<u>Main Ideas and Concepts</u>

A. Introduction

Culture describes social actors, the webs of significance that allow for social actors to communicate and understand each other, and the material artefacts that facilitates that interaction. And just to complicate matters, I would also add that the study of culture should also include some understanding of what appear to be evolutionary pressures towards self-similarity that tend to have a stabilizing effect.

But, there are three caveats that need to be mentioned before I introduce these topics:

A.   First, it is very difficult to pull on the threads of a society in order to understand it with out tugging on the other threads that make up the whole picture. How can we talk about violence in gaming without dealing with its impact on the idea of community in gaming, or the portrayal of female sexuality in games.

B.   And second, al of these things are tied up in the economic machinery that is a modern capitalist economy. Earlier theorists of this "Culture Industry" saw collusion and capitulation between the creators of popular culture, the financiers of the same, and overt and hidden mechanisms of social control that perpetuate the consumer society. And while that school of thought may be a little blunt as a tool, there are elements of truth in the extensive penetration of computer gaming into our culture.

C.   Now, I want to add one more factor element to my definition that I didn't have time for before, although I did mention a number of times the importance of language, and more specifically, the importance of specialised language in the formation of cultural identity.

D.   So wrap all my cautions together and we get a very complex, nuanced problem that remains very difficult to unravel and understand.

B. Community

1.   When I talk about violence and sexuality, I think the idea of community will be

pretty evident. I did mention last class that the idea of community brings up many different ideas in cultural studies.

2.   And with respect to computer gaming, these elements manifested in a host of cultural arenas.

3.   Issues of representation in a virtual world add an additional element of challenge to understanding community.

a.   Think about the video "fear of Girls"
i.   Exclusion
ii.   Specialised language
iii.   Identity
iv.   Representation

C. Addiction

1.   Clearly, people become addicted to computer games

2.   If gaming can be considered an addiction, it would most likely fit the mold of a behavioral addiction.

3.   Some suggest the concept that "excessive behaviors of all types," for instance addictions to shopping, gambling, or sex, are addictive in very similar ways. These addictions don't have to involve drugs, yet even drug addiction shares features with these other addictions.

4.   Game companies and other entities are addressing these issues with a variety of successes.

D. Violence

1.   The dilemma of violence can be placed the dilemma on various axes:

a.   Does game violence lead to real violence or do they simply reflect the existing violence in society?
b.   Does the violence in a computer game act as catharsis for the violent aspects of our nature, or does it just add fuel to the fire?
c.   Are we capable of always realising that we are playing a game and therefore the violence is quarantined in a different part of our brain, or does violence in computer games blur the line in our heads.

2.   The depiction of violence in and of itself is not necessarily bad. Take the game *Kabul Kaboom*, released by Ganzalo Frasca, a prominent game theorist who would falls into the Ludology camp of game critics (I can explain this later if you wish).

3.   But, as I mentioned, these games are a minority, and the vast majority of computer game violence does not have such an obvious moral or political message.

4.   Certainly realism has something to do with it. The more computer games become more visually realistic, the more likely it seems that they would override people's ability to distinguish reality from the gaming environment.

5.   But it isn't just a question of something looking realistic. We need an element of "social realism" needs to be included if we are to get a good idea of the influence of violence on cultural communities.

E. Sexuality

1.   As I mentioned last class, there are clearly issues of sexuality associated with computer games. I showed you a few images that suggest that many authors of these games really need to get out more, and maybe even date.

2.   Issues of sexuality in games are complex.

3.   So, understanding sexuality in games requires an evaluation of more than just the image of women and men in the games. This can include (according to one critic),

4.   In addition, issues of sexuality are not just limited to the game, but also to the community networks associated with gaming.

5.   I think the ultimate extension of this would be the Holodeck, and more specifically, what would happen humanity if sexual relations on the Holodeck were possible.

F. Discussion

a.   *Nintendogs!.*
b.   *The Res*
c.   *Virtual Grilfriend*