Nostalgia Games: 
Replaying The Past

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Abstract

This thesis aims to analyse the function of a “nostalgia game” – games that intentionally reference to the past to broaden their appeal. The two games chosen for analysis are Yacht Club Games’ Shovel Knight (2014) and Nintendo’s The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild (2017). Shovel Knight exemplifies a game purposefully designed as a celebration of classic videogames on the NES form the late 1980s to early 1990s by using retro aesthetics and old game design conventions. Breath of the Wild demonstrates how a game series looks to its roots for innovation – the original Legend of Zelda released in 1986. The analysis will be divided in two sections for each game. The first section looks at the recurrence of game mechanics and references both games make through the concept of “remediation” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) and how the games use nostalgia. The second section looks at the micro-temporalities of the games and how they reflect the games they are referencing. These micro-temporalities are referred to as “seriality” (Denson & Jahn-Sudmann, 2015). The wider purpose of this thesis is to lay the groundwork for future research into the field of nostalgic videogames.
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Declaration

I, Marlon Gonlin, declare that this thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety under the guidance of Dr Christopher Chesher. I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, this thesis does not infringe upon anyone’s copyright and have acknowledged all sources of information which have been used in this thesis.

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1 Introduction

Googling a definition for “nostalgia” reveals “a sentimental longing or a wistful affection for a period in the past.” Among gamers, “nostalgia” is used to describe a sentimental feeling for a game that they played during their childhood or adolescence. When a game is described as “nostalgic” it may refer to a game that causes players to reminisce on a past experience or if a game manages to capture the spirit of older games, be it through its graphics, gameplay, soundtrack or any historical references. This thesis aims to examine how nostalgia plays an important role in broadening and securing a game’s appeal.

By design, videogames are a repetitious media. This is not just because games can be replayed, but because we see several past gaming conventions recurring in new releases. Whether intentionally harkening back to a previous game, being the next in a line of sequels, repeating familiar controls, game design and genre conventions, or using familiar characters, settings and story, tropes are repeated in videogames to instil familiarity in the context of innovation. This thesis suggests a new term for games designed to deliberately evoke the sense of familiarity through the recurrence of old gaming content and conventions: the “nostalgia game.” Within this category, I suggest there are three separate nostalgic relationships and further suggest different terms for each. First, there are historical nostalgia games that reference historical worlds. Second, there are retro-nostalgia games that remediate the aesthetics of past games and media. Third, there are universe nostalgia games that are part of a larger universe and reference the games that came before it. This thesis will focus on the latter two examples and demonstrate the application of studying nostalgia games for further research.
The process of creating a new game by reusing old game conventions can be referred to as “remediation”, which is “the representation of one medium in another” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p.45): “remediation offers us a means of interpreting the work of earlier media as well. Our culture conceives of each medium or constellation of media as it responds to, redeployes, competes with, and reforms other media” (p.55). New media that draw on the conventions of old media are designed to improve upon them whilst simultaneously retaining the look and feel of the old to evoke familiarity to the user. In the case of videogames, new consoles and new games can effectively be new media, with new technical and representational capacities, whilst simultaneously drawing on its predecessors. The reuse of archaic elements and old game conventions is widely practiced in game development, to the point where they have become standards. These conventions are ingrained in the player’s mind and body, therefore to change them would be detrimental to the game’s experience. In addition, remediation lends familiarity to players and brings about many similar experiences whilst playing, such as game structure, progression of in-game time and the story holding everything together.

Games incorporate strategies to establish and maintain temporal cohesion within and between games and other media. Denson & Jahn-Sudmann (2013) propose the concept of “ludic seriality”. The study of the temporalities of games which occur “not only in explicitly marked game series (with their sequels, prequels, remakes, and other types of continuation), but also within games themselves (e.g. in their formal-structural constitution as an iterative series of “levels” or “worlds”)” (p.1). In addition, I will also analyse the different grades of intra-ludic seriality: games that are strongly serialised, and those that are weakly serialised. Strongly serialised games impose a strict set of rules in order to restrict players to a certain style of gameplay, while
weakly serialised games emphasise story and allow players to experience more elaborate styles of gameplay (Heilmann, 2014, pp.36-7).

To analyse the characteristics of a nostalgia game, this thesis will take two approaches. The first is to examine the remediation of old games in new ones, thus revealing the origin of older game conventions that are remediated in new forms. The second approach is to analyse how similar temporal structures (serialities) of the older games are recreated. Whether deliberately paying homage to games of the past, or being the latest instalment in a long-running series, nostalgia games typically feature graphics, gameplay mechanics, sound design and narratives that can be traced to a past game. The second is to analyse how nostalgia games recreate the temporality of older games, this thesis will adopt theories of seriality, focussing on inter-ludic seriality – the temporalities between games occurring in the form of sequels, prequels, spin-offs or remakes; and more specifically focussed on intra-ludic seriality – how the micro-temporalities within the game segment the player’s experience (Denson & Jahn-Sudmann, 2013, p.10).

The two games chosen for analysis — Yacht Club Game’s Shovel Knight (2014) and Nintendo’s Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild (2017) — are two different kinds of nostalgia game: The retro-nostalgia game, which attempt to recapture the look and feel of old games, and the universe nostalgia game, which draws on the history of a long-standing game series by directly referencing events and characters in its universe. Both games fit the fantasy-adventure genre and both demonstrate how videogames can use nostalgia to build their appeal. However, there are numerous differences between the games, as Shovel Knight was crowd funded and independently developed, whereas Breath of the Wild is a first-party game.
developed by a major company. *Shovel Knight* is a 2D platformer\(^1\) and *Breath of the Wild* is a 3D open-world\(^2\) game. *Shovel Knight* is a stand-alone game with a retro aesthetic that attempts to faithfully remediate old game designs associated with the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), nearly three decades after their release. *Breath of the Wild* is part of the long-running *Zelda* series and represents modern game development. However, it also attempts to recapture the essence of the original *Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo R&D4, 1986) released three decades ago.

*Shovel Knight* was inspired by classic NES games of the mid 1980s to early 1990s. It creates a tribute to these games by imitating their graphics, sound, controls and game mechanics. According to its developers, *Shovel Knight* started as a “joke conversation over lunch that kind of got too serious” (Turi, 2014). Nick Wozniak and Sean Velasco, the lead developers, said the game was conceived over a conversation about a potential retro-style NES game that they would like to develop. They started discussing what game mechanics they liked from back then and cite *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link*'s (Nintendo R&D4, 1987) combat mechanics. Specifically, the down-thrust attack where the character jumps, points the sword downwards and lands on top of enemies. From there, Wozniak and Velasco brought up the idea digging through blocks and hitting the underbellies of enemies by flipping them over. Since these actions did not fit a swordfighter, they adopted a colleague’s suggestion of a knight who wields a shovel (Turi, 2014). *Shovel Knight* was crowd-funded via a Kickstarter campaign with a minimum funding goal of $75,000. They

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1 Platforming game, or platformer – a genre of game where the main challenge lies in jumping over obstacles and landing on platforms to traverse the environment.

2 Open-world game – a genre of game that allow players to interact relatively unrestricted within a large in-game world.
managed to far exceed that figure, drawing in $311,502 by 14th April 2013, backed by a total of 14,749 people (Shovel Knight Kickstarter, n.d.).

Upon its release, critical reception of Shovel Knight was widely positive. YouTuber ProJared would comment: “I can’t say enough praises for Shovel Knight, it’s some of the best platforming I’ve ever seen. I cannot think of a single thing that Shovel Knight does bad or poorly or wrong” (Knabenbauer, 2014); Ben “Yahtzee” Croshaw of Zero Punctuation notes: “on the whole, it’s an engaging game where a rudimentary core gameplay is used to a surprising degree of variety without compromising its simplicity” (Croshaw, 2014). In addition, major game publications reviewed the game favourably, earning an aggregate score of 85 out of 100 on Metacritic (2014).

Since Shovel Knight’s release in June 2014, at the time of writing, there have been two additional campaigns released for the game: Plague of Shadows, where players take control of one of the level bosses, Plague Knight; and Specter of Torment, where players control Specter Knight. However, this thesis is concerned with the campaign of the titular hero Shovel Knight, as this campaign resembles the NES games it is attempting to imitate the most. This game was chosen for analysis because it deliberately attempts to recapture a certain era of gaming by selectively remediating the most memorable parts of NES games. It is a prime example of a retro-nostalgia game.

The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild is the 2017 instalment in one of Nintendo’s most popular franchises. It was the final first-party developed game for the Nintendo Wii U and also released as a Nintendo Switch launch title. The Legend of Zelda series dates back to 1986 and includes 19 major titles on 11 different game consoles.
at the time of writing\(^3\). There is a recurring joke among gamers saying that Nintendo releases the same game over again whilst claiming that each is new. While there is an element of truth to the joke, it is unfair to claim such with the *Zelda* series. Each new iteration innovates on the pre-existing formula and over thirty years of game development, the *Zelda* games have evolved extensively with each game offering an experience that is new in its own way. The defining features of the *Zelda* games have been remediated countless times and this is where the joke stems from. Like Mario is constantly saving Princess Peach from Bowser, Link is constantly saving Hyrule from Ganondorf. In many ways *Breath of the Wild* is a remake of the first *Legend of Zelda*. The same iconic characters are featured, and the new game has a similar sense of openness that gives players freedom to explore at their own pace.

*Breath of the Wild* received overwhelmingly positive reviews upon its release, receiving an aggregate score of 97 out of 100 on Metacritic (2017). ProJared praised the game highly: “This is the most free *Zelda* has been since the original. It’s the constant gameplay loop of discovery, collecting and rewards that makes this game so addicting. I truly could not put it down” (Knabenbauer, 2017). Jirard “The Completionist” Khalil rated the game favourably, saying:

> [Breath of the Wild] changes so much about what we know in the series while evolving in new ways that’s never been done before for the franchise. Everyone will say ‘well that mechanic or that thing has been around for years in gaming’. That may be true, but here, in *Zelda*, in Hyrule with Link and Zelda we have a whole new experience with them in regards to gameplay, design, everything overall (Khalil, 2017).

\(^3\) This count includes all games in the main series and does not include ports, remakes or spin-offs. The most comprehensive list of all *Zelda* related publications can be found on Wikipedia under the subject “List of *The Legend of Zelda* media”.

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*Breath of the Wild* is a universe nostalgia game in the sense that it is part of a long running series of games and references the games in the same series. It evokes player’s nostalgia by recapturing the essence of what made the original *Zelda* game ground-breaking, whilst simultaneously presenting itself as a new experience.

*Shovel Knight* and *Breath of the Wild* are both analysed through the author’s own experience and by examining gameplay videos on YouTube. In addition, any relevant public statements by the developers, which provide insight to the design of the games, are taken into account. These statements will then be analysed through the two concepts of remediation and seriality.
2 Literature Review

To establish the parameters of a nostalgia game, I turn to Sloan’s (2015) Videogames as remediated memories. Sloan (2015) argues “the commodification of consumer nostalgia for videogames (repackaging, revisiting, or reimagining past designs and aesthetics)” (p.531) is a trend in videogame development. This practice is prevalent in games such as Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon (2013, cited by Sloan, 2015) and Gone Home (2013, cited by Sloan, 2015). Blood Dragon is a game that remediates the visual characteristics of the 1980s, such as CRT scan-lines, VHS static and the use of neon colours. It places antiquated objects within the game to synthetically restores the past rather than presenting it as an original artefact (p.537). Gone Home is similar in that it places antiquated objects in the game world. Here, it is furniture and items from a 1992 Sears catalogue and players are encouraged to inspect and scrutinise them (p.538).

Both games commodify nostalgia for certain time periods in order to appeal to (or exploit) the player’s desire for nostalgic depictions of the past (pp.537-8). Sloan (2015) describes this as a “Baudrillardian restoration”, drawing on Jean Baudrillard’s Simulacra and Simulation (1984, 1994, cited by Sloan, 2015), in which Baudrillard argues that reality in media is reduced to a system of signs that no longer resemble the real-world equivalent. In The System of Objects (1968/2005, cited by Sloan, 2015), Baudrillard argues that objects must be reduced to signs in order to be consumed, as the object’s sole purpose is to convey a message to the consumer (pp.533-4). As videogames continue to evolve, they become increasingly reliant on repetition, with nostalgia for older games being used to broaden their appeal. In turn, this reduces old games to antiquated symbols rather than games (Sloan, 2015, p.534). Sloan (2015) has argued that Blood Dragon and Gone Home are distorted
yet nostalgic representations of certain points in time and their central function is to
invoke nostalgia within players. Based on Sloan’s (2015) analysis of the two games,
I classify Blood Dragon as a retro-nostalgia game as it directly references the
aesthetics of obsolete media, in this case VHS tapes and CRT televisions. Gone
Home I classify as a historical nostalgia games as it directly references items found

By contrast, Shovel Knight presents a commodification of nostalgia through the
remediation of older games. It deliberately recreates the ludic and narrative features
of a specific era in gaming and aims to simulate as closely as possible the
experience of playing them, thus invoking nostalgia. On the other hand, Breath of the
Wild uses references to the series’ history and events within its universe and brings
into play a set of antiquated objects such as items, characters, landscapes and lore-
relevant symbols to commodify nostalgia. When studied in terms of symbolic
representations of the Zelda series, Sloan’s (2015) concepts of Baudrillardian
restoration lend themselves to an understanding of the recurring elements within
Breath of the Wild. Furthermore, the theories lend themselves to an analysis of how
these elements are used to recreate the familiar settings, narratives and gameplay
seen in nearly every previous Zelda game. To examine the different way both games
emulate past games, this thesis will analyse them from two different angles: first is
the components being remediated and second is how the remediated components
create the same seriality found in older games.

Part one of this thesis is concerned with the remediation of old games within newer
ones, asking what do the games appropriate from the past and how does the
combination of all these elements create reconstruct older game conventions in a
modern media environment. This draws on the concept of “remediation”, a term
coined by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999). It is described as a repurposing of media in a new context and giving it new functions. Therefore, media do not evolve through a simple linear progression, but rather through a complex network of media repurposing old media and making obsolete media live on as part of new media. When a new medium appears, we are constantly comparing it with what came before (p.55). Remediation occurs on a spectrum between immediacy and hypermediacy (p.45).

To elaborate, immediacy is when the remediated is seamlessly integrated within the new medium. Bolter & Grusin (1999) exemplify this with virtual reality which they describe as “a medium whose purpose is to disappear” (p.21). Virtual reality is designed to fully immerse the user and make them forget they are interacting with a medium. Hypermediacy is the opposite: the user is fully aware of the medium. Consider a desktop computer interface and its use of a windowed display. Users may read a text on screen, but once they are finished they are faced with the presence of the medium and its interface such as icons, menus and other windows. This creates a non-unified space or as Bolter & Grusin word it: “a heterogeneous space, in which representation is conceived of not as a window on the world, but rather as ‘windowed’ itself – with windows that open on to other representations or other media” (p.34). Different mediums fall within the spectrum and demonstrate varying degrees of either immediacy or hypermediacy.

Bolter & Grusin (1999) describe remediation as operating on a double logic that can be understood in three different ways. The first is “remediation as the mediation of mediation” (p.55). Bolter & Grusin (1999) argue that media is constantly repurposing, replacing and commenting on previous media forms and requires the continual existence of media in order to function as media (p.55). The second is “remediation
as the inseparability of mediation and reality”. Media exist as more than physical objects in the real world. They also reflect social constructions of the culture they were created – this is how every piece of media is given meaning and significance (p.58). Therefore, media remediates the real. Finally, “remediation as reform”. Similar to “remediation” in environmental engineering, the restoration of damaged ecosystems, “remediation” in a media studies sense acts as the restoration of media. By repurposing media, it enhances the experience of new media by promising to either fulfil a role old media failed at or fixing the shortcomings of its predecessor (pp.59-60).

The second part of this thesis deals with seriality in both games, analysing how each establishes inter-ludic seriality with the games they are referencing and how they refrain the intra-ludic serial structures of the game’s ancestors. Denson & Jahn-Sudmann (2013) describe “seriality” as a continual stream of objects in a media product, each related to the previous, such as an episodic television show and its presence outside of the show itself in the form of transmedia adaptations, such as novelisations and merchandising. Traditional seriality has been seen at least since the nineteenth century popular culture and relied on regular temporal intervals between releases. Modern “digital seriality” problematises this because new media reconfigure (or remediate) old media into digital formats, such as old television series and films getting released on DVD, or comic books and novels being digitally scanned and uploaded to a database. These break traditional seriality in which viewers were accustomed to a regular interval of time between releases. This wealth of reconfigured media gives a plethora of choices to the viewer, allowing them to consume media at their own pace (pp.4-5). Denson & Jahn-Sudmann identify a “convergence culture” in which media contents go beyond their original format and
are translated into many different media forms, complicating traditional media
seriality (Jenkins, 2006a cited by Denson & Jahn-Sudmann, 2013, pp.4-5).

Denson & Jahn-Sudmann (2013) explain that studies of digital seriality within the
field of game studies are limited, however the key elements to understanding
seriality in games have already been touched upon with the narratology versus
ludology debate (p.5). In summary, the school of narratology emphasises the
importance of narrative elements in games that structure their interactivity. The
school of ludology claims that narrative structures in games are secondary and, at its
core, games are about the player’s interaction with the boundaries of the in-game
world. A question that arises in this debate is whether games can deliver the same
type of serialised narratives found in film and television, or whether the storytelling is
merely superficial. Lacking from this debate, however, is an analysis on temporality
in games. That is, an analysis of the relation between games and time, both within
the games themselves, between games, and outside of games. In other words, how
does story influence game time, and how does play influence game time (pp.5-7)?

Denson & Jahn-Sudmann (2013) propose theories of digital seriality and adopt them
to analyse the serialisation of games as “ludic seriality” (p.10). They identify three
levels of ludic seriality. The first level encompasses the temporal structures within
the games themselves, looking at how games are segmented into “worlds” or “levels”
that are connected with one another in sometimes complex ways. This is referred to
as “intra-ludic seriality”. The second level deals with the temporal connections
between games in the form of sequels, prequels and/or remakes. This is referred to
as “inter-ludic seriality”. The third and final level deals with transmedia temporalities
occurring outside of games, in the form of comic books, novels and/or television
shows. This is called “para-ludic seriality” (p.11). Denson & Jahn-Sudmann (2013)
identify two main methods to study seriality in games. The first method is to analyse the intra- and inter-ludic seriality of games by looking at the dynamic between the micro-temporalities created in-game and real time beyond the boundaries of the game. The second method is to adopt a cultural-historical viewpoint. Mainly focussed on inter- and para-ludic seriality, this method aims to study “collective serialization” – the dynamic between ludic seriality and the broader communities built around them based on socio-political and historical identities which permeate through the serialization of games (pp.11-2). For the purposes of this thesis, I will mainly use the first methodology of analysing intra- and inter-ludic seriality and focusing on the how seriality of older games are reconstructed in both examples.

To better grasp the concept of intra-ludic seriality, consider Heilmann (2014) and the idea of strongly serialised and weakly serialised games. Strongly serialised games “showcase the abstract, formal, rule-based nature of (video-)games theorized by ludologists”. The most noteworthy examples being arcade games such as Space Invaders, Pac-Man and Centipede (all games cited by Heilmann, 2014), as they were made with limited hardware and designed to be simple to play, but difficult to master. Weakly serialised games “display the narrative qualities of games discussed by narratologists” and allow players more elaborate forms of gameplay (pp.36-7). As will be made evident, Shovel Knight and Breath of the Wild exhibit different grades of intra-ludic seriality. One is based off classic Nintendo games, designed with some of the remnant design philosophy of arcade games, whereas the other places emphasis on story and free-roaming gameplay.

Although remediation concerns itself with the appearance of different media forms in other media, I argue that because videogames have evolved well past their simple origins, the representation of older games in newer ones can be analysed through
the lens of remediation. To elaborate, because each game creates a new set of affordances, that is a quality which allows a certain type of interaction, I argue that individual videogames, or game appearing on individual platforms (in my case, the Wii U and the NES) can be treated as separate media. To illustrate this, I turn to Bogost & Monfort’s (n.d.) Platform Studies: a series of studies examining the dynamic between hardware and software by looking at the platform for which games were produced. They understand games as being stratified, operating on five different levels: reception/operation – studies on phenomena occurring outside of the game, such as psychoanalysis, reader response theory or any empirical studies on videogames. Interface – what the user sees occurring on the screen, the main visual aspect of the game. Form/function – the narrative occurring because of the interface. In other words, the on-screen narrative being told by the player’s actions. Code – the language used to program the function on the platform. Finally, platform – a term used to describe the components that make up a computing system. Simply put: the game console or hardware. Bogost & Monfort (n.d.) argue that remediation is mainly concerns itself with interface. However, Platform Studies prioritise analysis on the Platform level and suggest that the hardware distinguishes the games as separate media. Whilst most likely the case with older games and consoles, this argument has shortcomings when analysing more recent games. Nowadays we see the practice of developing middleware, allowing games to be released on all major platforms with minor or no alteration. Furthermore, while the internal components of platforms may widely differ, a commonality between all platforms is the layout of the controller. Even though the Playstation 4’s DualShock 4 controller swaps the position the left analogue stick and D-pad\(^4\), compared to the Xbox One controller or the Nintendo

\(^4\) D-pad: Directional Pad
Switch and Wii U Pro-Controllers, they all share a similar button layout: four face buttons, two sets of two shoulder buttons, a start and a select button, a home button and a second analogue stick. Controllers have converged to a standardised layout, making the argument of platforms as the distinguishing factor of games as individual media troublesome. Consider the two case studies of this thesis: although *Breath of the Wild* is a Nintendo console exclusive, it saw a release on both the Wii U and the Switch. While minor technical differences exist between the two, at its core both versions are the same. *Shovel Knight* was released on nearly every modern platform: Microsoft Windows, Linux, OS X, Nintendo Wii U, Switch and 3DS, Playstation 3, 4 and Vita, Xbox One and even smart TV devices like the Amazon Fire. Again, while minor alterations exist between the individual versions, the game remains mostly unchanged regardless of the platform it is played on.
3 Shovel Knight

3.1 Remediation

As mentioned above, Shovel Knight is a retro-nostalgia game built on the conventions of classic NES games. According to the developers, several games influenced the creation of Shovel Knight, including Zelda II: The Adventure of Link (Nintendo R&D4, 1987), Castlevania (Konami, 1986), Super Mario Bros. 3 (Nintendo R&D4, 1988), DuckTales (Capcom, 1989) and Mega Man (Capcom, 1987) (Williams, 2014). With the main inspiration being the combat mechanics of Zelda II, Shovel Knight uses a similar combat system and integrates it as its core gameplay mechanic. Specifically, Shovel Knight uses the “down-thrust” attack and integrates it for more than just combat as it can also be used to bounce off enemies and certain objects. The down-thrust attack it also reminiscent of DuckTales, where Scrooge McDuck can use a similar attack by thrusting his cane downwards mid-jump and bounce off enemies. Whilst the developers note the similarities in both games, they state that in Shovel Knight, the “Shovel Jump” (or “Shovel Drop”) is more combat focussed and is tweaked for platforming segments. However, a reference to DuckTales can be seen in the form of hidden treasures and rewarding players for exploring the levels (Williams, 2014).

Other remediated parts of Zelda II can be seen in the hub towns where players can acquire upgrades to increase health and magic or purchase new armour. The hub towns are similar in function and reminiscent of Castlevania II: Simon’s Quest (Konami, 1987) and secondary elements of Castlevania are reused as a supplement to the core gameplay. Along with his trusty shovel, Shovel Knight also carries a large inventory of secondary items which are used situationally to progress in certain parts.
of the game. Some of these items are identical in function to the ones found in *Castlevania*. For example, the throwing anchor, a weapon thrown upwards in an arch is near identical to the throwing axe in *Castlevania*. Similarly, the items require magic points to use, much like how hearts are needed in *Castlevania*, and in both games players can replenish their magic or hearts by defeating enemies and picking up magic potions or hearts respectively. Additionally, like *Castlevania*, the game does not force players to use items and are presented as an alternative method to progress the game (Williams, 2014). As a final affectionate nod to *Castlevania*, *Shovel Knight* also allows players to replenish health by finding meat hidden in the walls of the level.

Turning to the main aspect of the game, the levels are reminiscent of *Mega Man* as each is themed according to the end-boss, both aesthetically and mechanically. For example, Polar Knight’s stage is themed around snow and ice and using them to cover up harmful spikes that kill you instantly, as well as readjusting your jumps to factor in the slipperiness of the ice. Each boss also has the moniker of “Knight” much like how the bosses in *Mega Man* all had “Man” at the end of their names. *Shovel Knight* also uses the room-based layout of *Mega Man*. The levels in *Mega Man* were separated into rooms, because of memory constraints on the NES. Parts of a level occupied the entirety of the screen and were demarcated by walls. Each room contained a platforming challenge and getting to the exit of that room (either a ladder, a door or an opening in the ground or wall), caused the screen to scroll either horizontally or vertically (depending on the exit’s location) advancing players to the next room. *Shovel Knight* uses a similar design choice for most of its levels.

According to the developers, segmenting the game in similar fashion to *Mega Man* made it easier to pin-point the unique aspect of each level as well as what parts
needed improving. More importantly, it allowed for an easier replication of the look and feel of older games (Williams, 2014). This structure is used throughout the game, all the way up to the final level, which pre-empts the last boss with a boss rush, where players must defeat all the bosses from the previous levels without dying, a staple of the Mega Man games.

The overworld of Shovel Knight is reminiscent of Super Mario Bros. 3, which the developers cite as the game that reminds them most of a large world full of surprises (Williams, 2014). More importantly, the mechanic of unlocking levels and progressing forward on a world map is a direct remediation of Mario 3. In addition to having parts of the map connected with dots and lines, in both games there are enemies on the map who may block your path and players can engage them in combat to clear the way. With each completed level, more of the world map is revealed, leading to more challenging levels. Whilst Mario 3 did not pioneer the overworld mechanic, it was the first to introduce it to the Mario series and has become a staple since then.

The list of games that Shovel Knight references demonstrates how the game is built on a solid foundation of classic NES games. However, Shovel Knight is not a perfect emulation of the NES but is instead a “rose-tinted view of an 8-bit game” (D’Angelo, 2014). There is a careful process to making a game look authentically retro. Despite the developers purposefully imposing the same limitations as the NES while developing Shovel Knight, the game contains several anachronisms as some (albeit minor) elements of the game are beyond the capabilities of the NES. First, the game is displayed at a 16:9 widescreen 1080p resolution, something the NES could not have possibly supported. Widescreen televisions were not common place then and the NES ran at a 4:3 full screen resolution at 240p. Shovel Knight also contains parallax scrolling, which was achievable on the NES but only through complex
programming illusions. However, the developers justified the use of parallax scrolling by saying it was hypothetically the next step in graphics for the NES (D'Angelo, 2014).

The NES had a specific colour palette that only supported 54 colours and could only support a certain number of frames of animation for sprites (Turi, 2014; D'Angelo, 2014). Therefore, all art assets in *Shovel Knight* needed to remain within the colour limitations of the NES and the developers used the same tricks to work around this limitation. For example, when displaying larger sprites that occupy nearly half of the screen, a trick to work within the NES’s colour limitation was to place the large sprite in front of a black background. If the larger sprite needed the colour black, they would leave those parts transparent, allowing the black background to fill in the gaps (D’Angelo, 2014). This technique is replicated for the boss Tinker Knight, who pilots a large tank-like robot that occupies most the screen. As expected, the room Tinker knight occupies has a black background. Whilst the developers did the best they could to stay within the limited number of colours, for certain parts of the game a few colours outside of the NES’s palette had to be included to give the game its desired look. For example, Polar Knight’s beige cloak uses a light shade of brown not available in the NES’s colour palette (D’Angelo, 2014).

The music and sound also contain a few anachronisms. D’Angelo (2014) notes that whilst the music may be the most authentic part of *Shovel Knight*, it sounds more intricate when compared to the music found on a regular NES game. *Shovel Knight’s* music was composed on a program that emulated the limitations of the Japanese version of the NES: the Famicom. This console supported the VRC6 chip, which in

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* NES games with parallax scrolling include *Shatterhand*, *Metal Storm* and *Batman* (all games cited by D’Angelo, 2014)
addition to allowing more advanced graphics, added three extra audio channels, allowing for more detailed music and sound effects. The European and American NES did not support this chip, and so the music in *Shovel Knight* more closely resembles the sound of the Japanese Famicom. However, even though the game itself may be impossible to run on the NES, the music can be transferred to an NES cartridge and played from the old hardware. Adhering to the retro style music and remaining within the capabilities of the NES the music was rendered in mono rather than stereo. Although one can argue that the music is not an anachronism, the raw audio files were processed through modern sound mastering programs to make the music more impactful. Unlike the NES, the music in *Shovel Knight* does not cut out audio channels to accommodate sound effects. To clarify, the NES had five audio channels for both music and sound effects and when a sound effect would play, one of the channels would be used. This caused part of the background music to be cut off temporarily. *Shovel Knight* forgoes this limitation completely and allows the music to play uninterrupted (D’Angelo 2014).

One final anachronism is the use of an auto-save function, where the player’s progress is saved automatically after each level or after leaving a town. This is a modern gaming convention afforded by current hardware. NES games usually used either a battery back-up within the cartridge itself to store save files (both *The Legend of Zelda* and *Zelda II* used battery back-ups) or operated on a password system (such as the *Mega Man* games). At the end of each level, players are given a password (the length and symbols they used depended on the game). If players quit the game, they could return to where they were by entering the given password on the menu screen. *Shovel Knight* completely forgoes the archaic password system in
favour of an auto-save feature, presumably to allow for a seamless experience and not necessitating the need to write down passwords to retain progress.

While technically not a perfect simulation of the NES on a technical level, the game remediates all the essential elements from the old console. To quote the developers: “the core aesthetics of the 8-bit era has been respected, and perhaps even enhanced” (D’Angelo 2014). In Bolter & Grusin’s (1999) words, Shovel Knight demonstrates “remediation as reform” (p.59) as it promises to deliver the same experience as the NES games it is remediating, but enhances it through modern game development tools. Even though the developers tried to remain within the self-imposed technical limitations, to achieve their desired vision for the game they had to step out of the limitations, thus providing an enhanced version of the medium they replicated. Shovel Knight is therefore a reform of NES games that uses subtle enhancements to improve the gameplay experience. Parallax scrolling, new colours and additional audio channels are the enhancements applied to fully realise the vision and a modern-day retro game.

Shovel Knight also demonstrates “remediation as the mediation of mediation” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p.56), given how the game is a product built from pieces of pre-existing games. At face value, Shovel Knight may seem like a regression of gaming technology, however we must remember that media evolves in a non-linear fashion and arguably the game is a step sideways rather than backwards. It is a progression of games as a medium in the sense that it understands what made NES games classics and faithfully rebuilds them from the ground up. Thirty years later, after immense leaps in gaming technology and more importantly, popular gaming conventions evolving, there was a niche for retro-style games in the modern gaming market and Shovel Knight filled that niche comfortably. Without the progress made in
the field of game development, *Shovel Knight* would probably never have been made. To clarify, advances in gaming technology brought change to gaming conventions. Genres, gameplay, sound design, graphics, everything was transformed and old conventions were either abandoned or evolved over time. *Shovel Knight* is a return to these old conventions, enabled by modern gaming technology that could faithfully recreate the old gaming conventions rather than just being a game representing obsolete hardware.

In a similar vein, *Shovel Knight* demonstrates “remediation as the inseparability of mediation and reality” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p.59). Arguably, the praise of most classic NES games nowadays comes from understanding where the gaming industry was in terms of technology. It is fascinating to see where the industry was at the time and how game developers, despite limited memory and computing power, managed to create games that were easy to pick up and play, yet difficult to master. The genius of most games was in their simplicity, and each game referenced in *Shovel Knight* is a time-capsule of gaming’s past. The developers of *Shovel Knight* acknowledge the restrictions game developers faced and in order to faithfully recapture the NES era of gaming they needed to impose the same restrictions.

However, it is difficult to place *Shovel Knight* on Bolter & Grusin’s (1999) spectrum of remediation. Arguably, the fact that *Shovel Knight* is a retro-styled game played on a modern game console is in itself hypermediacy. The combination of old pixel graphics displayed on a high definition widescreen TV and mono chiptune music played from stereo or surround-sound speakers, all of which is being played from a data file on a compact disk or from the game console’s internal hard drive. This creates a rather jarring juxtaposition between hardware and software. The hardware used to present the game far exceeds what is required for the game in question and
the software, the game itself, is a remediation of retro games and makes no attempt to hide this fact. However, the game faithfully recreates the look and feel of the games being remediated, allowing players to immerse themselves to the point where they do not take note of the graphics and sound. Unless players are constantly bothered by the audio and visual elements of the game, *Shovel Knight* achieves immediacy once players adjust to the disparity between the hardware and software.

*Shovel Knight* aims to recreate the look and feel of classic NES games. However, without this point of reference, *Shovel Knight* would lose its main appeal and would become just another side-scrolling action game. Therefore, *Shovel Knight* acts as remediated nostalgia: an antiquated object or a “Baudrillardian restoration” (Sloan, 2015) of NES games. The developers reduce classic NES games to essential gameplay mechanics and piece them together in *Shovel Knight* in order to build the appeal of the game. By saying it is an homage they present the game as a tribute to classic NES games rather than a genuine experience, similar to how Sloan (2015) describes *Blood Dragon* and *Gone Home* as a symbolic representation and distorted depiction of the time period they are remediating. In addition, much like *Gone Home* where players are encouraged to scrutinise the antiquated objects presented in front of them to invoke nostalgic sentiments and in turn enhance the appeal of the game (Sloan 2015, p.538), scrutinising *Shovel Knight* as an antiquated object only enhances its appeal.
3.2 Seriality

Strictly speaking, *Shovel Knight* does not feature inter-ludic seriality because it does not belong to a wider series. As the game was independently developed, the makers do not own any of the intellectual property they reference. Yacht Club Games had to create their own original characters and levels inspired by classic NES games and it can be appropriately called a spiritual successor. Even though *Shovel Knight* may not be part of an established series, it exhibits the conventions that typically defined NES games. In this regard, *Shovel Knight* shows inter-ludic seriality to a category of games rather than a specific title. It is not a sequel or remake of *Mega Man* or *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo R&D4, 1985) but looks and plays very much like them. Therefore, the inter-ludic seriality of *Shovel Knight* may be ambiguous and all-encompassing of a specific type of game. It executes past conventions faithfully enough to warrant being called a spiritual successor or a retro-nostalgia game that relies on the player’s knowledge and affection for classic NES games. This analysis will consider the ways *Shovel Knight* acts as a spiritual successor and tribute to the games of the past – that is, how intra-ludic seriality is established and how the game uses the temporal structures of old games to recreate an experience similar to the games of the past.

Partially due to memory and hardware constraints, the predominant format of NES games was the use of strong intra-ludic seriality by segmenting them into levels. Much like arcade games, they had simple controls and players were often restricted to a linear path and disallowed elaborate forms of gameplay. *Shovel Knight* employs a strongly serialised structure similar to that of classic NES games, most notably *Mega Man*. The game is segmented into levels and players can choose which they want to play next. Each level has a defined entry and exit: they start when players
choose the stage and the character Mega Man warps into it. Levels are further divided into rooms that contain various obstacles and challenges, demarcated by walls and (unseen) checkpoints. The level finishes once the boss is defeated and players are brought back to the stage-select screen. Completing all levels then unlocks a final level, typically divided into three large sections, each with a boss at the end. *Shovel Knight* borrows the same intra-ludic structure of the *Mega Man* games: the levels start upon being selected on the overworld, contain various obstacles and midway bosses, are segmented by checkpoints and finish once the level boss is defeated. Like *Mega Man*, there are secret collectable items hidden throughout the level, so the player is preoccupied with two tasks: completing the level and finding the secrets, mainly collectable music sheets that allow players to listen to any in-game music at the town. Unlike *Mega Man*, however, when the level ends, players are not taken to a level-select screen or returned to the overworld straight away. Players are first brought to a brief cut-scene showing Shovel Knight falling asleep by a campfire. Upon completing every second level, players are taken to a dream sequence where they fight several enemies for a short period of time. Then, he wakes up and players can move him off the screen to return to the overworld. The campfire scene is implemented to give players some breathing room before proceeding to the next level. In addition, players can choose to visit a town where they are not in danger before proceeding to the next level. This option does not exist in the *Mega Man* games, however peaceful towns did exist in *Zelda II*. Once all levels are completed, the final level is unlocked and much like *Mega Man*, *Shovel Knight*’s final level is structured into three separate parts, each one harder than the last. The intra-ludic seriality of *Shovel Knight* is a mix of several NES game: the
seriality of *Zelda II* and *Mario Bros.* 3 with its overworld and peaceful town, and the strongly serialised levels from *Mega Man*.

Just as graphical and audio anachronisms are present, *Shovel Knight* exhibits some modern gaming conventions that streamline and creates a strongly serialised intra-ludic structure. As mentioned above, a modern auto-save function allows it to forgo an archaic password system or manual save function. Another notable departure from NES conventions is *Shovel Knight*’s lack of a traditional life system. Typically, NES platforming games start by giving players a set number of lives (usually three). They lose a life when they either get hit by an enemy, their health bar reaches zero, falling down a bottomless pit or touching a spike. Players can increase the number of lives by either reaching a certain score, or collecting an extra life (this varies between titles). When the life counter reaches zero, it is Game Over and players continue from either the beginning of the level, or the start of the game. This design choice is a remnant from when games were designed for arcades.

In *Mega Man*, if players run out of lives, they are taken back to the level-select screen. Even if they chose to return to the same level where they failed, they do not start at their latest checkpoint, but rather at the start of the level. *Castlevania* has a similar mechanic of starting players from the beginning of the level once they run out of lives. Players could reach a certain checkpoint, but it could be all for naught once they lose all their lives and have to replay the level just to get to that point again. The original *Super Mario Bros.* was more unforgiving as once players lose all lives, they must start from the beginning of the game, meaning the intra-ludic seriality could consist of a “one step forward, two steps back” experience. *Shovel Knight*, on the other hand, forgoes the use of lives entirely and give players unlimited continues, allowing them to keep playing the same level over again from the latest checkpoint.
reached until they succeed. Interestingly, players are also given the option to destroy checkpoints in exchange from more gold. This, however, means that if they die they start further back and the punishment for dying is a 25% loss of the player’s gold, which can be recovered by retrieving the winged money sacks at the point of death. Here the intra-ludic seriality is more akin to modern games, namely Dark Souls (FromSoftware, 2011) where the same mechanic of having to recover gold from the point of death is also at play. While the intra-ludic seriality remains strongly serialised despite some modern additions to a retro-style game, Shovel Knight creates a more forgiving experience not unfairly hampered by having to restart the level.

The comparison to Dark Souls creates a good analogy to discuss Shovel Knight in regards to its difficulty and how seriality is affected. The developers of Shovel Knight claim Dark Souls was an attempt to recreate the combat mechanics of Zelda II in a 3D environment (Williams, 2014). Whilst the influence of Dark Souls may not be as prominent as the NES games, consider that Dark Souls is notorious for being one of the most difficult games ever. However, the difficulty of Dark Souls comes from a balance between challenge and player skill: challenge comes from the need to master the controls and being able to perform under extreme pressure. Shovel Knight is similar in that challenge comes from the need to master the controls, adjusting to the game’s difficulty curve and whatever unique aspect each level places in front of players. It is a careful balancing act of player skill and game difficulty that many NES games are known for. They were designed to have a strongly serialised intra-ludic seriality by making players struggle, potentially denying them from reaching the end of the game. Again, this is a remnant of game design for arcades. In fact, there is a term used to describe classic NES games that are extremely difficult to beat: “Nintendo Hard”. Games such as Ninja Gaiden, Ghosts
and Goblins or Mike Tyson’s Punch Out (to name a few) (games cited by Enger, 2011) are notorious for being some of the most difficult games ever made but are considered fantastic games even by today’s standard (Enger, 2011).

*Shovel Knight* is carefully crafted to retain the “Nintendo Hardness” of its predecessors by remediating the clichés and conventions of NES games. Each level follows a similar structure of platforming, mid-way boss, more platforming and ends with the stage’s main boss. The same strongly serialised intra-ludic structure is repeated throughout the game and this instils a sense of familiarity between old and new. Levels are filled with pitfalls, spike traps, disappearing platforms and countless other obstacles, all clichés of the 2D platforming genre. The difficulty curve shapes the intra-ludic seriality as the later levels of the game start to present more difficult platforming challenges and tougher enemies. This creates a unique experience for each level that goes beyond the visual distinctions. Whereas players may complete the earlier levels with ease and finish a major portion of the game within a few hours, the later stages may require more attempts to complete, resulting in more time spent on those stages. The same progression of difficulty exists in the “Nintendo Hard” platformers on the NES. *Shovel Knight* demonstrates how retro-nostalgia games must not only ensure the visuals and audio are accurate, but also that the experience of playing the games is faithfully recreated. In this case, the difficulty of the game coming from its simple yet versatile game mechanics and the challenges presented, as well as the use of clichés found in classic games.

From a narratology standpoint, *Shovel Knight* uses the clichéd story of a hero rescuing a damsel in distress, a story seen in countless other games. Even though *Super Mario Bros.* told players of Princess Peach’s kidnapping in the box blurb and *Legend of Zelda* had an opening text screen explaining the game’s plot, the story of
both games does not go beyond the words written on the box or the screen. *Shovel Knight’s* story may be simple, but acquires depth as it proceeds. The damsel in this game is not the clichéd princess figure, but rather Shovel Knight’s equal and partner, Shield Knight. A prologue cut-scene hints at a long and storied history between the two Knights and Shovel Knight takes on the mantle of a hero once his partner is presumed dead and the world is taken over by the Enchantress and her Order of No Quarter, a group of knights who make up the level bosses. Although Shield Knight is absent for the majority of the game, during the final boss fight she makes her return. This part shows how the two Knights complement each other’s abilities and how one is incomplete without the other, all through the context of gameplay. Interestingly, Shield Knight was not always planned to be Shovel Knight’s equal. In fact, during production the developers referred to her as “Princess McGuffin”. The decision to make Shield Knight a more fleshed out character could be attributed to a combination of modern hardware allowing for the creation of the character and modern attitudes towards character design – forgoing stereotypes and making characters that are more agented, regardless of their gender.

 Adopting the mindset of NES game developers, gameplay took priority over story. Consider Sean Valesco’s remark on storytelling on the NES: “you have to be able to say something without saying anything” (Turi, 2014), hence why many NES games have either simple stories or none at all. In *Shovel Knight*, the narrative elements do not directly affect gameplay. They simply provide context behind the motivations of the antagonists. Like NES games, story progression is based on game progression. In other words, the story does not move ahead unless players manage to beat the stages. Furthermore, story does not adversely affect seriality or gameplay by placing arbitrary barriers based on the character’s morality. The strongly serialised intra-ludic
seriality are solely dictated by the rules of gameplay. The only instances of heavily story-influenced sections of gameplay are the dream sequences that occur after every second stage is completed, providing momentary glances of story and character development. As Shovel Knight is tormented by a recurring dream of Shield Knight falling from the sky, players experience the same torment by needing to catch her in mid-air whilst simultaneously fighting off a swarm of enemies. The only words that appear are “Save Her” and players are left to their own devices. However, players not forced to save her and the consequences of failing are minimal. Furthermore, players are still bound by the same rules that dictate the gameplay, thus retaining the same strongly serialised intra-ludic seriality found throughout the game. Therefore, the design philosophy of telling a story without the use of words is adhered to and improved upon as the story of the game is more compelling than the simple plot of Mario Bros. or Zelda.

*Shovel Knight* shows strongly serialised intra-ludic seriality and displays the same level of “Nintendo Hardness” old NES games were known for. Even though inter-ludic seriality is lacking, as *Shovel Knight* exists as its own entity, it is fair to call the game a spiritual successor to the games it imitates and pays homage to. Thus, saying it has an inter-ludic serial connection to past games in not inaccurate. *Shovel Knight* serves effectively as a time capsule of the NES, in that it contains some of the most memorable elements of classic NES games. This demonstrates a commodification of nostalgia, or a game that uses Baudrillardian restoration of classic games to enhance and secure its appeal (Sloan, 2015). However, it is a faithful commodification as it understands what players wanted in a classic, 8-bit style platformer: similar visuals and music, identical game mechanics, challenges and puzzles not unlike the “Nintendo Hard” games, and a simple yet timeless tale of
a hero saving the world from evil. *Shovel Knight* fully understands why NES games are remembered fondly. It knows how to blend the best combination of older game conventions and supplement them with modern gaming conventions to create a similar strongly serialised intra-ludic seriality of classic NES games.
4 The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild

4.1 Remediation

With thirty years of history behind the *Legend of Zelda* series, *Breath of the Wild* is an example of a universe nostalgia game that depends on its own history to invoke nostalgic sentiments. The main inspiration behind *Breath of the Wild* was to recapture the essence that made the original NES game ground-breaking. Consider this statement by series producer Eiji Aonuma:

> Revisiting the conventions of the *Zelda* series would be our theme for the new *Zelda* game on Wii U. However, before I get into that, let me talk about something that I needed to help me realise this ambition. In fact, it’s something that we wanted to do for a long time in the *Legend of Zelda* series. And so, development began with this [the first *Legend of Zelda*] as our focus (IGN, 2014).

Starting with the characters: despite having their image updated on a near yearly basis, the defining features of the main characters almost never change. Link, the hero, the one players take control of in every game, is recognised by his iconic green tunic and pointed hat. The titular character Princess Zelda, whose role has evolved over the series’ history – from the damsel in distress to an active agent within the game’s story, was always typically defined by a regal pink dress and blonde hair. Finally, the antagonist Ganon (or Ganondorf depending on the game), was always depicted as an armour-clad black or dark blue boar and in human form he was always much larger than any other character, dark skin, swept back red hair and wearing black and brown armour. Although Ganon is not present in every game (and neither is Zelda), he is the most recognisable antagonist of the series and is Link and Zelda’s main adversary.
As a universe nostalgia, *Breath of the Wild* uses the familiar appearances of its main characters to generate consistency across the titles. However, when *Breath of the Wild* begins, players see Link only wearing dark blue trunks. Link is still recognised through his pointed elf ears and brown-blond hair and eventually players start to gather an inventory of armour. Link’s iconic green tunic and pointed hat are not available right away. The first proper set of armour includes a red tunic with a blue sash, pieces of leather armour and a dark grey hooded cape. The convention of having different armour is not unheard of in a *Zelda* game, as even in the first game players can upgrade their armour which turned Link’s tunic from green to red and then light-blue. The level of customisation seen in *Breath of the Wild* is unlike anything seen previously. Each set of armour provides different set bonuses and can be equipped to match a player’s play style or used situationally. The first *Legend of Zelda* started with Link in his iconic green tunic and hat, establishing Link’s image for years to come. Each instalment acts as an update to his image and Link’s appearance from a simple 8-bit 2D sprite has been remediated and went through many iterations before turning into the sophisticated 3D model we see in *Breath of the Wild*.

The more notable image update is Princess Zelda who is depicted wearing a blue and white top with black leggings and leather boots – a much more functional outfit considering the role she plays. Although Zelda only appears in flashbacks and towards the end of the game, Zelda is more mobile as she rides on horse-back, investigating the ruins dotting the world map and trying to improve her magical abilities. *Breath of the Wild’s* Zelda exemplifies remediation as reform. Traditionally in the *Zelda series*, when she is not captured by the antagonist, Zelda’s role has typically been a supporting character. However, as a supporting character Zelda was
either in disguise or in an altered state. For example, in Ocarina of Time (Nintendo EAD, 1998), Zelda disguises herself as Sheik. In Wind Waker (Nintendo EAD, 2002) Zelda assumes the form of a pirate girl named Tetra. Perhaps, the most influential presence of Zelda can be seen in Spirit Tracks (Nintendo EAD, 2009) where Zelda is Link’s travel companion. However, she is in ghost form. To see Zelda as a supporting character in the flesh and not in disguise is a break from tradition. The importance of her role is emphasised by the fact that she has a voice in Breath of the Wild, a first in the Zelda series. In contrast, her appearance in the first game was nowhere near as prominent: She only appeared after Link defeated Ganon, said two lines of dialogue, then the end credits roll. This massive disparity between the two depictions of Zelda demonstrates the evolution of the character and the series in general. Admittedly, the lack of character depth in the first Zelda was due to the hardware limitations of the NES, whereas the substantially more powerful hardware of the WiiU and Switch allows more freedom towards character development. Breath of the Wild uses this freedom to reimagine and reform Zelda. Realising her as she might have been imagined at the inception of the series, or perhaps adhering to the modern trend of having more fully formed and agentic female characters in games.

Setting is another important element of the Zelda series. Most Zelda games take place in the fictional land of Hyrule and over 30 years of game development, much like the characters, Hyrule has been remediated several times. A new Zelda game that return players to Hyrule can evoke nostalgic sentiments as they may recognise

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6 Careful readers would note this is not the first time Zelda has been given a voice. The first time both Zelda and Link had voice acting was in the Zelda games for the Phillips CD-i – Zelda: The Wand of Gamelon (1993) and Link: The Faces of Evil (1993). These games are not considered canon by Nintendo and therefore ignored by this thesis.
recurring landmarks, from their simple 8-bit pixel graphics up to their high-poly 3D models. As Hyrule gets remediated, it demonstrates remediation as reform, with each new iteration of Hyrule adding a new landmark or changing the landscape entirely. Advances in gaming technology allows for increasingly more sophisticated renditions of Hyrule and *Breath of the Wild* is the largest, most sophisticated in the series yet, estimated to be around 61 square kilometres in size (O’Shea 2017).

However, Hyrule’s geographical layout of has not always been consistent, especially when comparing the original *Zelda* to *Breath of the Wild*. In fact, according to *Hyrule Historia* (Nintendo, 2013) (the official *Zelda* compendium detailing every game from 1986 to 2011) the setting of the original *Zelda* is referred to as “Lesser Hyrule” and is possibly the remains the once-great kingdom seen in later releases (p.105). Even though this name is a retcon, it is appropriate as many landmarks that appear in later games are missing. While saying *Breath of the Wild* remediates Lesser Hyrule of the original *Zelda* would be inaccurate, upon closer inspection parallels between Lesser Hyrule and Hyrule in *Breath of the Wild* are apparent. For example, in both games there is a forest deliberately designed to disorient players called the “Lost Woods”. In the original *Zelda*, it was simply a cross shaped road with dead trees in each corner. When players enter the Lost Woods, they can only proceed by walking in a specific pattern. Otherwise, the screen loops and returns players to the other end of the screen. *Breath of the Wild* also has a fog-dense forest area called the Lost Woods. Navigating it involves a convoluted puzzle of using a torch and paying attention to the direction the embers are flying. Straying from the path takes players back to the entrance. Despite the parallels between the two games, Lesser Hyrule does not equal Hyrule. While it did establish some important landmarks for the series, as *The Lost Woods* would make appearances in as *A Link to the Past* (Nintendo EAD, 1991).
and *Ocarina of Time*, many important landmarks are missing. Conspicuous by its absence, the most important landmark, Hyrule Castle, does not appear in the original *Zelda*. However, in *Breath of the Wild* it is the most important landmark of the game, as it is where the seat of the royal family is and where final fight against Ganon takes place. In short: *Breath of the Wild* forgoes remediating Hyrule of the original *Zelda* and instead remediates the Hyrule of more recent games. The map of Hyrule in *Breath of the Wild* more closely resembles the one found in *Ocarina of Time* and *Twilight Princess* (Nintendo EAD, 2006), based on the geography and names given to each area.

The remediation of Hyrule goes beyond simply re-establishing the setting of the *Zelda* games. Rather it is about enhancing the in-game world players have journeyed across numerous times in previous *Zelda* games. *Breath of the Wild* encourages players to explore and scrutinise every nook and cranny of Hyrule, as there are virtually no limits placed on players in terms of exploration. This is a contemporary development for the series, as rather than a linear story *Breath of the Wild* allow players to freely explore the world. This demonstrates remediation as reform as it retains the familiar feeling of a *Zelda* game, but also updates the formula by adding game mechanics seen in modern games such as Bethesda’s *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011). In *Skyrim*, players are presented with a main storyline quest at the start of the game, but players are not obligated to stay on this path. *Skyrim* allow players to complete quests at their own pace, giving them the freedom to explore the in-game world and complete other quests outside of the main storyline. *Breath of the Wild* is similar in that it start players with a main quest that drives the story and while it forgoes the long side-quests that *Skyrim* offers, it does give players the freedom to explore and complete the main quest at their own pace. This also
allow players to complete the main story quest in whatever order they want as they can choose which dungeon to tackle next.

In addition to demonstrating remediation as reform, this also demonstrates remediation as the mediation of mediation as the *Zelda* series is dependent on itself for innovation. Both the first *Legend of Zelda* and *Breath of the Wild* present the same end-goal: defeat Ganon. How players accomplish that is at their discretion. While the first *Legend of Zelda* had a logical progression path, it is not revealed in an obvious manner. To reach the dungeons, players would either need to know where they are going or find the dungeons by chance. In addition, players are not obligated to complete the dungeons in order (however, there is a difficulty curve as the dungeons become more challenging). The difference in *Breath of the Wild* is that the dungeons can be found by toggling the map screen and all dungeons are more or less the same difficulty, plus there are fewer – there were nine in the original *Legend of Zelda* and five in *Breath of the Wild*. However, *Breath of the Wild* has the addition of smaller dungeons called shrines, of which there are 120 scattered throughout Hyrule. Again, either players come across them by change or by knowing where these shrines are located. While they are not essential to the game’s story, they are necessary for increasing Link’s health and stamina capacity. The return-to-form and sense of vast openness demonstrates remediation as reform and remediation as the mediation of mediation in the *Zelda* series. Consider this statement by Aonuma:

> After the game transitioned to 3D, and the hardware continued to evolve it became harder to create that feel of being in a vast world. For example, in *Wind Waker* we used various techniques to create a wide world where you could freely explore many isolated islands. But it was very hard to create one large world where everything felt connected. We had to design small
bounded areas with a defined entrance and exit and putting them all together made it feel like you were playing in a large world. But you still couldn’t cut through the boundaries wherever you liked to explore that world (IGN, 2014).

The comments by Aonuma resonate when comparing the transition from 2D (isometric) to 3D, that is *A Link to the Past* to *Ocarina of Time*. *A Link to the Past* played very similarly to the first game. Even though it provided players with more guidance and a more obvious/linear progression path players still have the option to freely explore the world at will (albeit with a few restrictions). *Ocarina of Time* and to an extent every 3D *Zelda* game since suffers from being too segmented. That is, important areas of the game such as towns and dungeons being sectioned off and can be accessed only when the time is right. The sense of openness and being in a vast world was lost. Even though the series progressed graphically and evolved gameplay wise, it regressed in terms of player freedom. It is intriguing how the *Zelda* series took inspiration from its roots to innovate and break aware from some of the conventions that defined the *Zelda* series for over three decades.

*Breath of the Wild* is a nostalgia game that demonstrates the commodification of nostalgia for a specific game series. As with any long-running series, we see recurring elements of the *Zelda* games such as character traits, items and locations. These elements achieve immediacy as none of them feel out of place and the combination of these symbols gives them their intended function of identifying the game as a *Zelda* game. Furthermore, with Aonuma stating that *Breath of the Wild* was heavily inspired by the original *Legend of Zelda*, we see Baudrillardian restoration with the idea of returning to the series’ roots is used to enhance the appeal of the game. When broken down to its elements, *Breath of the Wild* barely resembles its simple origin aside from a few identifying symbols. Baudrillardian
theory would argue that Breath of the Wild suppresses the original Zelda by reducing it to a purely nostalgic referent. However, the overwhelmingly positive reception for Breath of the Wild demonstrates that the love of the series is genuine. Breath of the Wild is a blend of both the old and new: the old design philosophy of the first Zelda game – give players the freedom to explore, coupled with the modern presentation of recent Zelda games and newer ideas of how open-world games should be. Taking Aonuma’s statements at face value, as a nostalgia game, Breath of the Wild demonstrates nostalgia on behalf of the developers wanting to recapture the feeling of playing the original Zelda for the first time. Whether one argues that the references to older Zelda games is pure nostalgic symbolism for the sake of marketing, or a genuine attempt by the developers to recapture the essence of older Zelda games, Breath of the Wild incorporates enough traits of modern games to be called something new and ground-breaking, whilst retaining enough of its original source material and antiquated symbols to be labelled a nostalgia game.
4.2 Seriality

As a universe nostalgia game, *Breath of the Wild* draws upon the long history of the *Zelda* series by making references to past entries. These references include story elements, characters, settings and even minute details such as items. However, analysing seriality in *Breath of the Wild* as a part of the *Zelda* series is complex. Inter-ludically, the chronological order of the games releases is out of sequence with the events in the game’s universe. The first *Zelda* game had a direct sequel: *Zelda II*. The third game, *A Link to the Past* (Nintendo EAD, 1991), was a prequel to the first game. *Link’s Awakening* (Nintendo EAD, 1993), the fourth instalment for the Nintendo Gameboy was a sequel to *A Link to the Past*. However, the fifth game, *Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998), was a prequel to *A Link to the Past*. Arguably, the convoluted nature of the *Zelda* chronology reveals that the developers lacked a clear overarching narrative set from the beginning. In fact, it was not until 2011 with the release of *Hyrule Historia* where an official timeline was pieced together, resulting in a chronology that was anything but linear (see Otero, 2015 for the most up-to-date *Zelda* timeline). Even though the timeline gave some much-needed narrative structure between games, it is not necessary for players to be cognisant of it to enjoy the games as each game is its own self-contained narrative. In addition, at the time of writing, the placement of *Breath of the Wild* in the timeline is unknown, making analysis of *Breath of the Wild* from an inter-ludic perspective problematic.

When a new *Zelda* game is released, fans have expectations about the quality of its story and gameplay. Most *Zelda* games are prefaced by an introductory cut-scene referencing the events of a previous game. For example, *Wind Waker*’s introductory cut-scene references the events of *Ocarina of Time*, in which the Hero of Time (Link)
defeats Ganon and is prophesised to return should Ganon be resurrected. *Breath of the Wild* creates its own mythos that dates ten thousand years before the events of the game. No specific game is referenced. The backstory simply mentions that Ganon was sealed away by the descendant of the Goddess Hylia, her appointed knight and the champions piloting large automatons called Divine Beasts. The immediate backstory of the game dates to a hundred years prior and involves Princess Zelda appointing her personal knight, Link, and five new Champions to pilot the recovered Divine Beasts in preparation for Ganon’s inevitable return. While many new story details are included, we also see many recurring symbols that give the game its identity. The inclusion of Link, Zelda and Ganon alone characterises it as a *Zelda* game. However, there are more intricate details to be examined. For example, Ganon’s resurrection, a plot device constantly being reused. The Master Sword is another important recurring symbol in the *Zelda* series. These inclusions unmistakably identify *Breath of the Wild* as a *Zelda* game. More importantly, this further demonstrates Baudrillardian restoration of the series’ past. To broaden its appeal, the game creates familiarity and consistency by reusing plot points and story elements typical of the *Zelda* series. Reuse of the same symbols, settings and characters invokes the player’s nostalgia for the series as they revisit and reacquaint themselves with previously encountered elements of the series.

*Breath of the Wild* is an open-world game. Therefore, it exhibits a weakly serialised intra-ludic seriality. The game world is not heavily segmented and players are not forced to adhere to a strict set of rules. On the contrary, the game enables and encourages elaborate forms of gameplay. As mentioned above, this version of Hyrule is the largest ever created and when people say that *Breath of the Wild* is boundless, it is meant quite literally. Every surface in the game is climbable: trees,
buildings, cliffs and even the tallest mountains can be scaled with enough patience. In addition, different regions of the map are not demarcated by a physical barrier, nor do they require a prerequisite to enter. Consider the comments by Aonuma:

> You can enter any area from any direction. So, the puzzle solving in this game begins the moment the player starts to think about where they want to go, how they will get there and what they will do when they arrive. This is a clean break from the conventions of past games in the Zelda series where you had to follow a set path and play through the scenario in the right order (IGN, 2014).

In contrast, previous 3D Zelda games limited their worlds to just a set number of areas with a single entry/exit point, all joined together by a central hub. This lends itself to a more linear experience. While the portable (isometric 2D) Zelda games retain most of the openness of the original, the in-game world ended up being denser with different sections of the world explicitly demarcated by cliffs, mountains or buildings. Even though players may be able to traverse the world relatively unbounded, because of hardware constraints there are limits to how much freedom players are afforded. In addition, like the 3D Zelda games, most of these games also use a linear narrative, meaning players are only brought to a certain area when the time is right. In short: intra-ludic seriousness was easily discerned in previous games, whereas in Breath of the Wild it is not as clear-cut. With nothing separating the different areas, Hyrule is basically one expansive world with no central hub. This design choice harkens back to the original Legend of Zelda and similarly, players spend most of their time traversing through the world and figuring out where the next dungeon is. The threat of getting lost and dying were constant realities since the game provides little to no guidance on where players should go.
An advantage to the weakly serialised nature of Hyrule is the creation of a more organic world. When observed closely, there is a semblance of a strongly serialised intra-ludic seriality, in the sense that there is a logical sequence to the in-game world. Outside of peaceful villages and towns, enemies are scattered across the landscape, often confined to an enclosed area such as camps, watchtowers or hiding among the ruins. In addition, some areas have tougher enemies, meaning they should be accessed later in the game – once players have better equipment and health upgrades. Another differentiating quality is climate. While most of Hyrule experiences mild temperatures, the peaks of mountains and the north are topped with snow and can only be accessed if players have the appropriate armour, otherwise Link will slowly freeze to death. There is an active volcano in the game, Death Mountain, which can be approached only if they have fireproof armour. Similarly, the desert to the south-west experiences high temperatures and Link can die of overheating without the appropriate clothing. Finally, a more tropical area to the south-east experiences more rainfall and lighting storms, meaning Link can get struck by lightning if anything made of metal is equipped. Depending on the player’s location, they must swap their armour to compensate for the changes in climate. While changes in weather provides variety to Hyrule, the gameplay remains largely the same. No barrier exists between regions, temperature changes are gradual and enemies can be spotted from a distance and easily avoided. Despite variety in the world itself, players still only interacts with the one large area.

This is not to say the game is entirely without structure, as the game contains 120 shrines. These provide some much-needed points of interest to the landscape. Entering a Shrine take players underground to either a puzzle or a combat challenge and some shrines require a puzzle to be solved above ground before entering.
Shrines provide numerous small instances of strongly serialised intra-ludic seriality as they have a single entry/exit point and completing them involves adhering to a set of rules that disallow elaborate forms of gameplay. In addition, the game encourage players to complete Shrines as they award players with a “Spirit Orb” upon completion, which can be exchanged for health and stamina upgrades. They also act as fast-travel points, allowing players to teleport between them. Finding them however, is a challenge in and of itself as many of them are hidden from plain sight. It may take players several hours to find a single Shrine (especially towards the end of the game). Searching for Shrines is integrated into the exploration and the game provides players with tools to locate them. Shrines can be identified by their distinct orange glow, easily spotted from a distance. Players are given a map and the ability to place markers on it, as well as a radar that beeps faster if players are moving towards a Shrine. Locating Shrines and completing them are some of the building-blocks given to players to construct their own intra-ludic seriality. Players may actively seek out Shrines to complete or find them by accident. In other words, they influence the player’s exploration behaviour. Many Shrines are cryptically hidden. Again, this harkens back to the original Zelda where secret caves were plentiful. Like Shrines, finding caves was entirely optional, but reward players with helpful items such as potions or money. Much like the free-roaming exploration, the inclusion of well-hidden Shrines stems from the original design philosophy of the NES game.

Game progression is strung together by a narrative, which is divided into several quests, each taking players to a new area and Divine Beast (the main dungeons of the game). Completing a quest that is part of the main story has a bearing on the game’s ending and the game treats each main quest as paramount for standing a chance against Calamity Ganon. In addition, there are optional side-quests such as
retrieving the Master Sword, completing Shrines to increase health and stamina, collecting “Korok Seeds” to increase inventory space and countless other side-quests and errands. However, most of these are motivated by an unspoken narrative of Link, the hero, preparing himself for the final fight which runs parallel to the overarching story of the game. While they have no bearing on the narrative itself, they make the final quest of the game easier for players. This means there are two narratives that structure the intra-ludic seriality of *Breath of the Wild*, each running from the start of the game until the end. They dictate the layout of the world, the events unfolding within, where players can go and what they need to do.

The biggest contributors to seriality in *Breath of the Wild* are the main five dungeons – the four Divine Beasts and Hyrule Castle. Dungeons are a staple in the *Zelda* series and traditionally, there has been a formula to completing them. Before entering, players must reach a certain point in the narrative and complete the appropriate errands. Dungeons consist of many separate rooms, some requiring a small key to open. Progressing through a dungeon involves finding a map and compass for orientation as they are not linearly designed. Solving a multitude of puzzles land players a new item, who then backtracks to find where that item can be used. At the end of the dungeon, players fights a boss and is rewarded a Heart Container, increasing their health. Usually dungeons employ a gimmick such as clinging to walls in *Twilight Princess*’ Sky Temple, or gliding through the air in *Wind Waker*’s Wind Temple. The intra-ludic seriality of dungeons is strongly serialised as they must be completed in the correct sequence to proceed. When players reach the end, they are prompted to travel to a new area where the next chapter of the story begins.
In contrast, because *Breath of the Wild* give players all essential items from the outset, no items (except for some weapons and crafting items) are found in dungeons. Like previous *Zelda* games, the Divine Beasts use strongly serialised intra-ludic seriality. The interior of the Divine Beasts is compartmentalised into separate rooms, with the gimmick of each lying in its puzzle solving: manipulating its exterior, which causes the interior to shift. This allows access to six separate terminals which players can approach in any order to complete. Therefore, a hint of free-roaming is seen within the dungeons of *Breath of the Wild*. In line with tradition, the story of the game is tightly knitted to the dungeons. They act as chapters which segment the story. Much like the games that came before, the events leading up to entering a Divine Beast is strongly serialised. Players must satisfy a set of prerequisites, then they are helped by an NPC\(^7\) to enter the Divine Beast in a scripted sequence. Spliced between these parts are brief cut-scenes and dialogue exchanges, revealing more plot details. Thus, the sequence of events is as follows: travelling to the appropriate location, accomplishing the prerequisites, the action sequence of getting into the Divine Beast, solving the puzzle and finally, defeating one of the manifestations of Ganon. Completing a Divine Beast gives players some assistance in fighting Ganon and gives Link a new ability, which makes combat and exploration easier. Both the main narrative and unspoken narrative converge on the Divine Beast. They reveal more of the backstory (the events that transpired a hundred years prior), progress the ongoing narrative of freeing the Divine Beasts from the clutches of Ganon and progress the unspoken narrative of Link proving himself as the hero. Even though the Divine Beasts break tradition with their non-

\(^7\) NPC – Non-Playable Character
linear format and being able to complete them in any order, they provide some much-needed strongly serialised intra-ludic seriality in a weakly serialised game.

The final Dungeon, Hyrule Castle, is arguably not a dungeon because it can be approached from any angle and any time. It can be entered like any other village or settlement, however it contains dungeon-like elements, such as tough enemies and a maze-like structure. It is one of the largest landmarks of the game and necessitates its own map. Hyrule Castle consists of one large area: the Castle itself containing intertwining hallways and rooms, and its surrounding landscape of cliffs, moats and roads. Discouraging players from entering is its high difficulty as Hyrule Castle provides some of the toughest instances of combat. It is the longest, most arduous dungeon in the game, much like the final dungeon of any Zelda game. Previous incarnations of Hyrule Castle were created as an elongated dungeon with a set path. In Breath of the Wild, players must simply reach the top of the Castle and more than one path can be taken. Due to the game’s weakly serialised intra-ludic seriality, there is no unified experience leading up to the Castle. The time spent reaching the end of the game may vary, dungeons may be completed in a different order and how players ascend to the pinnacle may differ. Notwithstanding these variables, Hyrule Castle is the culmination of the narrative and events of the game. In addition, the Castle sanctum has a strongly serialised experience that remains largely the same for most players. Here the fight against Ganon takes place and the player is locked in until they either defeat Ganon or die. The fight is divided into two parts: once players defeat Calamity Ganon, Ganon transforms into his familiar boar-like form called Dark Beast Ganon and the fight continues outside. Once Ganon is defeated, a cut-scene plays where Link and Zelda are finally reunited, followed by the end-credits. However, the game does not continue from there, but rather from
the last save point, meaning players see the end of the game’s narrative, but the
game does not progress from Ganon being defeated. In other words, *Breath of the
Wild* can be played indefinitely. While the earlier *Zelda* games had a defined finish,
most modern *Zelda* games allow player to continue from their last save point before
the final fight. Some games allow the player to start a new game file with an added
difficulty level, a feature *Breath of the Wild* forgoes given its size.

Unlike the games that came before it, *Breath of the Wild* offer players an open and
unrestricted experience by forgoing the heavily scripted experience of previous *Zelda*
games. *Breath of the Wild* is a nostalgia game demonstrating the developer’s desire
of a return to form given how its design philosophy stemmed from the original
*Legend of Zelda* on the NES. Allow players the freedom to go anywhere they want
was what made the original ground-breaking. The weakly serialised intra-ludic
seriality sharply contrasts the more strongly serialised found in previous *Zelda*
games. More importantly, as players revisit the digitally recreated land of Hyrule a
sense of nostalgia is invoked as players recognis familiar landmarks and characters,
demonstrating how *Breath of the Wild* is a nostalgia game that relies on references
to the universe of previous games of the series. While the open-world game is a
well-established genre, *Breath of the Wild* is arguably just as ground-breaking as the
first *Zelda* on the NES, or at least in regard to the *Zelda* series.
5 Conclusion

This thesis has analysed two games that invoke nostalgia in different ways to broaden its appeal. *Shovel Knight* uses the aesthetics and mechanics of NES games to appeal to player nostalgia for classic 8-bit platformers, whereas *Breath of the Wild* uses the history and roots of its own series.

Remediation is one of the techniques used by nostalgia games to incite a sense of familiarity. Familiar game mechanics, graphics, characters and stories recur throughout the medium of videogames, with some conventions recurring for over many generations – a testament to their longevity. This thesis has argued that remediating past gaming conventions is a deliberate practice, used to incite familiarity within players and enhance the appeal of the game through the commodification of nostalgia. Nostalgia games can further invoke nostalgic sentiments by recreating the micro-temporalities of older games. In other words ensuring that seriality remains the same, or similar enough to the games being referenced.

In the case of *Shovel Knight*, a game reliant upon the past game conventions, the game was created to be a time capsule – a checklist of the most memorable conventions of the NES library, such as pixel-art graphics with a limited colour palette, a simple story, simple controls and most importantly, challenging gameplay. While a few anachronisms exist, the overall presentation of the game represents what people chose to remember of classic NES games. It is not a perfect emulation of the past, but rather a nostalgic look back at a fondly remembered period of gaming. It may represent a Baudrillardian restoration of classic NES games, it is not a blatant cash-grab or used in an exploitative manner, but rather in an affectionate
way that respects the past. The fact that Shovel Knight’s Kickstarter campaign managed to accumulate over $300000, four times its funding goal, and backed by nearly 15000 people, proves there is considerable demand for retro-style games and a player-base willing to pay for such an experience.

Shovel Knight is a stand-alone game with no sequels or spin-off titles and can appropriately be called a spiritual successor. Inter-ludically, it acts as a continuation of traditions found in an NES game. Not only does it respectfully recreate the visuals of past games, but also recreates their micro-temporal structures. Shovel Knight’s intra-ludic seriality mirrors the strongly serialised structure of Mega Man’s level design. The same structure of demarcating parts of the level to a single screen, or having the screen scroll horizontally, as well as its use of midway and final bosses all stem from the Mega Man games found on the NES. Shovel Knight’s use of a simple story give context for the protagonist’s and villain’s motivation and manages to gain a surprising amount of depth – an uncommon feature of older games. Despite this, its use of story is not unlike that found in Mario Bros. or The Legend of Zelda – a simple narrative that motivate players from start to finish. It is a game that was made to recapture and celebrate a bygone era of gaming and therefore, appropriately fits the description of retro-nostalgia game.

The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild, the biggest and most ambitious Zelda game to date, was conceived from a desire to recreate the boundless feel of the original Legend of Zelda on the NES. With a history spanning over thirty years, the Zelda lineage is one of the longest running in gaming that is constantly being remediated. Breath of the Wild is the epitome of the Zelda series that manages to capture every defining aspect of the series. The iconic characters, settings and narrative that define a Zelda game are remediated with new life breathed into them.
The game’s incarnation of Zelda is the most fleshed out; Ganon is at his most menacing and how players can customise Link’s outward appearance is the most diverse in the series. Hyrule in *Breath of the Wild* is unlike anything ever seen, but still faithfully reflects a similar geography seen in previous games. This leads into the biggest innovation of the series: making it an open-world game and giving players the freedom to explore Hyrule with virtually no boundaries – a landmark achievement for the series.

While it is difficult to discuss *Breath of the Wild*’s inter-ludic seriality given its questionable place in the *Zelda* chronology, it is unmistakably a *Zelda* game. Intra-ludically, the same structure of completing dungeons to advance the story is present, however more emphasis is placed on exploration. Like the original *Legend of Zelda*, exploration is encouraged and scrutinising every nook and cranny of the landscape is rewarded. However, *Breath of the Wild* give players more freedom thanks to being on a platform with infinitely more powerful hardware. Hyrule is no longer segmented on a screen-by-screen basis. While dungeons are given less importance, like the previous games they still retain major importance towards the story. Giving players the choice to complete dungeons in any order, or even forgo them entirely, is unheard of in the *Zelda* series. While the open-world genre lends itself to a weakly serialised structure, the inclusion of Shrines, dungeons and hundreds of collectable items give allow players to have a unique experience during each play session. With the inspiration behind *Breath of the Wild* being the original *Legend of Zelda* on the NES, it demonstrates the function of a universe nostalgia game which relies on the long history and development of an entire game series in order to evoke nostalgia. *Breath of the Wild* represents three decades of evolution in gaming and it is fair to say that this was the game envisioned three decades ago by the developers.
Nostalgia is a significant factor in videogames, because players develop an attachment to the games they played in the past. The commodification of nostalgia is accomplished by remediating older games players most fondly remember. In both cases discussed, we see a Baudrillardian restoration of games from three decades ago. They are presented as reference points for inspiration and used to secure appeal to their player-base. Referencing the conventions of older games and turning them into something new invokes nostalgia and even fix the flaws of archaic game design. Recreating the seriality of older games invokes nostalgia as players go through familiar cognitive and physical motions. Using theories of remediation and seriality to analyse nostalgia games, we can demonstrate how player replay the past.
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