

“Classics Age” – The Flexibility of Planned Obsolescence in Terms of the Classic Finnish Board Game Kimble

14.10.2020

[adaptive obsolescence](#) [classics](#) [cultural](#) [neo-production](#) [process](#) [forced obsolescence](#) [planned obsolescence](#)

Lilli Sihvonen

lilli.sihvonen[a]utu.fi

Degree Programme in Cultural Production and Landscape Studies

University of Turku



Planned obsolescence most commonly refers to the deliberate limitation and weakening of the use, usability and durability of a product or service. Its purpose is to stimulate consumption. Planned obsolescence is harmful for both users and the environment, and has been studied from both economical and technological aspects. It also has several sub-concepts, methods and techniques. This article focuses on conceptual flexibility of planned obsolescence in terms of the classic Finnish board game Kimble. It asks, how does a classic product change the purpose, outcome, and definition of planned obsolescence? This article presents the author’s lifespan theory of classic products: the cultural neo-production process in which the same product is re-introduced to the users several times, and is partly influenced by planned obsolescence. This article suggests new forms of obsolescence, adaptive and forced obsolescence, that stress the fact that obsolescence is a flexible and ubiquitous phenomenon. It is not always planned, nor is its outcome always perpetual. Classic products need obsolescence to exist.

Introduction

“Because classics do not age” is a line recently used in the Finnish Fazer Company’s commercial for Domino cookies. Domino cookies have been on the market since 1953, and are considered somewhat of a basic treat during Finnish coffee breaks. “It is a classic and original”, and according to the advertisement, “not old”. [1]

Classics are considered to have a recognised value, they are historically memorable and linked to a canon, a group of generally great works (Mäyrä 2008, 55). Stewart Woods defines *classical board games* as games that do not have any specific author, company or organisation who can claim ownership, for example, games such as chess. Mass-market games, on the other hand, are those that dominate market shelves and are associated with the general public. They can also be divided into three sub-categories the first being successful family games from the 19th and 20th century. According to Woods, these are considered classics as their rules are known to the general public. However, their status is based on manufactured nostalgia and effective marketing. (Woods 2012, 17–19.)

Classical products are supposed to endure both physically and psychologically, not to become obsolete like everyday products. Planned obsolescence, the limitation of product use and durability, is hardly associated with physically durable and classic products. Nevertheless, classics do age, but the increase in their value and enduring status is what makes their aging process significant. The aging process also takes different forms: some classics have limited availability and are withdrawn from the markets, while others retain their demand and go through some minor modifications over the years. Some classics utilise a combination of these forms.

In my own research, I am particularly interested in the lifespan of classics and the functions of planned obsolescence. In this article, I will consider how planned obsolescence is connected to the lifespans of classic products using the Finnish board game Kimble as an example. My research question is: How does a classic product change the purpose, outcome, and definition of planned obsolescence?

To understand why this question is asked, I will introduce the concept of the cultural neo-production process in which classics are created, and how obsolescence is part of that process. This process describes a lifespan where a (classic) product is re-released more than once, and subsequently reflects one form of product relationship, i.e. our attitudes towards products that endure and those that do not. (Sihvonen 2014.)

In addition, to understand the significance of planned obsolescence in the context of *classics*, its use and connotations need to be redefined. For instance, classic products that are constantly on the market and physically durable require new descriptions such as *adaptive obsolescence* or *forced obsolescence*: product modifications made voluntarily or those that

are demanded by influences exterior to the company. Obsolescence is not always planned, but rather is something that occurs over time. This makes obsolescence a flexible term. I will present these definitions later in this article.

Next, I will discuss planned obsolescence more profoundly. After which I will describe the connection of planned obsolescence to the concept of the cultural neo-production process and make some remarks on its relation to other lifespan terms. Then, I will introduce the classic Finnish board game Kimble along with my research material and methods. Following on from this, I will demonstrate my research findings and point out how a classic requires different descriptions of obsolescence. In the last section, I will conclude my arguments.

A very essential part of my own research is that obsolescence can co-exist with other phenomena, thus, it is involved in different processes. This article is part of my upcoming dissertation in which I study lifespans of classics; my aim is to create a theoretical framework of the cultural neo-production process which can be applied to different kinds of cultural products to explain the societal and material meanings related to re-releasing classics.

Planned Obsolescence

There are several definitions of planned obsolescence, and most of them emphasise its negative aspects. Vance Packard, for instance, defined obsolescence as a strategy that indicates a throwaway spirit and affects both the product's shape and mental attitude of the consumer (Packard 1960, 65). Giles Slade sees planned obsolescence as "the catch-all phrase used to describe the assortment of techniques used to artificially limit the durability of a manufactured good in order to stimulate repetitive consumption" (Slade 2006, 5). Both distinguish three types of obsolescence, which are very similar to one another: Packard introduces the obsolescence of function, quality and desirability – where a new, better functioning product outmodes the old one, or the product breaks down or wears out, or the styling becomes old-fashioned and less desirable in the consumer's mind. (Packard 1960, 66–67.) Slade ties his three types of obsolescence to historical events: technological obsolescence can be traced back to the introduction of the electric starter in automobiles in 1913, as can psychological obsolescence to the annual model change, again, adopted by the car industry in 1923. Adulteration, ergo, the practice of using inferior materials and the manipulation of the failure rate of products, began during the Depression. (Slade 2006, 4–5.)

These definitions have been the basis of my own previous research. I have referred to planned obsolescence as a method that limits the use of a product or a service technologically, materially, or psychologically. A better functioning product replaces the old one, the product is forced to break down or wear out at a given time, or new and better-looking products lure the consumer to abandon the old ones. However, newness does not guarantee quality: new jeans can be manufactured to look old and worn out, which can also make them wear out more easily. (Sihvonen 2014, 3, 51.)

A considerable amount of research has focused on, for instance, how to delay (Lawlor 2015), plan for (Burns 2010), or regulate (Maitre-Ekern and Dalhammar 2016) obsolescence, the problems and questions it raises and the extremely short lifespans of products (Packard 1960; Slade 2006; Newman 2012). In practice, these studies focus on the problems and harmful effects of planned obsolescence, such as, an unsustainable economy, an increase in environmental issues, the transportation of e-waste into developing countries, and climate change. Jonathan Chapman, for instance, notes that the decline in natural sources is not entirely due to increasing population, but also because of the unsustainable design of products (Chapman 2015, 4–5). Paul Connerton, in turn, has claimed that obsolescence is a form of forgetting. To keep on consuming, people have to abandon and forget old products. (Connerton 2008, 66–67.) Roland Strausz claims that obsolescence is a tool for the consumer to punish the manufacturer for poor quality. One loses customers quickly if the quality is not improved. (Strausz 2009, 1405–1406.)

Researchers, as well as politicians, have suggested solutions such as legislation that guarantees product durability, energy efficiency, sustainability, and ecological products. The European Union, for instance, is aiming to secure the possibility of product repair and to make it more profitable for the consumer instead of buying a new product [\[2\]](#). In some cases, product durability can also be a problem: if there are more energy efficient products available, should the consumer purchase a new, less energy consuming product while the old one is still functioning (Maitre-Ekern & Dalhammar 2016)? There is also the danger of seeing planned obsolescence where it does not exist. Slade reminds us that long term wear and tear is normal (Slade 2006, 5). However, the issue still remains that many product's operational life is far shorter than their material life; we are producing enduring waste (Chapman 2015, 10–13).

The research concerning planned obsolescence is also evolving. In 2016, the themes of the conference [*Planned Obsolescence: Texts, Theory, Technology*](#) focused on planned obsolescence as an analytical tool to study literary and artistic works, and their facets, e.g., representational and theoretical. [The presentations](#) discussed issues such as the ephemeral nature of street art and self-destruction as a radical form of obsolescence.

Moreover, presentations were given on Packard and Slade's definitions are from an American point of view, however, there are several other opinions how obsolescence has developed. Overall, this is a phenomenon whose qualities are – ironically – constantly reconstructed and negotiated by different scholars, users, producers and manufacturers.

Product Lifespan and the Cultural Neo-production Process

From the planned obsolescence point of view, the studies of product lifespans focus on use and usability. A product can be both physically and psychologically untenable for use even though the material itself could withstand more wear and tear: the product can wear out and be discarded, but exist as waste for a very long time. (See Chapman 2015.) The material is not designed to be obsolete.

The product lifespan can be understood as the period between the acquisition and the final disposal of the product, whereas the market lifespan refers to the market availability of the product (Park 2010, 78). Product longevity, on the other hand, is shaped by user behaviour and socio-cultural factors – not from the design and manufacturing processes like physical durability (Park 2010, 78; Cooper 2010, 8–11). The consumer can find ways to repair the product, and so make it last longer. Culture anthropologist Ilmari Vesterinen has a broader view on lifespan: it starts from the birth of the object (the moment of manufacturing or existence), and ends with the death of the object, the disappearance from existence. (Vesterinen 2001, 33–36.)

To illustrate the life of classic products and products that are re-released more than once, I have developed the concept of *the cultural neo-production process* to describe the controlled alternation between planned obsolescence and revivification. Planned revivification is a term coined by the sociologist Fred Davis who used it to signify a nostalgia-based resuscitating of products (Davis 1979, 133–134). The *cultural neo-production process* is of my own development, but its roots lie in the idea that Davis introduced in his book *Yearning for Yesterday – A Sociology of Nostalgia* (1979): planned obsolescence and revivification should

be built into old *media* products like movies and television shows so that products should first have a short life on the market, after which they would disappear with the introduction of new products (planned obsolescence). Then, several decades later the products would have a nostalgic re-introduction (planned revivification) (Davis 1979, 133–134; Sihvonen 2014).

While Davis never elaborated further on replays, apart from his idea that companies would have nostalgia specialists determining the specific times for reintroductions (Davis 1979, 133), reappearances have become the nature of media products to some extent. Old television series are repeatedly broadcast. On special occasions, such as anniversaries, films such as *Titanic* and *Jurassic Park* are often re-released not only on television, but also in cinemas. Some companies, e.g., Disney, are known for their strategy of withholding their products from consumers and re-releasing their classic films only once a decade (Wasko 2001, 44–46).

Building on this, in my previous study I have recognised and separated different phases in the process by using a media product as an example. The cultural neo-production process consists of the original production phase, neo-production and resting phase(s), and can thus entail several market life spans. The original production phase is a unique phase in which the product's possible future reappearances are determined. After the markets tire of the product, it is then directed to its first resting phase by planned obsolescence, where it will stay for a certain period of time, as determined by the producer. To the consumer this means that the product is not available for purchase. The first neo-production phase is activated after the resting phase. Nostalgia, modifications and updates are methods that are used in the comeback to active consumers to repurchase the product. This is both obsolescence and revivification: each re-version of the product makes the previous one obsolete, either by ending its manufacture or sale possibilities or by turning the old one into something old-fashioned. The new version also revitalises the product in general. (Sihvonen 2014, 81–89.)

As Davis suggested, the most common explanation for this kind of revival of products would be nostalgia. Svetlana Boym defines nostalgia as longing for a time that no longer exists or has never existed. According to her, nostalgia is the sentiment of loss and displacement, and it reappears as a defence mechanism during hard times. (Boym 2001, xiii–xiv.) Paul Grainge has claimed that nostalgia is the result of certain technological transformations and strategies of niche marketing and not a reflection of a mood of longing (Grainge 2000, 29.) Toni Ryyänänen and Visa Heinonen note that there is no unambiguous definition” of nostalgia. They claim that nostalgia is mainly based on childhood memories and has been used in the

literature to refer to memorable experiences. They have studied recalled consumption experiences, and found different temporal structures that involve nostalgia. (Ryynänen & Heinonen 2017.)

Indeed, there seems to be a whole economic structure behind nostalgia, not just a longing for bygone days and products. While I admit that nostalgia is a strong and significant influencer in the cultural neo-production process, it is not the only facet, nor the most interesting one to study. For instance, what happens to a classic during the process of planned obsolescence, e.g., what modifications are made or how does it develop otherwise, – these are far more interesting questions. In this article, I wish to draw attention away from nostalgia, and focus on how the board game *Kimble* has changed overtime, how the changes are justified by the manufacturer and seen by the users, and how these changes reflect conceptualisation of planned obsolescence in the cultural neo-production process.

Case Product, Research Material and Method

As Davis focused on media products, and I myself have in my previous study used a film as an example product, it is now time to explore other product types that are known to reappear. The usual market life-span of a board game is only a few years (Heljakka 2010, 23). Of course, the game's life continues among the players, and analogue games might preserve playability longer than digital games. Digital games can face rapid technological obsolescence when applications, technical supports and updates cease, or the physical disks corrode (See Newman 2012, 11, 16–19). Board games are prone to other forms of obsolescence depending on, for instance, how they are manufactured and from what they are manufactured.

Kimble (see Image 1) is one of the traditional and popular board games in Finland. It was introduced into the Finnish market in 1967 and has been in stores ever since. It is produced by the Finnish board game company Tactic Games Ltd (known before as Nelostuote), which was founded in the same year. *Kimble* is based on the American game *Trouble*. Aarne Heljakka (Sihvonen 2019), who founded Tactic Games, and his family received *Trouble* as a gift from their American relatives. The game became popular among the children in the family, which made Heljakka realise that the game might sell well in Finland. He bought a license to manufacture and sell the game, and the production began in the family's garage where the game boards and game packages were manufactured by family members. The

game was named *Kimble* after Dr. Richard Kimble, a character in the television series *The Fugitive*, which was popular on Finnish television in the 1960s.



Image 1. The game board of the original Kimble version. Lilli Sihvonen 2015.

The idea of *Kimble* is to go around the game board and run away from the other players' game pieces. The board is composed of a square-shape but with eight plastic sides and a game track of small slots where players insert their game pieces. Each player has a set of four game pieces of either blue, red, yellow or green. The "Pop-O-Matic" die container is in the middle of the game board. To roll the die, the player pushes the Pop-O-Matic. The game starts when the player rolls six", and is allowed to move one piece to the starting point. Six" always allows another roll. Pieces are moved according to the die, and the game board is circled clockwise. If a piece lands on a taken slot, this piece eats" the other one which is sent back to the home base to wait for a new six". The winner is the one who first lands all their pieces on the finish. *Kimble* is a fast-paced, intense and loud game; not only do the players make a noise but especially the Pop-o-matic produces a loud sound. The game is also easily turned into a drinking game in which the rules are slightly modified and an alcoholic drink serves as punishment, – this is popular among students in a human sized version. (See Sihvonen 2017; Sihvonen 2018.)

The research material consists of the facets of manufacture and production, the users, and the product. These three different facets represent the actors that take part in the cultural neo-production process. The first part of the research material, that is the manufacture and production facet, consists of interviews I conducted in 2015. I interviewed five specialists working for Tactic Games Ltd, three of them descendants of Aarne Heljakka: CEO Markku Heljakka (the founder's son and now a former CEO), creative manager Katriina Heljakka^[3] (the founder's grandchild), and sales manager Kalevi Heljakka (the founder's son, retired). The two other specialists were the graphic designer Jussi Wallenius and the production manager Hannu Tuomola (retired). The interviews focused on the history and development of *Kimble*, and on the interviewee's own professional background and experience. They have all worked for the company for several years, especially the members of the Heljakka family, who began in childhood or adolescence.

The second part consists of the responses to the *Kimble* online inquiry I conducted in November 2015. I received altogether 247 responses, out of which 184 were women, 51 men, and 12 did not either answer the gender question or answered 'other'. The largest respondent groups were students (105) and workers (96), and those born in 1980s and 1990s. A more detailed demographic background description is given in the two charts below.

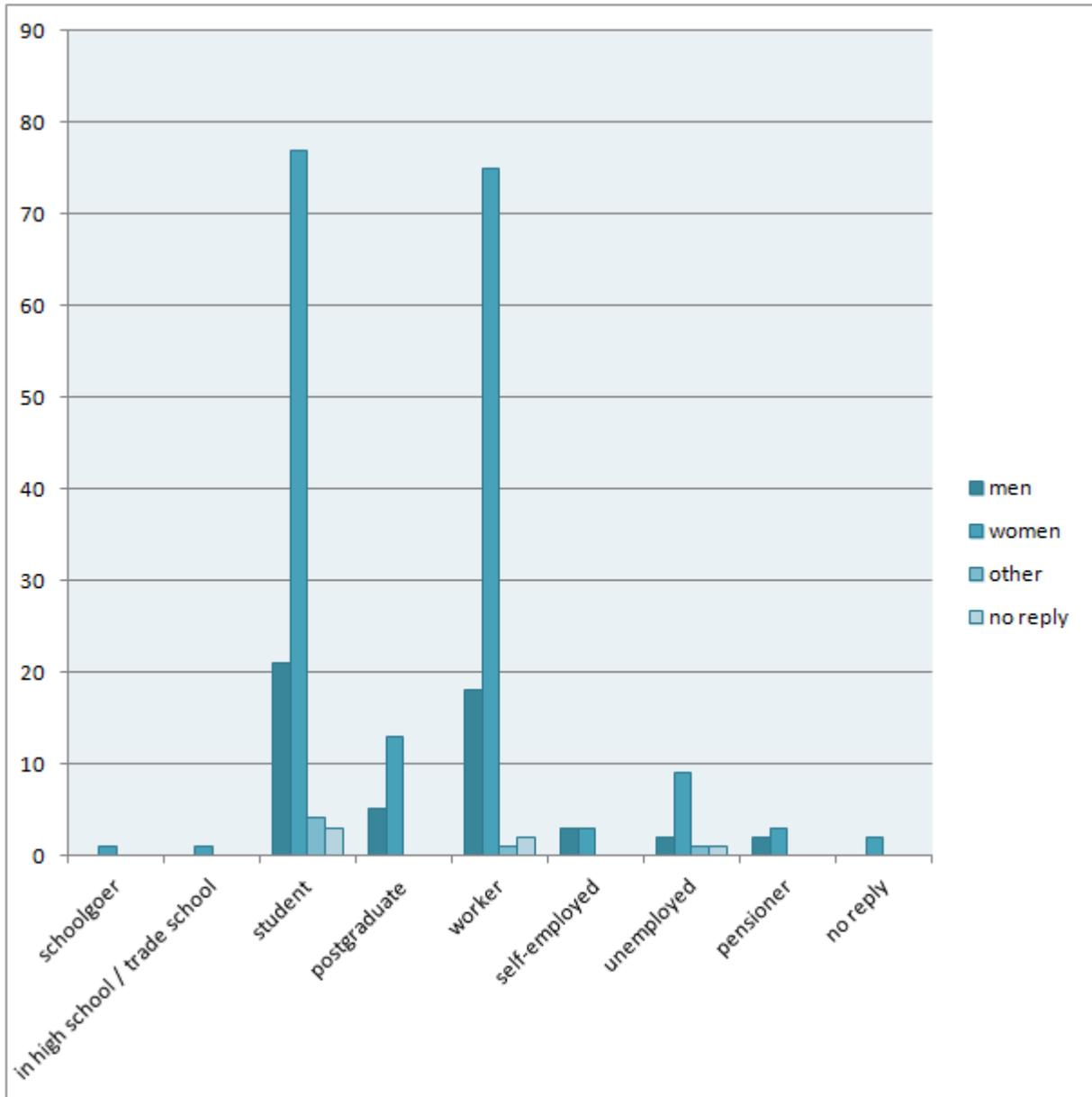


Figure 1. Demographic background of the Kimble online inquiry.

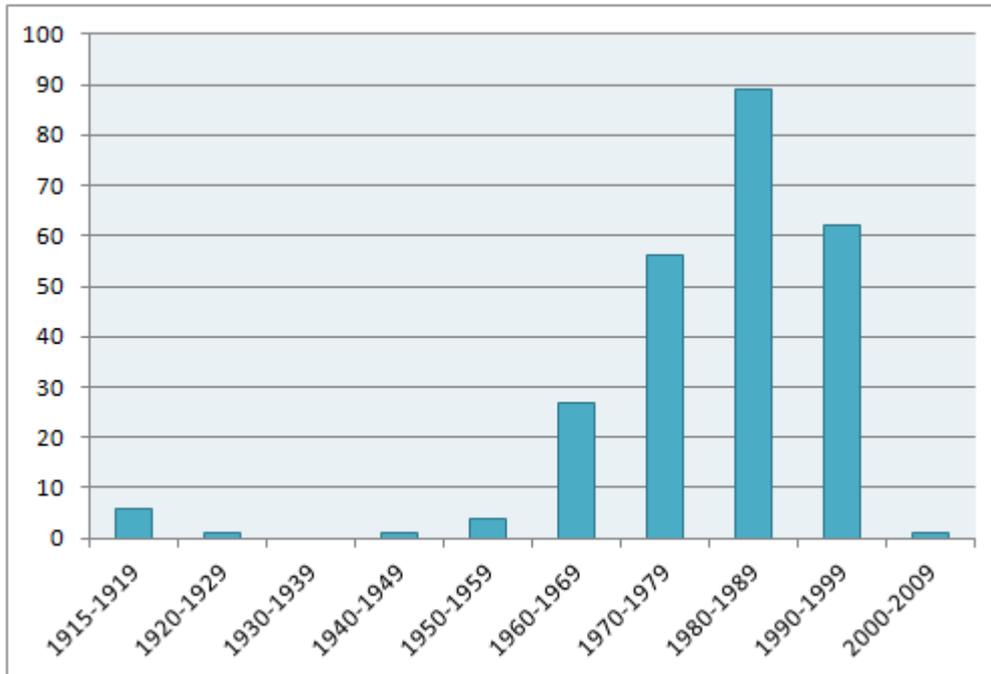


Figure 2. Demographic background of the Kimble online inquiry.

The inquiry form included 23 *Kimble* or board game related questions, but here I will only deal with the responses to the questions 17. *Which Kimble versions do you own or recognise* and 18. *Which Kimble version do you consider the best and why* because these questions specifically focus on different *Kimble* versions. *Question 17* had 21 different *Kimble* versions as options: the ones that had been published in Finland and I had documented so far. The options 'original version' and 'other' both included an open-ended text section for details: in the 'original version' the time of purchase year was specifically asked in order to determine the exact version they were familiar with, and in the option 'other' the participants were questioned as to whether they either owned or recognised *Kimble* versions that were not included on the list. All the questions on the online inquiry were mandatory, so both *questions 17* and *18* had 247 responses. Altogether 102 respondents, who either owned (had owned) or recognised an original version, gave an estimate as regards the purchase year, and 12 respondents mentioned either owning or recognising a *Kimble* version not on the list.

For this article, I have been particularly interested in what modifications have been made to which versions and why, and how users have perceived these changes. Both thematising and content analysis have been used in analysing the data. Thematising can be used to compare the occurrence of the themes that will enlighten the research problem. However, Eskola and Suoranta argue that thematising does not necessarily guarantee a very deep analysis. In order for it to function well, an interaction between the theory and empiricism is needed. (Eskola &

Suoranta 2014, 175–182; see also Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2013, 93.) I have divided the interview material into four different categories: history and stories, modifications, permanent features, and users and user culture. These categories have been the themes of my previous research articles, and they also represent the different sections of the cultural neo-production process. For this article, I have separated the discussion of the modifications from the research material.

Content analysis is applied to both research materials. Content analysis is used to examine how or what has been written or spoken about the subject under analysis. It is usually used to quantify the content of the text by calculating individual words as well as sentences, and to compare qualitative research material in order to make generalisations. (Eskola & Suojajärvi 2014, 186–189; see also Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2014.) However, there are differences in understanding content analysis. For instance, Tuomi and Sarajärvi note that (at least in Finnish language) analysing (*sisällönanalyysi*) and separating (*sisällön erittely*) the content of a text into units and to present it quantitatively are two different aspects of the analysing method. In the first, the content is described verbally, while in the latter it is presented more as numbers/figures. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2014, 105–107.) Furthermore, Lindsay Prior has suggested thinking of content analysis as a hybrid method, combining both qualitative and quantitative modes of inquiry, and it is not uncommon to use content analysis along with various other methods (Prior 2014, 359–379). Although I have quantified the data and calculated the number of certain types of responses such as how many users have or have not noticed any of the modifications, which *Kimble* versions are in question and what is the users' response to modifications, I describe the results verbally when analysing them.

As Arjun Appadurai has noted, we are not to think of objects as just commodities. We are to follow the things themselves in order to find human transactions that enliven things. (Appadurai 1986, 3, 5.) Therefore, the third part consists of product documentation I gathered in the same year. I photographed and examined over 30 different *Kimble* versions including both the original and themed versions that had been published up to that date. A themed version combines the product with a character or theme: the company buys a license which gives the rights to do this. The character is like a new costume on the product, but the product keeps its distinct features. (Heljakka 2011.)

Kimble was Tactic Games' first product, and one of the first games to be manufactured from plastic in Finland, which gives it a historically significant context. Sihvonen and Sivula have

previously noted that the game was memorable in the company's history. It has been recognised as a classic by both the company and the players. (Sihvonen & Sivula 2016.) It resists the traditional forms of obsolescence, and demands a renegotiation: as the interviewees argue, the game has always been manufactured to be physically durable. Arne Heljakka even advertised the game's durability by standing on it without breaking it [4]. Even now, it is difficult to break *Kimble*, and it wears out slowly. *Kimble* makes a most interesting case since it is not planned to become obsolete, and the original version does not have actual resting phases. However, the renewing of the original version and the introduction of the themed versions point to a cultural neo-production process. In the next section, I will further discuss the relation of the experts' arguments and users' perspectives in terms of adaptive and forced obsolescence.

Adapting or Forced Obsolescence?

As pointed out by Davis, consumers are encouraged through nostalgia to purchase products (Davis 1979, 133–134). In the cultural neo-production process, this applies especially to consumer groups who are reacquainted with the product and who have the potential to develop a nostalgic interest towards it. My studies have also shown that it is useful to the producer to design permanent and recognisable features in order to create a sense of familiarity and trust towards the product. To attract new consumers but also to offer something new to the existing ones, the product is modified and updated by renewing specific parts of its design, materials, production or marketing. (Sihvonen 2014; Sihvonen 2017.)

The changes made to a classic product are executed with serious consideration, and are rarely radical or quickly produced as in planned obsolescence. By adaptive obsolescence, I refer to modifications and improvements that are made voluntarily and gradually. These modifications are caused by something external to the company, such as consumer feedback, fashion, or safety concerns. Obsolescence is still relevant here since the product is in the cultural neo-production process and its previous version is rendered obsolete. The modifications to the original *Kimble* demonstrate the gradual development and adaptability of the product.

The original *Kimble* has been updated seven times in 40 years (1967–2007) (see Image 2). At first, *Kimble* greatly resembled its paragon, *Trouble*. The front cover of the package was a photograph portraying a family of four playing the game. The hole in the middle of the front

cover was meant for the customer to push the Pop-O-Matic in the shop before purchasing the game. In 1972, the cover changed from a photograph to a drawing, yet its portrayal as a family game and the hole in its cover remained. The visual design changed considerably in the third version in 1977 when *Kimble*'s new theme was established: a blue background with just the game board on it, and no hole in the cover. The next four versions have consisted of small adjustments that have kept the theme recognisable for the consumers. The front cover has only changed from a photograph to a computer-generated image of the game. The company's graphic designer says that these adjustments are done approximately every ten years, usually when the game has its anniversary.



Image 2. The development of the original Kimble. Lilli Sihvonen 2015.

Slade notes that psychological obsolescence means creating concern and shame about being old-fashioned. Its specialised form is the obsolescence of style, which is supposed to steer our attention to the object's visuality and design. (Slade 2006, 50–53.) This is something the consumers are supposed to experience, but companies are prone to it as well: keeping up with the changing visual designs. Changing the visual design is merely an adaptation to fashion, but at a far slower rate than expected in psychological obsolescence. The slow pace suggests a stable status in culture: the dated appearance does not cause harm to the product or the company.

Adaptive obsolescence also refers to the anticipation of future industrial and production demands and safety issues. In practice, this means modifying the product before any possible penalties take place. Such was the case with *Kimble*'s wooden game pieces, which were

changed to plastic in 1977. The CEO says that they could not say with any certainty whether the paint used in the pieces at that time was harmful. The plastic pieces were considered safer and allowed for the addition of a protruding edge on the outer surface to prevent the pieces from falling off the game board. The CEO has clarified that nowadays the wooden pieces are safer, and the retro versions of Kimble have reverted to wood. The development of Kimble also reflects the development of general processes of manufacture to ensure safer materials and methods.

According to the interviewees, the modifications have had a positive impact on the product and its manufacturing procedures. For instance, the hole was removed from the game package since customers complained about losing their game pieces. Both the former sales manager and the former production manager recall how the manufacturing of Kimble has developed: in early days, the game board was glued together which required a certain time to dry and a proper ventilation system. This made the process slow. Instead they developed a method of ultrasonic sealing where a small plastic plate is inserted under the game board and the parts are welded together. This is how *Kimbles* are still manufactured. In general, the adaptive obsolescence has occurred slowly and gradually, and has usually been the result of improvements. The modifications cannot be radical because a classic needs to secure its value when updated.

Jonathan Sterne has argued that obsolescence is not always planned but built-in or forced, and socially controlled (Sterne 2007, 22–23). The more advanced form of adaptive obsolescence would be forcing obsolescence. With an external force, such as legislation or the owner of the license, compels the manufacturer to make changes to the product, or a phenomenon such as fashion makes the product obsolete. This is close to social obsolescence, one of Brian Burns' four modes of obsolescence, which he says is either something that societies stop doing, or something that occurs when new laws and standards are adopted (Burns 2010, 46–47). This shows that the product is not entirely under the manufacturer's own influence.

The themed versions are ways to introduce the product to new generations via some known character or theme, such as the Disney Company's *Winnie the Pooh*^[5] (see Image 3) or *Angry Birds* based on a mobile game from the Finnish game company *Rovio Entertainment* (see Heljakka 2011). Some of the interviewees note the strict design instructions have to be followed when a license is bought. In some cases, the license is so expensive that the

company can only use the visual design and is unable to design any new material components such as new game pieces. Each new themed version is chosen according to whatever is popular at the time. They have much shorter market lifespans than the original versions, mainly due to the rapid changes in fashion or closing contracts that force them to be obsolete.



Image 3. Winnie the Pooh Kimble. Lilli Sihvonen 2015.

The success of the themed versions can differ quite a lot. For instance, *Winnie the Pooh Kimble* is the first themed version ever published (2000), and the interviewees link it to a new era in *Kimble*'s history since it turned out to be a huge success where two classics were combined – a classic Disney character with a classic product (See Sihvonen & Sivula 2016). This themed version, with game pieces taking the shape of *Winnie the Pooh*, has lasted over time, and its visual design has been updated as the Disney Company has itself renewed its

own characters. Another themed version is *Beyblade Kimble* (Image 4), with a design based on the anime series [Beyblade](#), and the game pieces are the same shape and colour as the originals, but the players can put stickers on them. *Beyblade Kimble* was not as successful as *Winnie the Pooh Kimble*. The CEO explains that sometimes the target group and the product do not meet, and with the themed versions, there is always a risk involved since there is no guarantee of a successful version. However, themed versions enhance the life of the original version.



Image 4. Beyblade Kimble. Lilli Sihvonon 2015.

For the online inquiry respondents, the most recognised and owned version was the original *Kimble*. Moreover, when asked which was the best *Kimble* version and the reason for that choice, most of them chose the original version either because it was the only one they had ever played, they did not recognise other versions, or they thought the themed versions were too commercial. Some did not answer the question, while others claimed that they were unqualified to answer because they did not know other versions. For most, the time of acquisition of the original *Kimble* was unclear. They speculated that they had either bought it or receive it as a gift in their childhood in the 1990s, which also correlates with their age distribution. However, none of them described their version or gave any details about it. It is possible that due to the gradual and slow change of the current blue original version, the modifications were not visually memorable. The respondents did not know that *Kimble* had changed as only radical changes tend to be noted, or the modifications to *Kimble* were

considered irrelevant. It is also possible that the question was not constructed sufficiently clearly for them to understand that they were being asked for a description of their version in order to determine the exact original version in question. The participants, of course, assumed I knew the game and that the game was generally known in Finland.

Interestingly, the themed versions were more often recognised than owned by the respondents compared to the original version [6]. There is a huge difference between recognising the versions mentioned in this article. For instance, only 9 respondents claimed to recognise *Beyblade Kimble*, while both *Angry Birds Kimble* [7] versions were more widely recognised, and the original *Angry Birds* version also owned by a few. *Winnie the Pooh* was recognised by 52 respondents and also owned by 12. This clearly confirms the CEO's comment on the themed versions: the franchise has a huge impact on the success even though it is still the same product.

Consequently, the themed versions were not familiar to the respondents but this can also be because of the distribution channels of the online inquiry which correlates with the age distribution of the respondents: as I advertised the online inquiry, it first spread through the university and social media channels and only after that reached local media channels and board game groups. The online inquiry might not have reached the right target groups for the themed versions as the first was published in 2000, and the respondents who might have played those versions could have been just children at the time of the online inquiry. Should I release it again in 2025, it might reach the target groups of the themed versions and change the research results.

Regardless, the respondents resisted the commercialism and stated that the original version endures over time and is not prone to fashion. This was the case, even though the themed versions are physically just as durable as the original version. On the other hand, some respondents showed interest in the themed versions due to fandom and design. For instance, *Pori Kimble* (a version which is designed based on the Finnish city Pori and where Tactic Games' headquarters is located) was claimed to be interesting. There were also a few who considered the first original *Kimble* (with a photograph) the best one. They mentioned the wooden pieces but not the hole on the cover, but this still indicates a mild interest towards the retro versions of *Kimble*. Miles Park claims that while fashion is a major reason for product obsolescence, it can have a positive impact on extending product lifespans. In fashion circulation, classics and collector's items are created, and retro and nostalgia function as

marketing strategies in recycling the past styles. Park also considers the advertising of 'design classics' right at their launch problematic.(Park 2010, 95–96.) Classics cannot be artificially manufactured.

As themed versions extend the life of *Kimble*, they also indicate how prone *Kimble* can be to fashion but only when themed versions are in question. The online responses confirm the forms of adaptive and forced obsolescence: while the original version adapts to whatever cultural context there is, the themed versions live only a fragment of the life of the original version and they are forced not planned to become obsolete.

Conclusion

In the beginning of this article I asked how does a classic product change the purpose, outcome, and definition of planned obsolescence?

In the previous chapter, I presented a classic Finnish board game *Kimble* and its original and themed versions to elaborate new forms of planned obsolescence: adaptive and forced obsolescence, that is, voluntarily made modifications and ones that are forced by something external to the manufacturer. I have briefly described these new terms of obsolescence with an explanation and case examples in the following table. Undoubtedly, the line between different forms of obsolescence is subtle. For instance, although the creative manager was not certain why the materials in the original game pieces were changed, she said that these things can happen when a subcontractor closes down or another material becomes more common and cheaper. The manufacturer is either forced to modify the product or voluntarily chooses a new material.

Table 1. Adaptive, forced, and planned obsolescence. Lilli Sihvonon 2020.

Form of Obsolence	Description	Case Product Kimble
Adaptive (FI: Sopeuttava)	Modifications and improvements that are voluntarily and gradually done. Caused by something external to the company.	Gradual development and adaptability of original Kimble versions: slow change in visual design, anticipation of future industrial and production demands and safety issues.
Forced (FI: Pakotettu)	An external force, such as legislation or owner of the license, compels manufacturers to make changes, or a phenomenon such as fashion makes the product obsolete. Manufacturer is forced to make modifications.	The introduction of themed versions: licenses are bought and last certain amount of time, they are chosen according to whatever is popular at the time.
Planned Obsolence (FI: Suunniteltu vanhentaminen)	A method that limits the use of a product or a service technologically, materially, or psychologically (Sihvonon 2014). A sortment of techniques used to artificially limits the durability and to stimulate repetitive consumption (Slade 2006).	Not applicable.

These new forms arise for two different reasons: Firstly, *Kimble's* cultural neo-production process is only partial, and secondly, *Kimble* is physically durable. As explained earlier in this article, planned obsolescence is part of the cultural neo-production process in which classics are created, and its role in the process is to direct the product into a resting phase limiting the product availability. However, *Kimble* is not the type of product that rests: the original version is constantly available, and themed versions only exist for a while without ever reappearing apart from a few exceptions. The effect of planned obsolescence in *Kimble's* cultural neo-production process is not complete; it is not *planned*. Rather, what occurs here

are lighter versions of obsolescence but still obsolescence as the previous versions will no longer be available. I have illustrated this in the diagram below to demonstrate how the different forms might stand in relation to one another in the resting phase of the cultural neo-production process. Lighter versions of obsolescence are the consequence of a physically durable product being in the cultural neo-production process, and the reason for the partial process.

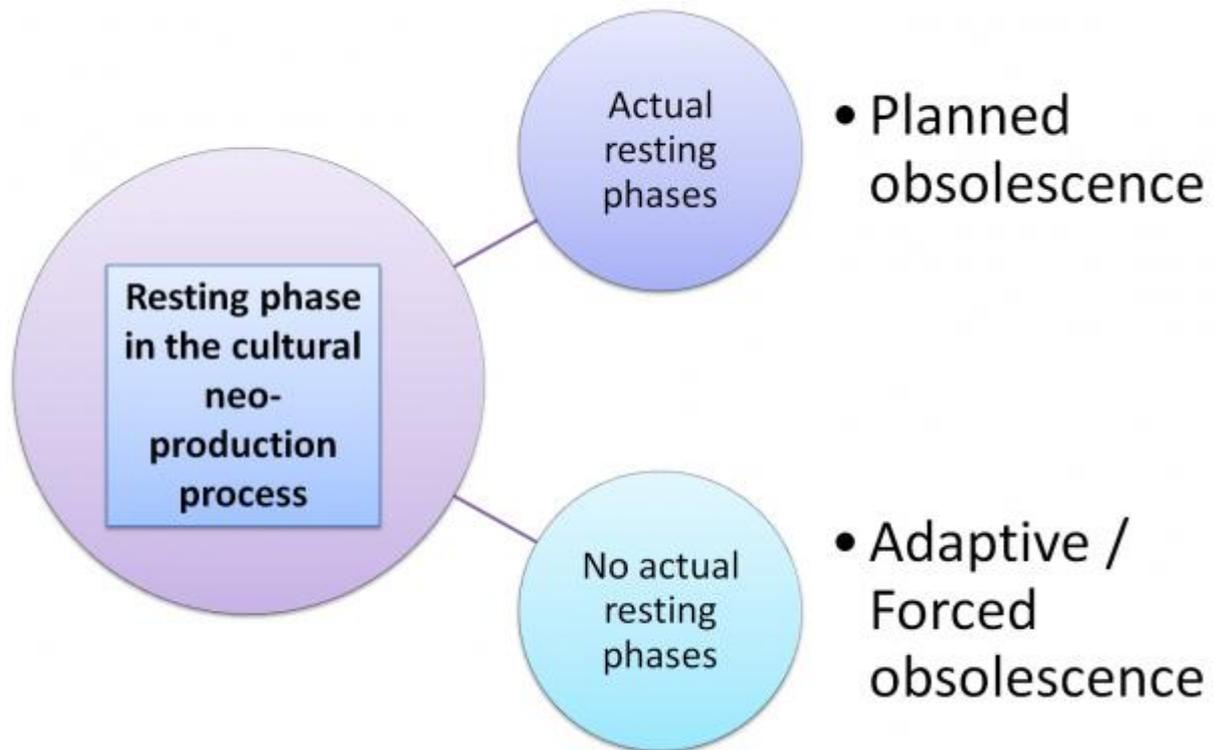


Figure 3. The relation of different forms of obsolescence in the cultural neo-production process. Lilli Sihvonen 2020.

According to Daniel Miller, an object's own material possibilities and constraints may indicate some general material practices (Miller 1987, 105). The second reason, being physically durable, indicates a strong resistance to planned obsolescence. Although obsolescence is usually seen as the perishability of the material and the end of usefulness, in the cultural neo-production process the impact of obsolescence is not perpetual. The product in general does not become obsolete, but versions of it do, at least from a manufacturing point of view. Rob Lawlor's distinction between item obsolescence and product obsolescence is useful here: in item obsolescence, a single individual item becomes obsolete while product

obsolescence makes every single item of the product obsolete (Lawlor 2015, 401–426). *Kimble* versions might face product obsolescence, but the individually owned versions can continue for ever due to their durability. From a planned obsolescence point of view, the CEO claimed that *Kimble*'s only weakness is its durability: it is, in fact, too durable. Durability is, as argued by Tim Cooper, the required function of the product in its normal conditions of use (Cooper 2010, 8). Roland Strausz claims that it is often difficult to assess durability before purchase, but it is learnt in the use (Strausz 2009, 1405–1406). *Kimble* can be acknowledged as being more durable than required (See Sihvonen 2017), and its durability is one of the reasons for adaptive and forced obsolescence; it cannot be weakened on purpose because that would cause the loss of customers to the company.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick has suggested that planned obsolescence is an encompassing term for different kinds of cultural conditions each of which need different methods of analysis and response (Fitzpatrick 2011, 1). Thus, its qualities are constantly being reconstructed and negotiated by different scholars. Every definition and perspective (when well argued) is reasonable and justifiable. It is difficult, and perhaps unnecessary, to compress obsolescence into a one specific term. It is flexible term, and this flexibility is revealed by studying products that are not supposed to become obsolete and the cultural neo-production process in which classics are created. Classics do not exist without planned obsolescence; not only because it is part of the cultural neo-production process directing them to a resting phase, but also because other products around classics become obsolete. More importantly, it does not always lead to the wearing out and breaking of the product.

Of course, more research on the matter is needed. It will be necessary to investigate different types of classics and their cultural neo-production processes to determine the contexts where the different forms of obsolescence actually occur. Then, it would be possible to turn the cultural neo-production process into a tool to extend product life.

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All links verified 11 October 2020.

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Notes

[1] Domino – Klassikot eivät vanhene”, *Youtube.com* 17.8.2017; Domino”, *fazer.fi* 27.9.2019. YouTube video on Domino cookies’ adds claiming that classics do not age or grow old. A Fazer Company’s website on Domino cookies telling the history of Domino cookies.

[2] Aulasmaa, *yle.fi* 16.11.2016; Kokkonen *yle.fi* 11.1.2019.

[3] Katriina Heljakka is also a researcher whose studies I refer to in my research.

[4] Read more about Kimble’s history from Sihvonen & Sivula 2016.

[5] Winnie the Pooh is originally A. A. Milne’s creation, which Disney Company later adopted. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winnie-the-Pooh>.

[6] Only two respondents claimed neither to own nor to recognise even the original version, which indicates only a reluctance to answer thoroughly to the online inquiry: why would anyone answer to an online inquiry of Kimble, if they did not even recognise the game (apart from the possible lottery win)?

[7] Angry Birds original and Angry Birds Space Race.