

Culture

Culture

- **Rules** – formal
- **Play** – experiential
- **Culture** – contextual

Culture is anything outside the magic circle.

There are no simple answers to questions of culture.

Games as Open Systems

Open systems take input from and produce output to the environment in which they exist.

All games reflect culture.

Some games transform culture.

Speaking and Hearing

As a game designer, you game is saying something. Do you know what it is? Your culture influences what you say.

As a game player, you are hearing something. Do you know what it is? Your culture influences how you hear.

As a game designer, do you know what your players are hearing when you speak?

Same-Sex Relationships in *The Sims*



Why is Culture Important?

By understanding your culture, you can:

- Avoid being restrained by the ideas of others and thus be more creative.
- Recognize what messages you are passing on.

By understanding your player's culture, you can:

- Leverage their existing values or challenge them with new values.
- More closely control the impact and historical importance of your game.

Cultural Schemas

- Games as Cultural Rhetoric
- Games as Open Culture
- Games as Cultural Resistance
- Games as Cultural Environment

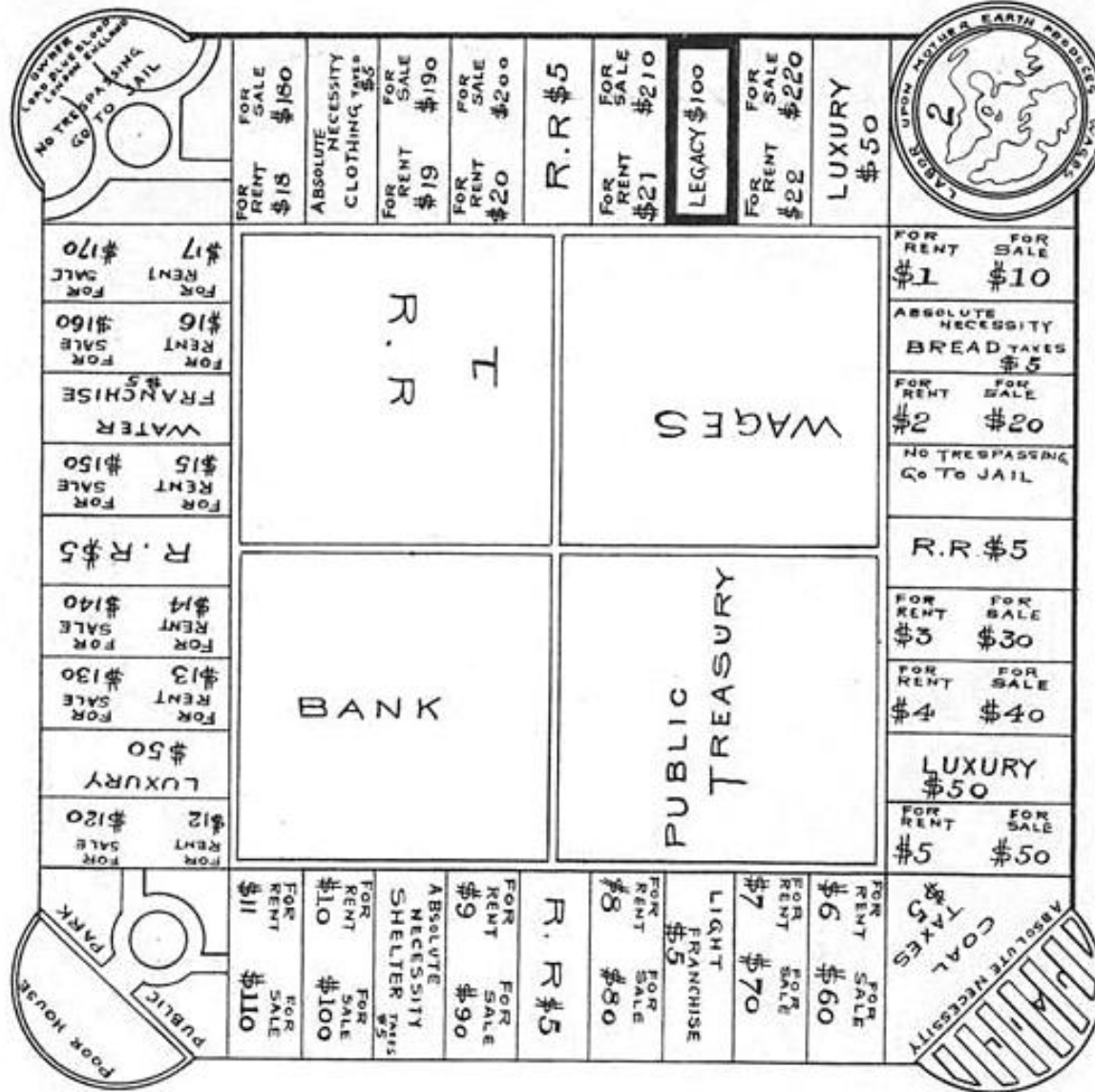
Games as Cultural Rhetoric

Rhetoric

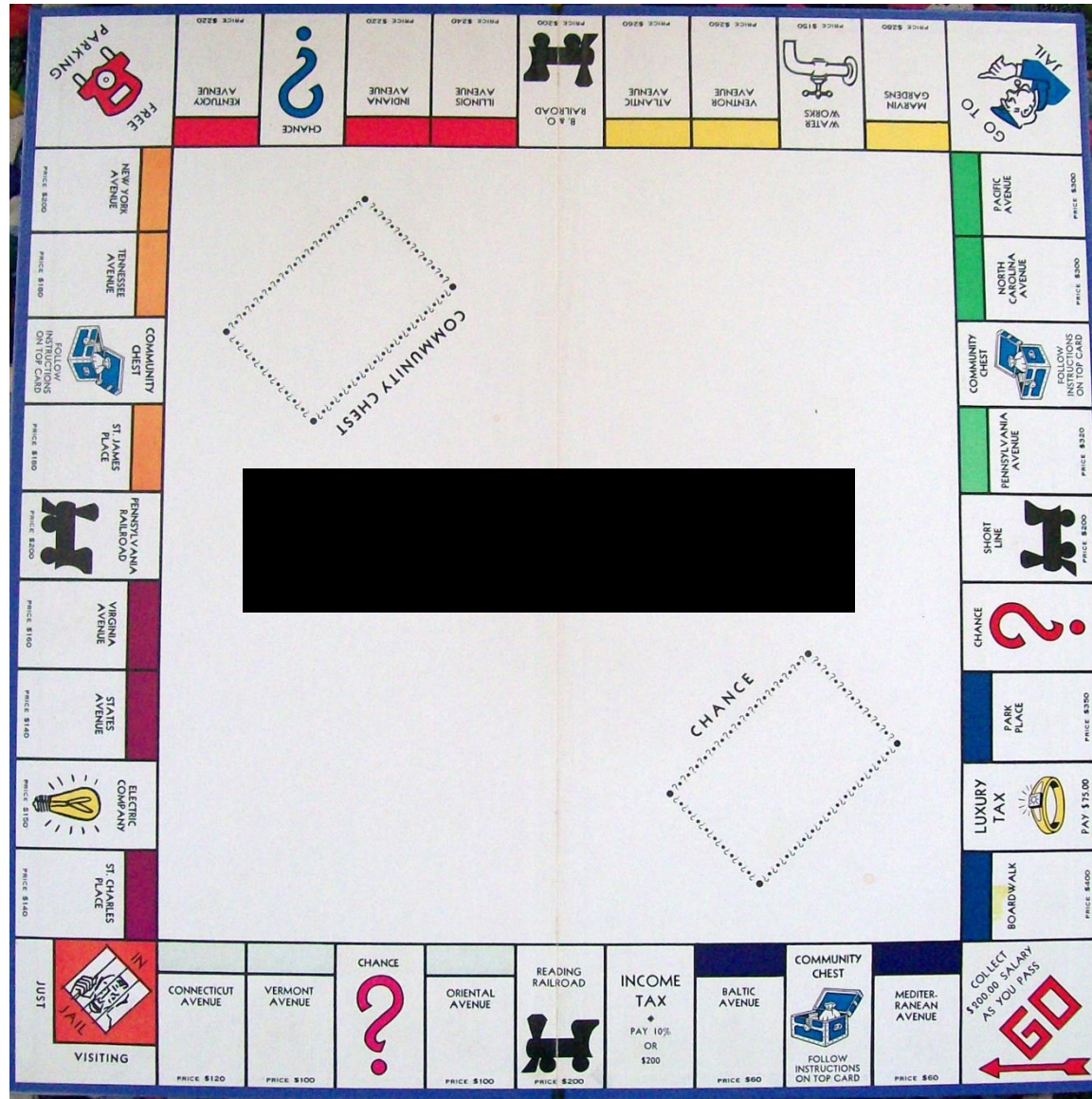
Rhetoric is persuasive communication meant to convince the audience of the rightness of the speaker's opinions.

Games are one of the ways that a society communicates its values to other societies and passes on its values to its own members.

The Landlord's Game, 1904



Monopoly, 1933



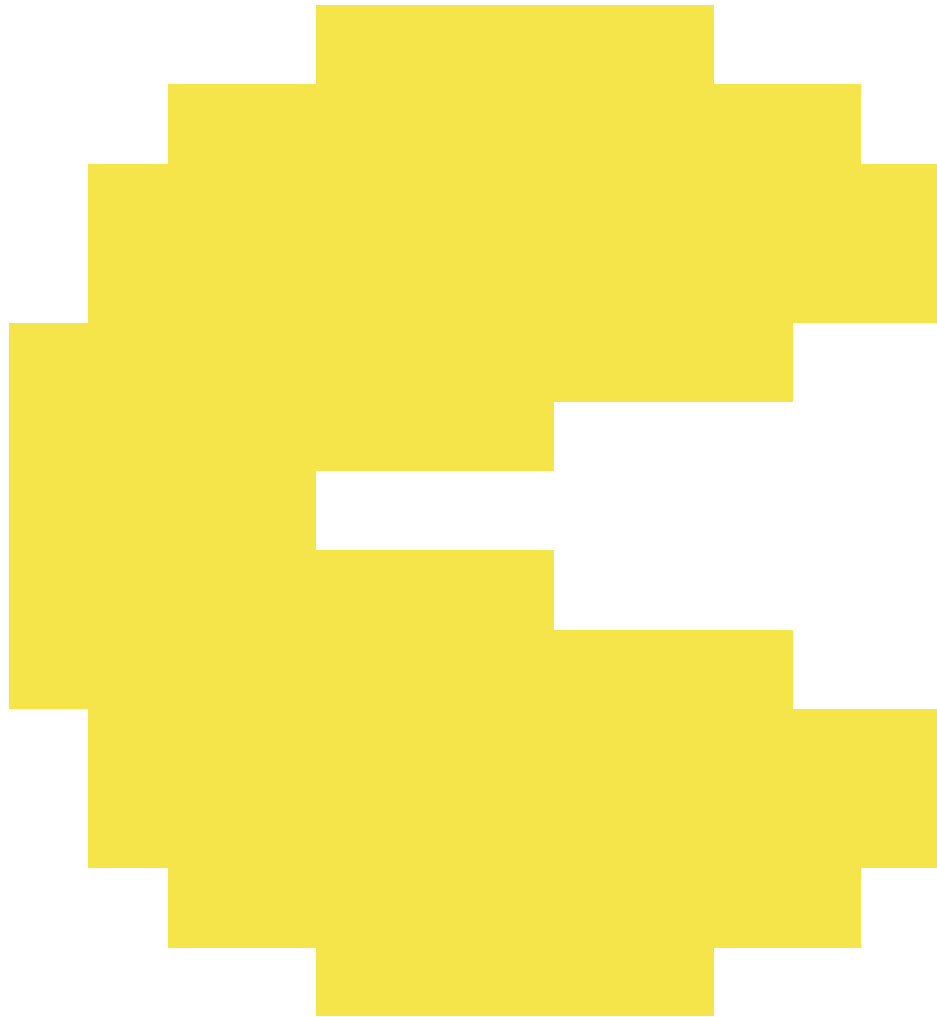
Rhetoric of The Landlord's Game and Monopoly

- *The Landlord's Game* was developed by Lizzie Magie to convince audiences (especially children) that a land value tax was right.
- Monopoly glorifies capitalism and the ruthless acquisition of wealth.
- Both involve buying and renting property to become the richest players.
- They are both saying similar things, but they are saying them very differently.

Sutton-Smith's 7 Rhetorics of Play:

1. **Progress** “Games make children into adults.”
(children's play, animal play)
2. **Fate** “We do not control our own lives.”
(games of chance)
3. **Power** “Heroes should be glorified.”
(sports)
4. **Identity** “Games maintain our group identity.”
(festivals)
5. **Imaginary** “Creativity, innovation, and flexibility are valuable.”
(improvisation, advancement of art)
6. **Self** “One should discover and improve him or herself.”
(hobbies, extreme one-man sports)
7. **Frivolity** “The establishment should be mocked.”
(stand up comedy, political cartoons)

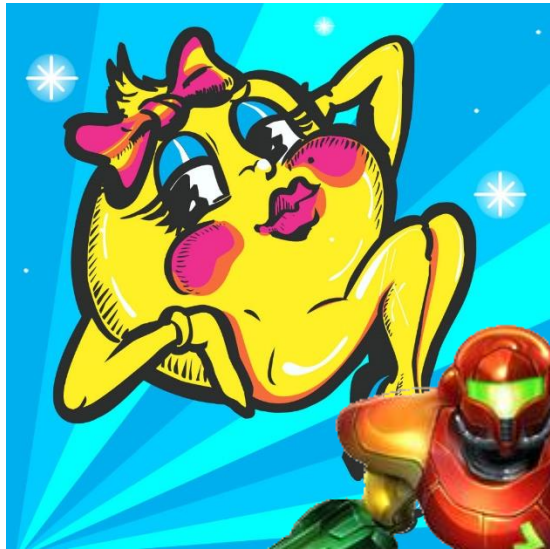
Pac-Man



Ms. Pac-Man



Rhetoric of Gender in Games



Toys

1. Player 1 chooses a favorite childhood toy.
2. Player 2 chooses a different toy.
3. Instructor chooses to adjectives such that:
 “The X toy beats the Y toy.”
4. Players decide who wins.

Moral of the Story

It's complicated.

Games as Open Culture

Games as Open Systems

Some games let players bring things into the magic circle with them.

- In-game purchases
- Choices made in previous games

Some games let players take things out of the magic circle when they leave.

- Trophies
- Family Photo Album in *The Sims*
- Machinema

Open Source Software

Tenants of open-source software:

- The development community should be fluid and non-hierarchical.
- Software should be freely available and open accessible.
- Use of the software should be non-guided.
- The results should be emergent.

These tenants can be applied to games.

Player as Producer

Games intentionally designed to be customized, modified, and reused by players.

- Game systems, e.g. deck of cards
- Video game engines, e.g. *Unreal Tournament*
- Level editors

Community Management

- Most games that encourage players to create content provide some kind of community management.
- Don't tell players what to do.
- Provide a space for them to meet, socialize, and help one another.
- Provide a space for them to publish their work.

Hats, *Team Fortress 2*



Games as Cultural Resistance

Resistance = Friction

Play is free movement within a rigid system.

Play obeys rules, but it also butts up against and strains the boundaries of rules. **Resistance** is friction between a game and its cultural context.

Hero's Adventure



Do-It-Yourself Mentality

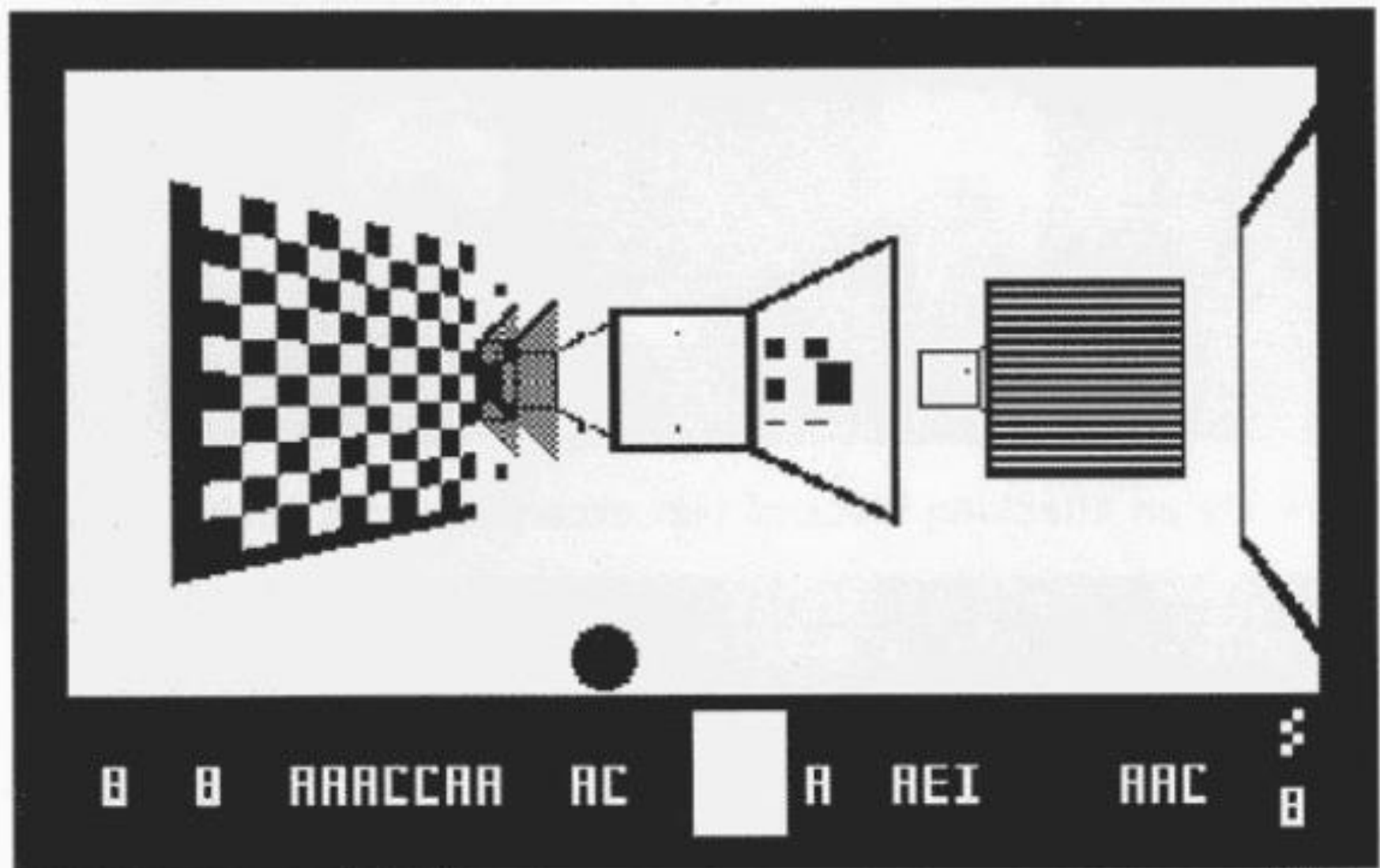
The ability to hack and modify games allows people to break down the traditional distinction between players and producer.

Many examples of Games as Cultural Resistance are game modifications (or mods).

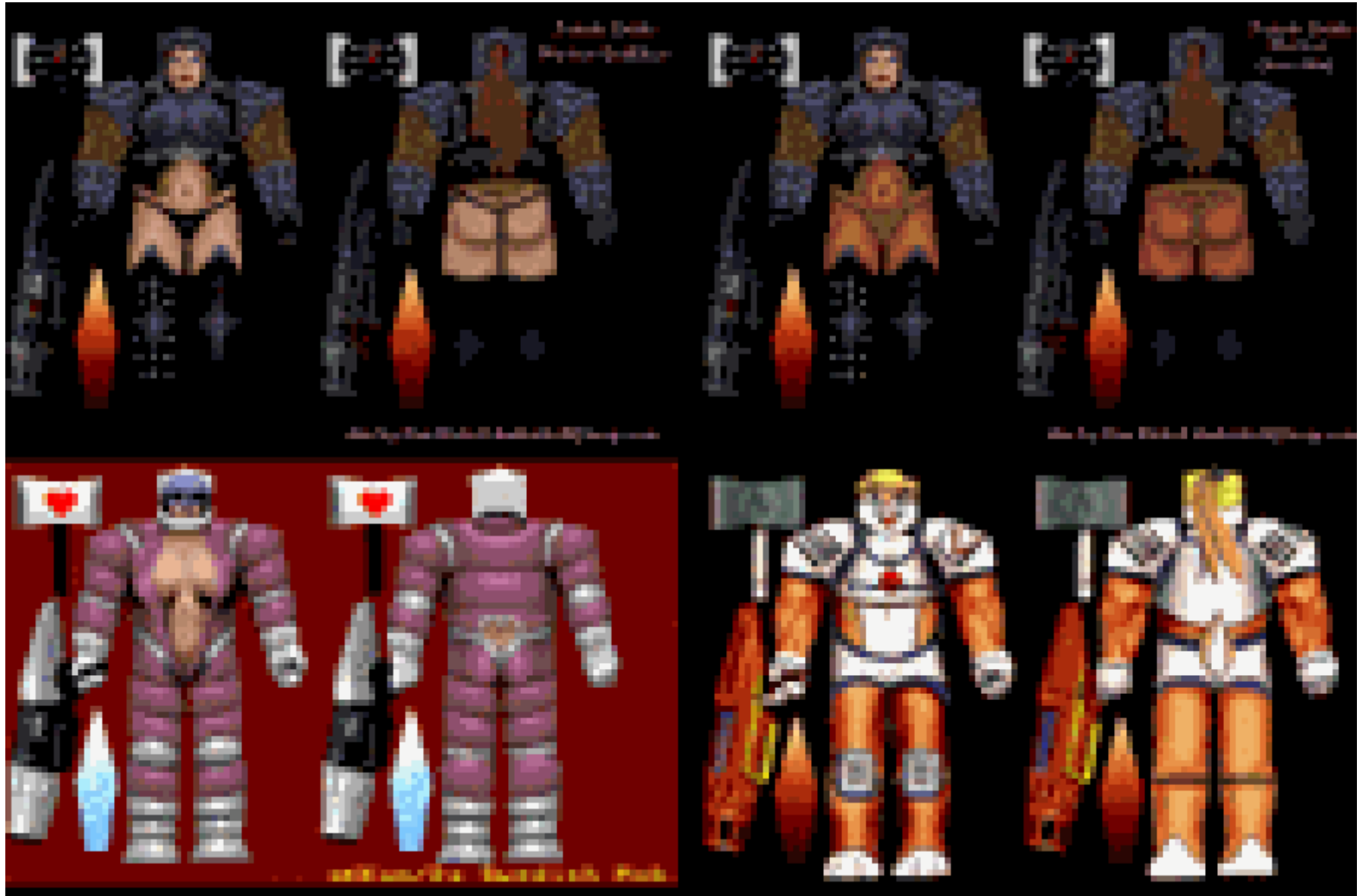
Resistance Strategies

- **Alteration:** change the setting and vocabulary of a game to express something new.
- **Juxtaposition:** put unexpected things in the same place to emphasize their relationships.
- **Reinvention:** create something entirely new out of something old.

Alteration: *SOD*, 1999



Juxtaposition: Frag Queens



Reinvention: *Counter Strike*, 2000



Cheating

Cheating is one example of players straining against or breaking the rules of a system.

Cheating usually prompts counter-resistance from players and/or developers.

The Tale of Fancy the Bard



Games as Cultural Environment

Alternate Reality Games

Games that intentionally blur the distinction between the game and the real world.

The Beast

**ARE YOU TIRED OF WATCHING
MACHINES TAKE JOBS FROM YOU
AND YOUR NEIGHBORS?**

**IT'S NOT THE COLOR OF
YOUR SKIN THAT'S IMPORTANT
- IT'S THE FLESH INSIDE**

**DOES IT DRIVE YOU CRAZY
TO WATCH A METAL-HEAD STRIDE
DOWN THE STREET AS IF IT OWNS IT?**

**ANSWER THE
CALL TO ARM!
SUPPORT THE
ANTI-ROBOT
MILITIA!**

**DO YOU EVER WONDER IF THE
EVOLUTIONARY TRACK IS BRANCHING AND
THE CHOICE IS HUMANS OR ROBOTS?**

The Beast Alternate Reality Game

- Viral marketing for the 2001 film *A.I.*
- Rabbit hole: Jeanine Salla credited as “Sentient Machine Therapist” in movie’s trailer.
- Various websites with fictional content disguised as real content.
- Puzzle solving unlocked episodic content.
- Some players called by fictional characters.
- Players invited to attend real life Anti-Robot Militia rallies.

Features of ARGs

- Fiction mixed with and disguised as reality
- Multi-modal delivery
- Use of public spaces
- Real-world interaction
- Distributed problem solving
- Interaction between players and creators
- Episodic content
- Emergent storytelling