Ctrl + S for Save

by Kyle Bickoff

“Ctrl + S.” “Save Progress.” “Are you sure you would like to overwrite the current saved game on the memory card?”

There are a significant amount of different methods for ‘saving’ games, progress, high scores, saved game states. Some saved games physically ‘write’ this information to internal memory, while other games require the user to manually transcribe a serial number, oftentimes returning the played game to a certain ‘checkpoint’ in the middle of a game. Not all games ‘save’ by the same means—there are many different ways the software of games permits this. In regards to hardware—sometimes this memory is written to very small internal memory chips in the handheld game cartridge, buried in the arcade cabinet, in a removable memory card, within hard drive storage, by removable tape drive—oftentimes, games had *no* means of to memory. Systems such as the Vectrex allow users to record oftentimes very complex information, such as complicated animations of graphics that are ephemeral and eternally lost upon turning off the system. One of the questions I’d like to answer once I work hand-on with the systems is, what are all the different means I can observe to record the ‘save.’

Games like Pacman, Asteroids, Tetris moreover depends on this inability to save the state. Mother nature or the deficiencies of power companies also intervene between the user of a system and the player’s next chance to save. How do these external forces come to intervene, and often return the player to reality before the digital realities current state can be inscribed?

Another question I have is about the relation of the public / private. The most obvious public displayed of memory is the

high score. Initials are the most common way to publicly declare one's mastery over a given arcade game—other messages (oftentimes "ASS" or other brief messages) are recorded for the public to see. How are these public messages intended for distribution? Conversely, other saved games are very private—one's own Mario 64 saved state can become one's own world. Upt to 3 (?) different saved games can be recorded on the memory—when a sibling or friend might sit down and play one's saved game, it can upset and often seem to change one's own world. The expectation of privacy between the player and the game state is often assumed—when this secret trust is broken between the user and the game state, where can this sense of loss stem from?

While games are of course a rich origination of this memory, I would strongly prefer to avoid limiting my purview to games alone. In fact, I'm thinking about the memory of many early computing systems. The first that comes to mind is the Altair. The Altair at the MAL has no connectable magnetic drive although it supports one; there is an internal memory that is about placing, moving, and reorganizing 0s and 1s. What early computing systems at the Residual Media Lab can I use to observe early computing memory? Moveover, I understand that nearly all processors have some small internal ROM in which to hold some amount of digits during processing. How can I look at ROM vs RAM to better understand the role of memory in early computing (and even gaming)? How does the internal ROM and RAM embody the private, while the memory card embodies (perhaps) a more public role?