

Assignment A2

The Retro Mobile Gaming Database (RMGD) is a public online database of mobile games between the period of 1975 (the beginning of the mobile as a gaming console) and 2008 (the launch of the first iPhone). The database provides tools to sort and filter games through criteria such as name, player count, genre, fps, region of origin, and creators among others. The user can run searches for the metadata, generate maps and find keywords across published material such as press coverage and other published content. It even suggests other similar games that can be included in research. Being a publicly alterable platform it seems to aim towards Manovich's cultural analytics of including "everything by everyone" but the requirement of verification hinges the relationship between the canon and the archive on its creators. (Manovich, 2017) The project falls under distant reading because the study of every game to discover trends does not require playing each one.

The RMGD as a repository of early games provides the benefit of access to information regarding games which may not be accessible due to copyright or software incompatibility among other issues. While this may make the data unverifiable by individual researchers, there is a system of approval by the MGRL researchers which makes the data close to reliable. The breakdown of the "close reading elitism" of the canon (as termed by Moretti) is true for small circle games which were available to a select elite group but can now be seen by the public. (Moretti, 2000) The public nature of the database provides scope to make it diverse allowing for, as Manovich claims, a large enough sample to find local trends for deeper research. This allows for more variables to act as a filter leading to what Manovich calls wide rather than long data through distant instead of close reading. (Manovich, 2017)

Distant reading also has its limitations. I ran the database by a some gamer friends who immediately pointed out games not present in it. While the RMGD is a publicly alterable repository, it requires a signup and familiarization with its format. Two issues arise here. Firstly, most people would not want to register and spend time learning the database format to input information into a database they don't have a need for themselves. This highlights the problem of the information distant reading databases miss out on. In Moretti's concept of distant reading the core and periphery of canon and archive still exist regardless of the breakdown of the strictness of their

separation and relationship. (Moretti, 2000) As an American origin database, it is bound to exclude many local games developed around the world, especially in non-white countries. Secondly, though entries are verified by the MGRL researchers and are inclined to be credible, the biases and gaps in knowledge of the researchers can act as gatekeepers. If a game did exist on the global periphery for a short duration but is accessible only in lived memory with almost no records of it (due to lack of public media accessibility at the time of the game) it may be unverifiable, erasing its existence.

A repository such as the RMGD acts as a great macroscope for early games but it begs the question of what we miss out on by potentially discarding close reading and consequently, context. As Hitchcock states, the nuances of close reading may get lost in the large-scale analysis of big data. (Hitchcock, 2014) This is especially true for minority narratives such as very local games about local narratives which get lost due to there being less quantity of its records.

References

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