's a quest for authenticity – we want the original, the first one. But trying to find the original is basically impossible. If I take Newman's example of *Donkey Kong*, is the original version the arcade one? Maybe, but that arcade cabinet was updated and maintained, or even converted to house another game.<sup>7</sup> It's not the fresh, out of the factory copy. Is the original one of its prototypes? Or the first sketch by Shigeru Miyamoto, the man who conceived *Donkey Kong*? How far do we have to go back to find the original? It just seems like the idea of originality is too fleeting and intangible. You can always go back further.

What we must preserve is the aura of *Donkey Kong*. The first version, or versions, of a game don't exist in a vacuum.<sup>8</sup> It's that "original" version *along* with the later versions or remakes that form *Donkey Kong*'s aura.<sup>9</sup> Also, the subsequent versions – those created at or around the time of the original release, the later ports; remakes; re-releases – were all based on the original.<sup>10</sup> Then again, videogames are larger than their original release, re-releases, and remakes. As I said earlier,

every part of a videogame helps to create the idea of the game as a whole. Therefore, we need to collect and analyse every part of a videogame to understand it.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, I argue we have to stop thinking simply in terms of games, and start thinking about gaming. We need to think about not only the games themselves, but also their use and social aspects, like LAN parties for instance. I have first-hand experience with this. I used to host those in my mom's basement every week before I moved out. But LAN parties, fueled by energy drinks and junk food are not the only experience worth preserving; eSports, clans, and guilds also have a place. Dominic's experience, I think, shows why they are so interesting. The following interview clip is in French. For those who don't understand French, I will briefly summarise it after the clip itself. You can also read the script if you want a more accurate translation. I apologise for the quality of this clip; it's pretty bad. I interviewed Dominic in a noisy cafe... not doing that again.

Original:

Dominic: 'La première, euh, clan que j'ai eu c'était sur un jeu qui s'appelait Quake

Dany: [intéressé] 'Hmm.'

Dominic: 'et c'était un jeu, euh, qui était de first-person shooter. Fait parti d'une équipe, et euh c'était une équipe professionnelle.'

Dany: [intéressé] 'Ah!'

Dominic: 'Éventuellement, on a fait des euh, des compétitions de ça. Euh, on a gagné la première place aussi, éventuellement en... 98, je crois?'

Dany: [impressionné] 'Ah!'

Dominic: 'Sur euh le jeu de Quake, tout ça.'

Dany: 'Nice!'

Dominic: 'Gagné des cartes graphiques dans ce temps-là, c'était ben euh, c'était ben open là.'

Dany: 'Ouais, ouais, ouais.'

Dominic: 'Y'avais ça, ça c'était mon premier clan. Ça c'est euh, dissocier éventuellement, parce que... un clan comme ça, c'est comme une équipe de, de, de sport.'

Dany: 'Ouais.'

Dominic: 'Et euh, t'aimes pas toujours avec qui tu joues'

Dany: [compréhension] 'Hmhhhmm.'

Dominic: 'mais tu joues pour gagner, donc tu joues pas pour avoir du plaisir, tu joues vraiment pour gagner.'

Dany: 'Ouais, ouais, ouais.'

Dominic: 'Fait-que le plaisir est mis de côté, souvent ben ça crée de la discorde.'

Dany: [compréhension] 'Hmm.'

Dominic: 'Éventuellement, ben, ça s'effrite, pis ça se sépare.'

Dany: 'Ouais, ouais, ouais.'

Dominic: 'Alors... le deuxième clan que j'ai eu c'était un jeu qui s'appelle World of Warcraft. Donc, en 2005, j'ai décidé une guild, qui s'appelle The Phoenix Guard, qui est encore ouvert d'ici aujourd'hui, on est rendu en 2017. Pis euh la plupart des personnes... qui ont fondé cette guild est toujours-là en train depuis tous ces années-là, ça fait proche de 12 ans là'

Dany: 'Nice!'

Dominic: 'qu'on est toujours actif, qu'on, qu'on joue à ce jeu-là.'

#### English translation:

Dominic: 'the first, hum, clan that I had was on a game called Quake,

Dany: [interested] 'Hmm.'

Dominic: 'and it was a game, hum, that was a first-person shooter. Was part of a team, and hum it was a professional team.'

Dany: [interested] 'Oh!'

Dominic: 'Eventually, we did hum, competitions of that. Hum, we also won the first place, eventually in... 98, I believe?'

Dany: [impressed] 'Oh!'

Dominic: 'on hum the Quake game, all that.'

Dany: 'Nice!'

Dominic: 'Won graphics cards at the time, it was hum, it was really open.'

Dany: 'Yeah, yeah, yeah.'

Dominic: 'There was that, that was my first clan. That hum, dissociated eventually, because... a clan like that, it's like a sports team.'

Dany: 'Yeah.'

Dominic: 'And hum, you don't always like with who you are playing'

Dany: [understanding] 'Hmmm.'

Dominic: 'but you play to win, so you don't play to have fun, you really play to win.'

Dany: 'Yeah, yeah, yeah.'

Dominic: 'So, pleasure is pushed aside, often, well it creates discord.'

Dany: [understanding] 'Hmm.'

Dominic: 'Eventually, well, it crumbles, and it splits.'

Dany: 'Yeah, yeah, yeah.'

Dominic: 'So... the second clan I had was on a game called World of Warcraft. So, in 2005, I decided to create a guild, named The Phoenix Guard, which is still open until today, we are now in 2017. And hum most people... who founded that guild are still there, playing since all those years, it's been close to 12 years now'

Dany: 'Nice!'

Dominic: 'that we are still active, that we, that we play that game.'

Basically, Dominic was saying that his first clan was on Quake. It was a professional clan that eventually competed and won first place in 1998 at a competition. Dominic says that in clans like that, you don't necessarily play with people you like because you're playing to win. And because fun is pushed aside, it creates discord. Eventually, those clans crumble. His second clan was actually a guild he formed in 2005 on World of Warcraft. It's called The Phoenix Guard, and it's still active today, after 12 years. Most of the people who founded that guild still play and are part of it. To me, that's such an interesting story.

**LAN parties and eSports? Say I agree with you and think everything shapes how we understand videogames, that's a lot of material, no?**

You're right. This might seem excessive—I mean how can we even collect everything about and every piece of a game? We can't. But I see this more as an advantage. There are multiple possible experiences when playing a game. Some people even enjoyed the E.T. game.

Skot: 'Hum, and I think maybe it's because I was only 8 years old'

Dany: [subtle laugh]

Skot: 'but the E.T. game

Dany: 'Yeah.'

Skot: 'has a special place in my heart; I loved that game.

Dany: [interested] 'Huh!'

Skot: 'I loved it.'

In an ideal situation, we would save everything, every experience, but that's impossible. Instead, we should concentrate on what captures our interest and what is available to us. The parts of a game are fluid and dynamic, they interact and influence one another.<sup>12</sup> So, while a scholar or institution might be acquiring, preserving, and analyzing only one aspects of what makes the game what it is, it's still capturing its aura.

This has another implication though, one that's expressed by James Newman in *Best Before*. We might not need to study or even preserve everything. Not because we do not want to,

but because we can't. In the future, it might not be possible to play today's games, but that doesn't mean we failed. Perhaps, he says, it's simply a fact we have to come to terms with and use as a basis to plan how we'll preserve games in the future.<sup>13</sup>

### **So you say everything is worthy of being preserved, but what does that mean? Is there a list?**

Of course. I combined existing lists and added to them to create my own.<sup>14</sup> Links and sources on deadplay.net. I created a typology, or classification if you will, that identifies what I consider to be part of a videogame. It's not intended to be definitive and it's by no means complete. Without a doubt, there's material I forgot to include that merits mention. Also, remember that the categories are fluid, meaning that parts can fit under more than one.<sup>15</sup> I'll shortly describe them here, but if you want to see the complete list, I invite you to take a look at them on the website.

Now, my typology. The three main categories I argue form a videogame are "Paragame", "Creator", and "Social", each of which is subdivided in two. For the first primary category, "Paragame", its subcategories are "Epigame" and "Perigame". "Epigame" describes the game itself and includes things like the original release, its source code, mods, and both authorised and unauthorised copies. "Perigame", however, includes material about the game or that derives from it. This includes book or film adaptations, walkthroughs, etc. I borrowed and adapted "Paragame" from the literary studies' notion of paratextuality.<sup>16</sup> It basically means the entirety of a book, from "everything between and on the covers" to parts outside of it, like interviews, reviews, diaries, etc. The literary theorist who came up with paratextuality, Gérard Genette, described it as sort of dichotomy; what's *inside* the book and what's *outside* of it. What I did is I took out two large aspects, what I called "Creator" and "Social". In theory, they could still be considered "perigame", but I took them out because I wanted to highlight these two other categories. Fell free to disagree.

Moving on, “Creator”, the second primary category, is divided between the “Core” creator and the “Periphery” creator. The “Core” includes what is directly related to the game’s development; such as development and marketing material, legal documentation, or internal websites. The “Periphery” is indirect material about the game. This includes oral histories of players and fans, strategy guides, research papers on the game, etc. Finally, the third main category, “Social”, includes the “Company” and the “Community” subcategories. “Company” represents social elements of the games directly created by their developers or publishers. It includes things like official forums, company social media pages and accounts, and official contests. The “Community” subcategory includes material and events specifically developed by the community. This includes LAN parties, community managed forums, and wikis.

**To be honest, this is a little confusing.**

Not being able to visualise a typology is confusing. So, that’s why I made a list to help me. Again, I highly recommend looking at it. The list is much more complete than the short description I just gave.

Now that I’ve described what constitutes a game, we can move on to our next question: “How do we distinguish between a game that’s alive and a game that’s dead?” In the next episode, we try to answer understand how a game can die. Please stay tuned! I would like to thank Rebecca Baker, who is the other voice you heard throughout the podcast, and Racoon City Massacre for giving me permission to use their music. The theme song for Deadplay comes from their song “Where They Walk Alone.” You can find more of their music on Bandcamp. \*outro\* They also have a Facebook page and a Twitter! Thank you so much and see you next time!

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<sup>1</sup> James Newman, *Best Before: Videogames, Supersession and Obsolescence* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1.

<sup>2</sup> In an edited collection entitled *Residual Media*, and building on Bruce Sterling’s notion of “dead media”, Charles R. Acland describes the notion of “living dead” culture. This is the basis for qualifying “dead” or “dying” games as



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zombie games. As zombies are also often portrayed in and are the subject of videogames, this seemed like a fitting analogy. See Charles R. Acland, *Residual Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xx.

<sup>3</sup> There are multiple formulations for this rule, but this variation was the most compelling. See Tom Chivers, “Internet Rules and Laws: The Top 10, from Godwin to Poe,” *The Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/news/6408927/Internet-rules-and-laws-the-top-10-from-Godwin-to-Poe.html>.

<sup>4</sup> In essence, I am applying Manuel DeLanda’s interpretation of assemblage theory. In *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, he defines assemblages as “wholes whose properties emerge from the interactions between parts” (2006, 9). DeLanda goes further and argues that the theory must “account for the synthesis of the properties of a whole not reducible to its parts” (italics in original) and that “parts of an assemblage do not form a seamless whole” (Ibid, 4). As a result, the parts making up an assemblage might appear unrelated to one another, but still, these parts constitute the whole.

Parts are not simply defined by the whole. DeLanda’s example of market-places illustrates this notion well. He argues that “scaled economic units must be regarded as an individual singularity bearing a relation of part-to-whole to the immediately larger one, much as organisms are related to species” (Ibid). Parts might constitute a whole, but they should not be interpreted as only having meaning in terms of the whole they make. DeLanda argued that “unlike wholes in which parts are linked by relations of interiority (that is, relations which constitute the very identity of the parts) assemblages are made up of parts which are self-subsistent and articulated by relations of exteriority, so that a part may be detached and made a component of another assemblage” (Ibid, 33). Put differently, no part of an assemblage is restricted to one assemblage. This understanding of assemblage theory allows for much flexibility and permits an understanding of assemblages as inherently dynamic. Manuel Delanda calls this flexibility and fluidity “a space of possibilities” (Ibid, 18). Assemblages should therefore not be seen as closed systems, but rather as interrelated systems capable of influencing and being influenced. See Manuel Delanda, *A New Philosophy of Society, Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

The literary notion of intertextuality also helps in understanding videogames as assemblages, as it provides an interesting take on the origin and influences of videogames. This theory suggests “that meaning in a text can only ever be understood in relation to other texts; no work stands alone but is interlinked with the tradition that came before it and the context in which it is produced.” (Allen 2011, i) Put simply, and if we adapt the theory to videogames, games can only be understood in relation to other videogames. See Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Florence: Routledge Ltd, 2011), doi:10.4324/9780203829455.

Still, the concept of intertextuality also accounts for the influences of other sources. “The systems, codes and traditions of other art forms and of culture in general are also crucial to the meaning of a work of literature” (Ibid, 1). In other words, to truly understand literature, or in this case videogames, one must also look to other media that influence the design and creation of the games. Like text, videogames are not only influenced by other games, but also by culture and other art forms. This is the argument of Tristan Donovan in his book *Replay: The History of Videogames*, in which he identifies literature, comic books, film, and Dungeons & Dragons some of the most prominent influences and inspirations to videogames (2010). See Allen, *Intertextuality* and Donovan, *Replay*.

<sup>5</sup> Slack and Wise also state that, in articulations, “no single force or relationship takes the center stage, and that the context is more heterogeneous” (Ibid, 127). For the scholar of videogames interested in a preservation strategy that does justice to the idea of game-as-assemblage, this concept enjoins us to consider every possible articulation of an assemblage to have the potential to hold the aura of the assemblage itself. Every part of a videogame can teach something about the game, from LAN parties to fan labour. Players and fans appropriate these games and sometimes create entire storylines within a videogame’s universe. These can tell us much on how the game and its story is interpreted and appropriated. Videogames are inherently social and not considering what fans create is to disregard the creativity, work, and experience of players. Understanding parts as equal in their effect on the assemblage pushes the interpretation of games beyond what is on the screen or even on the panels of an arcade cabinet. See Jennifer Daryl Slack and J. Macgregor Wise, *Culture and Technology: A Primer*, second edition (New York: Peter Lang, 2015).

Parts of assemblages are better understood as articulations. They are defined by Jennifer Daryl Slack and J. Macgregor Wise as “dynamic interminglings that can move in many and various directions, propelled by various and changing circumstances (of other articulations). The “web” of these particular articulations is what [they] call an assemblage” (2015, 133). They stress the fact that though articulation form identities or unities, “these articulations

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are neither necessary nor permanent” (Ibid, 152). In fact, Slack and Wise describe assemblages as being “made up of multiple (corresponding, noncorresponding, and contradictory) articulations” in which “change takes place in the dynamic tensions among the articulations that constitute an assemblage” (Ibid, 133). There is much place for flexibility and fluidity in these understanding of assemblages and articulations. While it could be argued that this interpretation could cause confusion in the understanding of an assemblage, making a whole too stable risks oversimplifying and denying the dynamic aspects of assemblages and their articulations.

<sup>6</sup> Newman, *Best Before*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Some arcade cabinets with similar designs could be modified to become a whole new game. For instance, *Joust*, *Robotron: 2084*, or *Stargate* could be converted to house *Cloak & Dagger*. “Cloak and Dagger installation instructions for Joust, Robotron: 2084, or Stargate,” Atari, 1983, box 59, folder 5, Atari Coin-Op Division corporate records, Strong Museum of Play.

<sup>8</sup> See Allen, *Intertextuality*.

<sup>9</sup> Bruno Latour and Adam Lowe’s understanding of aura helps make sense of videogames’ fluid identities, as well as their materials and materialities. They argue that the aura of an original is, in fact, both created and reinforced by the availability of facsimiles. For them, “the real phenomenon to be accounted for is not the punctual delineation of one version divorced from the rest of its copies, but the whole assemblage made up of one —or several— original(s) together with the retinue of its continually re-written biography” (Latour and Lowe 2011, 4). In other words, the original cannot be separated from its copies. It is the very existence and prolific nature of reproductions that produce an aura of authenticity combined with the original that gives weight to a piece of art. This is profoundly important, especially given that one of the fundamental function of a computer is to make copies and then perform manipulations on those. Games are copied, ported to other platforms, adapted, reinvented, and reimaged; be it as games, other media, or memorabilia. All of these different iterations have the potential to hold the “original’s” aura. The development and derivative material, copies, and even references in other media – such as film, magazines, or online forums – contribute maintaining a videogame’s aura. There is no single and unique object that hold that aura; everything has the potential to hold on to it. Videogames are therefore assemblages. See Bruno Latour and Adam Lower, “The Migration of the Aura, or How to Explore the Original Through its Facsimiles,” in *Switching Codes: Thinking through Digital Technology in the Humanities and the Arts* ed. Thomas Bartscherer and Roderick Coover (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), accessed on May 29, 2018, <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/108-ADAM-FACSIMILES-GB.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Dominic Arsenault somewhat addresses this when he applied intertextuality to *Shovel Knight* and argued that games are reflexive of their ancestors. In the case of *Shovel Knight*, this means “*Mega Man*, *Castlevania*, *DuckTales*, *Zelda II*, and occasionally *Faxanadu*,” as well as many others (Arsenault, 2015). While Arsenault’s argument is sound, I push this line of argumentation further and argue that ports, re-releases, remakes, emulation, etc. are intertextual to their direct ancestor—the original version. See Dominic Arsenault, “Shovel Knight Redug: The Retro Game as Hypertext and as Uchronia,” *First Person Scholar*, posted on November 16, 2015, <http://www.firstpersonscholar.com/shovel-knight-redug/>.

Also, I based this argument on Raymond Williams’ notion of articulation of the residual. When discussing culture, Williams describes the notion of articulation of the residual as being “effectively formed in the past, but [...] still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present” (1977, 122). Charles R. Acland notes that “for Williams, the residual, emergent, or dominant can refer to experiences, practices, values, artifacts, institutions, and meanings” (2007, xxi). For preservations purposes, videogames are considered artifacts, and therefore Williams’ notion is useful in understanding them. Videogames are and were defined and created in a particular timeframe. As they evolve, and as culture evolves around it, their meaning and how they are understood also changes. What was once thought as pure entertainment becomes an artform with complex origins and meanings. This becomes even more meaningful as videogames are currently the subject of much nostalgia, while being decidedly thought of in presentist terms. Early videogames were limited in their displays, storylines, and controls due to technological limitations and simply due to the fact that they were a novel medium. All of these limitations have been lessened or worked around in the now roughly 60 years of videogames history. But older videogames are still often compared to their more recent counterparts. They are reinvented and reconsidered as time changes while still retaining the residues of the culture, art, ideologies, and technologies of that came before them. Since videogames are assemblages, they are not static.

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Thibodeau makes a similar argument. He argues that “to preserve digital objects, we must be able to identify and retrieve all its digital components” (Thibodeau). While this is true, videogames also physical. To preserve them effectively, Thibodeau’s claim must be taken one step further. Physical material relating to the

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object—not only those that are directly related to them, or even actively part of said object—must be preserved. See Kenneth Thibodeau, “Overview of Technological Approaches to Digital Preservation and Challenges in the Coming Years,” *CLIR* accessed May 27, 2018, <https://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub107/thibodeau/>.

<sup>12</sup> Refer to note 4. Also, see Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 3-4.

<sup>13</sup> Newman, *Best Before*, 160.

<sup>14</sup> Devin Monnens, Zach Vowell, Judd Ehtan Ruggill, Ken S. McAllister, and Andrew Armstrong, “Before It’s Too Late: A Digital Game Preservation White Paper,” edited by Henry Lowood, *American Journal of Play* (Fall 2009): 153 and John G. Zabolitzky, “Preserving Software: Why and How,” *Iterations: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Software History* 1 (September 13, 2002): 1-8, retrieved from <http://www.cbi.umn.edu/iterations/zabolitzky.html>.

<sup>15</sup> This fluidity – or as Manuel Delanda calls it, the “space of possibilities” – is a crucial part of assemblage theory. Refer to note 4 and See Manuel Delanda, *A New Philosophy of Society, Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Chris Koenig-Woodyard clearly summarised this notion by arguing that Gérard Genette, the literary scholar who developed paratextuality,

formulates a simple algorithm that governs the whole of Paratexts: Paratext = peritext + epitext. The peritext includes elements ‘inside’ the confines of a bound volume – everything between and on the covers, as it were. The epitext, then, denotes elements ‘outside’ the bound volume — public or private elements such as interviews, reviews, correspondence, diaries etc. — although Genette does comment that ‘in principle, every context serves as a paratext.’ (1997)

In essence, if this is applied to videogames, the peritext could be interpreted as the box of the game and everything inside it (the housing medium and everything on it, the manual, etc.) and the epitext would be everything outside of the box (development and marketing material, interviews, reviews, and so on). But videogames’ paratext has the potential to be much more complex than the paratext of books.

As the number of people who can potentially work on the creation of a videogame is greater and more diverse – from programmers, to music composers, and even military advisors – so is the potential for peritextual and epitextual material. Videogames cannot be treated simply as literature. The diverse origins and inspirations of this medium requires that they be analysed and thought of differently. For instance, when applying paratextuality to videogames, one must account “for flexibility in when a game text (or any other media text) might become a paratext and vice versa” (Consalvo 2017, 177). This flexibility is what both makes analysing and even defining videogames so difficult, and so rich in potential. Paratextuality is a useful tool to understand them, but it should be adapted to videogames.

James Hodges and Mia Consalvo both apply this theory to videogames but emphasise different aspects of a game’s paratext. Hodges remains within the game itself. He uses paratext and epitext to discuss text files and drivers coming alongside original versions, emulations, or copies of games (Hodges 2016,). This is an important addition to the parts of a videogame as these files accompany every piece of software. Even if a player might not interact with them directly, these “hidden” parts of the game are instrumental to the videogame’s functioning.

For her part, Consalvo goes outside of the game, focusing on peripheral material. She uses Peter Lunenfeld’s adaptation of Gérard Genette formulation of paratext to digital media. Lunenfeld argued that the boundaries of paratext are even more fluid when applied to digital media (Cited in Consalvo 2007, 9). Building on this, she argued “the peripheral industries surrounding games function as just such a paratext. Gaming magazines, strategy guides, mod chip makers, the International Game Exchange, Even Balance and other companies, and industry segments work to shape the gameplay experience in particular ways” (Consalvo 2007, 9). This approach is closely related to Graham Allen’s claim that “there is never a single or correct way to read a text, since every reader brings with him or her different expectations, interests, viewpoints and prior reading experiences” (Allen 2000, 6-7). As with literature, every videogame player brings with them different expectations, interests, viewpoints and prior gaming experiences. Additionally, many games come with cheat codes, map editors, or can be modded, something Mia Consalvo addresses in her book *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames* (2007). The different experiences resulting from these game alterations were not necessarily intended during the development of a videogame.

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Nevertheless, only preserving the “intended” experience of a game would be to overlook and discredit an entire experience.

How can we incorporate these diverse understandings for preservation and study from a public history point of view? What do these approaches imply for us? Both Mia Consalvo and James Hodges’ use of paratextuality expand what is understood as paratext for videogames, exposing the complexity of studying the medium but still are not complete enough. Based on the interpretation of paratextuality as a fluid concept, I propose including all forms fan-labour, such as fan fictions; oral histories of game creators and players; video recordings of the game, professional, academic, or otherwise; official and unofficial events; and much more.

Paratextuality is not without its problems. It creates dichotomy – what is in the game and what is outside of it. Consalvo herself warns of the dangers of fixing any text (read games) “as central and others as peripheral” (2017, 177). The strong relationship between game creators and players exemplifies this well. The concept of game creation can often be the result of a conversation between these two groups. This is especially true of games which rely on software updates, typically done automatically to modify or improve the game, such as Massive Multiplayer Online Games. Players can voice their grievances and opinions on official forums and social media pages ran by the company who created a game, or when testing early versions of a game. This positions players comments as integral parts of a game’s development. The boundaries of what is peripheral and what is part of a videogame is fluid. To distinguish between the original notion of paratext and how it applies to literature, I have opted to rename paratext as paragame. As such, peritext and epigame should also be renamed perigame and epigame. Renaming this concept when it is applied to videogames and appropriating it distinguishes it from its origin in literary theory. This is a first step in correcting the dichotomy created by paratextuality. Dividing between what is in and around the game stops being useful when all of the potential influences on a game are taken into account.