

CMLIT 191M Midterm 1 Study Guide

Josepeh Sepich Sept 27

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Day One: The Etruscan Vase

The main goal of this course is to understand how the world works through video games. In order to achieve this goal, we will have to look at video games as cultural artifacts. Artifacts exist through all of human history, because work does not necessarily come before “play”. We may think of having to go to a 9-5 job before performing leisure, but humans have always produced stories and art. This is why to understand culture we must be able to analyze the artifacts it produces.

In this way this course brings together both the arts and humanities. **Art** is the study of the history and making of objects we call art. **Humanities** is the study of the history of all human life and activity.

Facing the Artifact

When examining an artifact there are some basic questions you may ask of it.

Questions

- When is this from?
- What is it?
- Who made it?
- How is the object exchanged?
- Why was it made?
- What is it for?
- What information can I gather about the manufacturer/maker?
- Is this object priceless or sentimental?
- What influenced the making of this object?
- What did this object influence?
- What does it depict and why?

Primary vs. Secondary Characteristic

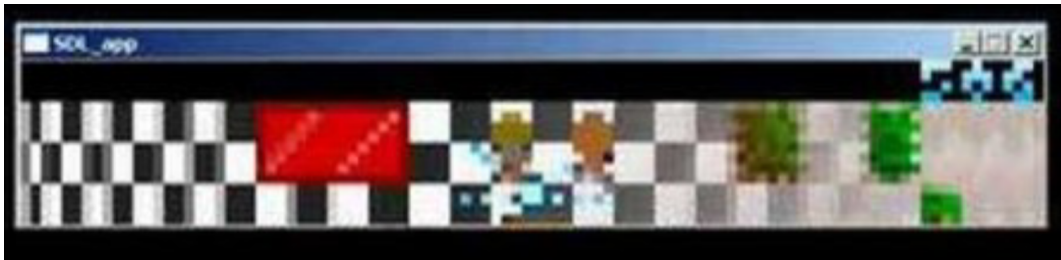
Primary and secondary characteristics are important aspects of analyzing a cultural artifact. A **primary** characteristic is something included for the intended and conscious use of the object. For a statue the shape would be a primary characteristic. For a game the dialogue would be a primary characteristic. A **secondary** characteristic is something non-primary that happened to be there. For a statue the weight is a secondary characteristic. For a video game the storage size is a secondary characteristic.

The Etruscan Vase



The Etruscan Vase is an example of a cultural artifact. To get some context about where this artifact was made we could find out that Etruria is in Northern Italy and the people existed there from about 800 to 300 BCE. The image on the vase depicts Artemis and her stags. So something to question is what aspects are intentional and what is unintentional?

Passage



Passage is another example of a cultural artifact. In this case passage is a video game. Some important context for this game is that it was actually made around 2010. The game looks as if it was an older game from the 80s perhaps, but since it was manufactured recently it must be a design choice and not a secondary characteristic. In this class we will use video games such as passage as an Etruscan Vase.

Phatic Exchange

A phatic exchange between two people is an exchange in which the words are meaningless and it is mostly to build rapport between the two parties. An example of this is the We Are chant or saying I love you to a partner after establishing that as a fact.

Day Two

Evolutionary Psychology

Evolutionary psychology is an attempt to understand culture as a result of natural selection. Natural selection is the phenomenon where traits that increase survivability remain. This begs the question why do we tell stories and does this aesthetic activity/pleasure/leisure increase survivability?

An example of natural selection would be the lactose tolerant single gene mutation. This mutation allows us to consume dairy and has occurred multiple times throughout history, but the gene did not become common until the neolithic era where people began raising cattle and the dairy became another source of sustenance.

Proposed sources of cultural evolution

- Sexual selection - sexually attracted to storytellers
- Cognitive workout - stories help to extend mental capacity
- Instruction/Social Glue - teaching!
- Accidental byproduct - there is no explanation

Stories

The claim is that culture is highly materialized and stories have existed over the entire course of human history. A story is a mode of human interaction, but that mode materializes in different forms. An important thing to note is that the change of culture is **not** strictly progressive. Furthermore story precedes history, which is a made form.

Two Forms of a story

1. Chronicle; A list of events following right after one another.
2. Historical work; An account of what happened and **why**

Genres

All cultural artifacts have a genre; a type to which they belong and which determines their meaning. Genres are not strictly defined. Artifacts are also determined partly, but not completely by their historical context. Genres are also historically determined. For example, the romantic novel emerged long before the detective mystery.

Gamergate

Gotschall states that the differences between the way girls play and the way boys play can be explained by the fact that biological evolution has not caught up to cultural evolution. When Anita reviewed some games and talked about the way they depicted women she got a huge backlash from the gaming community upset that she was attacking their community.

Note that it seems that girls are able to cross the gender boundary seemingly easier than guys. We talking about how there is both policing of this line and encouragement to cross it.

Three terms

1. Play is an activity that sometimes happens in games.
2. Sport overlaps with play and games, but not always.
3. Games like sports often involved playing, but not always.

Adult play

Note that the meaning of adulthood has changed over time. Think about us versus our grandparents. Adults play in many ways:

- Flirting
- Gambling
- Recreational Sports
- Video Games
- Drinking/Drugs
- Shopping (not buying)

Day Three

An important concept to understand when it comes to play is the magic circle. The magic circle is a construct that keeps the game safe from outside forces. For example, in monopoly you pay rent with the fake money, but if you offered real money then you would be breaking or breaching that magic circle.

When we come to analyze video games we must understand they are a unique cultural artifact. Unlike books and movies they have not penetrated the entire market. Think about what would happen if you asked a random person if they have ever seen a movie versus ever played a video game. To understand what work culture is doing you must understand how it distorts reality/expectations such as Ice Cube's west coast style on a Public Enemy song.

Five Faces of Play

Agon

Agon is the type of play that is competition.

Alea

Alea is the type of play that is chance.

Mimicry

Mimicry is the type of play that is imitation. Where do we draw the line between mimicry and simulation? To understand the difference between mimicry/imitation and simulation we must understand the distinction between **simulation and representation**. Gonzalo Frasca argues that games incorporate simulation in a way that traditional media does not. He also argues that instead of the narrative being the main thing, the simulation rather is the main subject. Gotschall also agrees that we cannot **not** tell stories. Our brains put data together to construct a narrative.

An example of how our brain creates stories is the Kuleshov effect. This was demonstrated in lecture using a picture of a man with different photos in the middle. While both groups saw the same man, they saw different stories, because of the context in the middle.

Illinx

Illinx is the type of play that is flow or also known as vertigo. The example of this used in class was a game called Flower. The main point of that game was the movement of it. Another game example is Katamari Damancy which is the game where you roll around in a ball of stuff.

Muthos

From what was mentioned in mimicry it is implied that storytelling **must** be a part of play.

Day Four

Game Studies

Game studies began in the 1990s. This is when the first generation of gamers became professors in academia. Game studies focuses on three main questions.

1. What is a game?
2. Why are there games and what social function do they serve?
3. How do games affect players and what effects do they have?

Areas of Research

1. Representation: How are games talked about in culture?
2. Ethnography/Social Analysis: How do games affect players?
3. Close Reading/Literary Analysis: What does an individual game mean?
4. Philosophy of Games: What are games?

People have been claiming that there is a move away from linear media such as television towards interactive media like games. This is not necessarily true.

Basic Theories of Games

1. The magic circle that encloses the world of a game.
2. Popular culture vs. high vs. middle
 - High would be classical music
 - Low would be reality tv or wrestling
 - "It's fun to hate people for liking stuff"
3. The question of winning. Most games emphasize effort, but some skill.
4. We cannot produce a clear definition of a game.

Diegesis

Diegesis is the story world. The examples used in lecture to describe this concept was some movies with an intro where there is extradiegetic music that becomes diegetic. This means that there is music playing that is not a part of the story world, but becomes a part of the story world. We must also understand **metadiegesis** which would be a story world within a story world like the Princess Bride.

Form/Content Distinction

The way a story is told and the actual content of the story are two very different aspects to a story. The story itself is a set of events or the form. The way the set of events or form is told is called the discourse or content. **The same events can be told in different ways.**

Lessons About Genre

What we know about genres:

- They emerge historically due to tech or social conditions
- They repeat themselves
- They have some relation to technique and technology
- They represent large scale cultural modes of interaction
- There are no pure examples of a genre
- Genres are fuzzy
- Genres compete in an ecosystem for attention

Day Five

Day Six

Day Seven

Day Eight