Two Cultures

Joshua Evans | ANTH 103 | Homework 1 | Due 2024-04-10

I had a hard time with this assignment at first. I'm extremely reclusive by nature, I don't have many friends or family to speak of, and I don't participate in any communal rituals of an easily identifiable "culture". Then I thought back to the definition of culture:

"A set of beliefs, practices, and symbols that are <u>learned</u> and <u>shared</u>."

The key insight being that the definition is only concerned with the shared nature of culture – it does not demand direct participation in communal activities, only alignment of thought. To that end, I've decided to examine two communities I have always been deeply passionate about: Video game players and video game developers.

To be more specific, I intend to examine <u>Western (American) Video Game Players</u> and <u>Western (American) Video Game Developers</u> – my own experiences being confined physically to the Pacific Northwest and online to the American English internet. I also thought it would be especially interesting to compare two cultures that are obviously so closely related.

The central common activity (i.e. behavior) for each group is described by their very names: players play video games and developers develop them. Of course, every single one of these terms covers a tremendous number of possible scenarios. There is an ever-growing list of video games to play, every player has their own preferred method of play (known as "playstyle" to players and developers, a commonly understood linguistic

symbol), and "video game developer" covers a wide range of responsibilities and disciplines. Still, there are many cultural artifacts shared among members of these groups.

In fact, a shared understanding of how video games' function is critical to the smooth operation of the entire video game industry. In the 25 years I have been playing video games, standards have developed that all "gamers" understand, even though they are entirely unwritten.

If a game uses a controller to play, moving the character will invariably use the joystick on the left side of the controller, and adjusting the position of the in-game camera will be done with the joystick on the right side. This is universal by default for <u>all</u> modern games with controller support; the opposite control scheme being referred to as "southpaw" and being used as a kind of curse in some games to disorient the player. Similarly, if a game is played with a keyboard, it is simply understood that the "w" key will move the player's character forward, "a" will move to the left, "s" down, and "d" to the right. This seemingly arbitrary "wasd" configuration has a fascinating history all its own that was shaped and set in place by players and developers alike.

The beliefs and behaviors of video game players and developers are not always in alignment, however. One great difference being the acceptable standard of behavior towards game developers. Many players can be extremely harsh on game developers – sometime being downright toxic, while game developers are generally much more supporting and understanding of each other. Compared to the number of video game players there are a tiny number of developers, so it tends to be a fairly tightknit cohort.

Still, even in their discord, players and developers mirror one another. A lot of "gamer rage" is directed at game developers when players feel "entitled" to a certain experience that they feel like they did not get from a game. This kind of grievance is sometimes warranted if a product is overpriced or is somehow a scam – but more often than not it's just a huge bummer that brings everybody down. Developers are not immune from entitlement either, though, and an outright refusal to listen to player feedback can destroy games, and even entire careers, that had tremendous promise.

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There are so many more aspects of these cultures to talk about. I imagine I could write a whole thesis on video game players, developers, and the intersection between them, but I think this should satisfy the requirements of this initial assignment. Once I started writing the analysis really just began to flow. I found this exercise extremely engaging, and I look forward to the rest of this class!