Re-versioning as a cultural technique of nostalgia? – Final Presentation

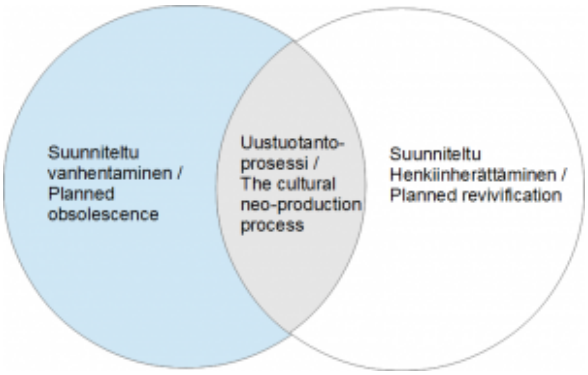
I decided not to use any digital device for my final presentation, but instead decided to go “analogue” and partly use the reading materials which we had become familiar with during the course. In my presentation I wrote and drew everything on a whiteboard which demonstrated, firstly, the ephemerality or obsolescence of things since everything was erased from the whiteboard after the presentation apart from my notes on my hand.

John Durham Peters argued in his article that *“The body and language themselves can – with the right viewfinder – be seen as media”*. He also wrote that *“Old media rarely die; they just recede into the background; they become more ontological”*. [1] So, the second point was to convey the presentation by using the oldest media we have, the body.

During the course we also discussed about the cultural techniques; such as writing, drawing, and talking, and that led to the third point of the presentation that it was a presentation conveyed via the oldest media and its cultural techniques. Lastly, the fourth point was to speculate whether or not the actual theme of the presentation, the re-versioning, is in fact a cultural technique of nostalgia, and what happens in the presentation is a presentation of a cultural technique via cultural techniques of the oldest media we have. This post is mainly about the questions that arose during the course regarding my own research, and I’m not necessarily offering any answers.

In short, my research is formed by the concepts of planned obsolescence and planned revivification. As mentioned in the

previous posts for this site, the cultural neo-production process[2] forms from the simultaneous use of obsolescence and revivification. While I've developed the concept of the cultural neo-production process on my own, the idea of using obsolescence and revivification is originally from sociologist Fred Davis[3] who focused on the exploitation of nostalgia in media products. The cultural neo-production process is about re-versioning one individual cultural object over and over again. Basically, the product is dressed up in a new costume or updated.



The relationship between planned obsolescence and planned revivification in the cultural neo-production process. Sihvonen 2014/2017.

The lifespan of the product alters between the resting phases (obsolescence) and the appearances of re-versions (revivification). Usually, during the resting phases the product is out of consumers reach. This is what Davis meant by the exploitation of nostalgia that the product accumulates nostalgia while it's obsolete. It then becomes revived by nostalgia, an "un-obsolete" product. The resting phases aren't necessarily that clear. One can find products that don't have actual resting phases since the products are always available and re-versioned every ten years or so. This is done with products such as the Finnish board game Kimble.

In my final presentation I used the example of Commodore 64 to discuss the re-versions of C64 and why they were failures. I also wanted to speculate how and where nostalgia is involved in the C64's cultural neo-production process. The new versions of C64 were published around 2011, and they were called the C64x and the C64x Extreme. They were described as *"modern PC hardware hidden in the original shell of Commodore 64"*. Both versions failed. [4] As I have discussed in my previous posts, re-versioning is generally about success, about classics. It is nearly impossible to bring back something that hasn't worked out before. Since the re-versions are successes, this leads to the question: why the re-versions of C64 didn't work out even though the first C64 was a success?

To try to answer these one has to get back to the question whether or not cultural neo-production process is actually a cultural technique of nostalgia. First of all, we know that there is an object, a subject, and an action involved in cultural techniques such as writing is produced by an individual with a pencil on paper. In cultural neo-production process there is something that controls it, either the producer, the markets, or the object itself. The cultural techniques are definitely involved when the product is used in different ways such as a game, toy, or learning device. In this sense, the object is a gateway for different cultural techniques. Nostalgia could then be seen as a gateway for different kinds of ways to deal with the longing, such as re-versioning some past product would be a commercial way for nostalgia.

What happened with C64, its "re-versions", and nostalgia? The first version was a success, a classic, but still the comebacks weren't popular. Some explanations would be that the technology of Commodore 64 didn't appeal to its former users, or that the users had grown out of it, but that is not the case with retro games and their users, so that is not very probable. Some of the factors still weren't in the right

place. Was it the fact that it wasn't brought back in the right way? What if the original version was brought back, would it be successful? Or, were these actually remakes, and if they were, how come nostalgia won't work with remakes? Do the remakes require different kind nostalgia?

What I was left with was a bunch of questions:

- Why other re-versions of (successful) classic products work and others don't?
- Who or what creates the cultural neo-production process? Is becoming a classic the result of simultaneous acts from both the producer and the users who by their own longing create the process, or is nostalgia something that is created on its own and it then creates the whole process?

In order to continue the research, one would have to determine what questions are important, what sort of research material to collect and use (such as user and producer interviews), and which versions to study.

[1] See Peters, John Durham. Infrastructuralism: Media as Traffic between Nature and Culture. *Traffic: Media as Infrastructures and Culture*, edited by Marion Näser-Lather & Cristoph Neubert, E.J. Brill, 2015, pp. 31-49.

[2] See Sihvonen, Lilli. *Kulttuurituotteen suunniteltu vanhentaminen ja henkiinherättäminen. Esimerkkinä Disneyn Lumikki ja seitsemän kääpiötä*. University of Turku, 2014. (Available only in Finnish.)

[3] See Davis, Fred. *Yearning for Yesterday. A Sociology of Nostalgia*. The Free Press, 1979.

[4] See the Wikipedia site for C64x versions <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commodore_64x> (1.6.2017). The

quotes are a translation from Finnish Muropaketti site <https://muropaketti.com/c-tulee-taas-commodore-pet-alypuhelin> (1.6.2017).