

CMLIT 191M Midterm 1 Study Guide

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Day One: The Etruscan Vase

The main goal of this course is the 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

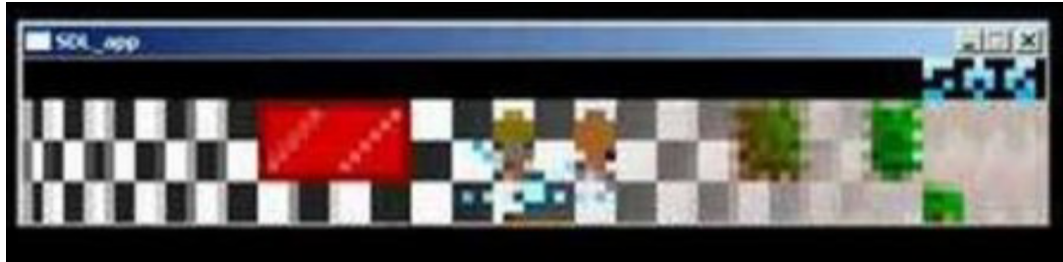
Primary and secondary characteristics are important aspects of analyzing a cultural artifact. A **primary** characteristic is something included for the intended and conscious use of the object. For a statue the shape would be a primary characteristic. For a game the dialogue would be a primary characteristic. 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.

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.

Day Three

Day Four

Day Five

Day Six

Day Seven

Day Eight