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 Etruia 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
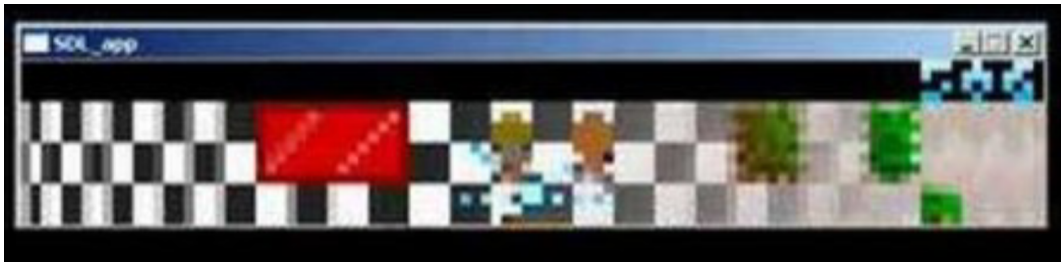
Passage is another example of a cultural artifact. In this case passage is a video game. Some important context for this game is that it was actually made around 2010. The game looks as if it was an older game from the 80s perhaps, but since it was manufactured recently it must be a design choice and 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 import thing to note is that the chang 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 they 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 polciing 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 differencce 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 narratie 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.

Ilinx

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

Shift recently to create moral choices

1. Undertale genocide/pacifist
2. Modern Warfare baby killing example

Someone also claimed that every story is composed of a mixure of story parts.

Early History

- 1961 Spacewar! debuts in MIT lab on PDP-1 computer
- 1969 Ralph Baer develops Pong for Brown Box
- 1971 Galaxy Game, fist coin-operated video game
- 1972 First console Magnavox Odyssey
- 1972 Atari founded by Norman Bushnell and Ted Dabney
- 1973 Taito launches Elepong, first Japanese arcade video game
- 1974 Dungeons and Dragons role-playing system launched by TSR
- 1975 Sears Tele-games Pong consoles first major home console
- 1976 Death Race launches first "moral panic"
- 1976 Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak launch Apple I (found Apple Computer)
- 1977 Adventure programmed by Will Crowther
- 1977 Commodore PET and TRS-80 launched
- 1977 Apple II launched
- 1978 Flight Simulator debuts on Apple II
- 1981 Football Manager released for ZX81 - first data driven sports sim
- 1982 Atari loses millions on ET (buried cartidges in New Mexico)
- 1983 Xevios and Dragon's Lair

    - Visuals made possible by laser disk

- 1983 Apple Lisa, first home PC with GUI for 10k (23k today)
- 1984 Croucher release Deus Ex Machina

- Uses audiotape for a soundtrack

- 1985 Balance of Power
- 1985 Garriot releases Ultima IV: Quest of the Avatar

Dates to Know!

- 1961 Spacewar!
- 1976 Death Race moral panic

   - A moral panic is anxiety people have about a cultural artifact because they think it is doing something wicked to children

- 1976 Fairchild Channel F
- 1976-77 Mattel and others release handheld games
- 1977 Adventure, Combat
- 1977 RCA Studio II
- 1977 Atari 2600 with Combat
- 1978 Space Invaders launched in Japan
- 1979 Asteroids (Atari, arcade)

   - Remediation of Spacewar!

- 1979 Mattel Intellivision
- 1980 Zork! released by Infocom
- 1980 Richard Garriot released Ultima

   - First majorly successful MMO
   - Sold in ziplock bags with floppy disks

- 1980 Pac-man (Namco, Toru Iwatani)
- 1980 Clive Sinclair develops Sinclair ZX80 in Europe

   - 1982 ZX Spectrum widly popular and assembled at home

- 1980-1983 PC Price Wars

   - Commodore vs Texas Instruments
   - 1980 Commodore VIC-20
   - 1982 Commodore 64
   - 1983 TI drops out of PC business

- 1981 Eastern Front 1941 for Atari (1st war game)
- 1981 Wizardy (Sir Tech) released
- 1981 Pimania by Mel Croucher - puzzle took four years to solve
- 1982 Great Video Game Crash

   - Overinvestment in arcades
   - Games became too difficult
   - Consoles hurt arcades
   - Poor quality of games
   - Aging technology in Atari 2600
   - US Economic Recession
   - Arrival of VCR
   - PC Price war

- 1982 Custer's Revenge

   - Result of Atari's console not being regulated

- 1982 Donkey Kong (really 81) by Miyamoto

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- 1983 Infogrames founded in France. Became Atari in 2008 after buying them out.
- 1986 Console sales bottom out at $100 million from $3.2 billion in 1983
- 1986 Ubisoft founded in France. Now top 5 company

    - EA (1982)
    - Activision Blizzard (1979)
    - Nintendo

- 1988 Freedom: Rebels in the Darkness
- 1988 Captain Blood by Philippe Ulrich with soundtrack from Jean-Michael Jarre

    - Symbol alien language

- 1980s Rise of "cracking" anti-piracy culture and "demoscene"

GUI:

- 1983 Lode Runner, first game with player made levels
- 1984 Apple Macintosh for $1,995 (5k today)
- 1984 Roberta and Ken Williams release Kings Quest - beginning of end text adventure
- 1986 Infocom bought by Activision; discontinued in 1989

Useful Concepts

Remediation is teaching new things using a familiar format.

Harware and Development

1. Shift from hardwiring to microprocessors
2. Vector graphics (1979), color (1979), Wizardy on Apple II 1981

Computers and Intelligence

1. Turing Test, Alan Turing 1950 (Can you tell you are speaking to a computer?)
2. Elize AI chatbot
    - Eric says humans like sex -> AI have female names

Atari bilateral symmetry is a secondary characteristic from RAM limit.

Day Six

All culture happens in a tech or economic space. Video games were developed due to two reasons:

1. WWII investment in tech for enryption and misssle system guidance (Claude Shannon)
2. Arcade gaming, which started with mechanical machines

Interaction Fiction

Video games created connected to existing culture. Below are some examples of interactive fiction.

Choose Your Own Adventure

CYOA books were books you read and flipped to different pages based on different decisions that you wanted to make. These books sold 250 million copies between 1979 and 1998.

An example like this in history was the Homeric poet who knew the basic story structure, but would present the same story differently depending on the audience. This was a seperation of story and discourse (form/content distinction).

A similar book that was sold in 1969 was The Unfortunates by B.S. Johnson. Essentially the first and last chapters were labeled and you shuffled the rest into a random order.

Electronic Fiction

Espen Aarseth created Cybertext in 1997, which was a novel that you navigated pages by clicking on any word in the current page.

Story and Discourse

Coming back to story and discourse there is different ways that they are thought to be created. **Expired** means that story comes before and dictates the discourse. **Tired** means that the discourse comes before the story, which is merely a back formation from the discourse. **Wired** is when story and discourse are created together.

Lion King One and a Half is a great example of how discourse can affect the story. The entire Lion King story is told from Timon and Pumbaa's point of view.

An example of a game at the limit of fiction is Beginner's Guide by Davey Wreden who also made the Stanely Parable. It is presented as if it is a factual retelling, but in fact it is completely constructed story by the creator. Davey uses the language of a documentary, but the content is not that of a documentary.

Day Seven

Culture

Our claim is that culture changes people. For example, people are more beautiful the more that you like them. People also ban a movie or a book. One example we talked about was the Modern Warefare baby again. We somehow all know the "rules", becuase they are dictated by a rating system.

Gotschall points to two findings of research:

1. People who consume stories tend to be more empathetic
2. People will reproduce the behavior that they see (priming)

Art both reflects society and helps to reproduce itself.

The idiot/asshole

When you see someone who does something different than you it is somehow always wrong. When you see someone walking faster than you on the sidewalk they must be an asshole, but anyone walking slowly you call an idiot. Also can be seen in amount of studying calling people nerds or a slacker.

Taste

Taste is a social phenomenon. What you like is determined by your experience. This sometimes involves feeling superior. We talked about how a hipster is someone well off that likes what a working class person likes to try to fit in.

Gameplay and Representation

Gameplay is what is being performed such as shooting, and isometric game, or climbing. **Representation** is what makes uncharted and tomb raider different even though they have the same gameplay. This is essentially the same as the story versus discourse discussion where you can present a story in different forms. Ian Bogost refers to the force of gameplay as procedural rheotric. Tone also has a huge affect on representation. Think of how different Borderlands would be without its art stye or the way guns were named.

Is play subversive and active or escapist and passive?

Feeling of impotence is very power. Freud call this castration. This produces anger and you are rarely impotent in video games.

Five Reasons to play

1. Flow
2. For the experience of satisfying work
3. For the experience of being successful
4. For social connection
5. To pretend to be another person