

Producers as an Architectural Tool: Moving Beyond Queerscapes in Virtual Worlds

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ABSTRACT

Repurposing of video game spaces by LGBT individuals to suit their needs is an important step, although often only the first one, to the creation of games and narratives that fulfill this community's needs. Understanding producers as a framework for participatory content creation helps us visualise how games can embrace diverse narratives and experiences that better suit the desires and needs of these communities.

Keywords

Queerscapes, Producers, Video Games

INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'queerscapes' has been used to describe the reclamation of spaces by queer-identified individuals to survive and thrive in environments that would otherwise be hostile to them. Ingram (1998) describes the function of queerscapes as being established to 'embody processes that counter those that directly harm, discount, isolate, ghettoize, and assimilate...involving multiple alliances of lesbian, gay men, bisexuals, and transsexuals...[and] nearly always overlaps with and is surrounded by social groups where heterosexuality is supposedly the norm'. There are many ways in which queerscapes can exist in video game worlds: LGBT guilds, Goldshire Inn (Sherlock, 2013), and queer-oriented gaming groups (including Facebook groups) can all fit this repurposing of space to suit queer needs. In this sense, queerscapes are inevitably embedded within a realm where heterosexuality (and the modes of existence involved in its processes) is the norm, and queerscapes must work to challenge this from within. In this sense, queerscapes, are a way of repurposing architecture in a way that may provide refuge; they exist as a 'counterpublic', where, 'conscious or not, [they maintain] an awareness of its subordinate status'. (Warner, 2002, p119, in Sherlock, 2013 p170).

As important as queerscapes are in gaming spaces, the mere existence of these spaces is not sufficient to provide the rich narratives that queer experience can offer, or are kept out of sight unless a player manages to push the 'gay button' (Adams, 2015). While LGBT guilds allow for queer identified individuals to participate in gameplay, they do not significantly change the architecture of the game space, or allow for queer narratives to be told (unless allowable by the game developers). Thus, the focus of this research shifted

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towards methods of video game production that sought not just to allow for queerscapes to exist, but to reshape the architecture of game spaces to explicitly offer these subversive experiences of collectivity.

Prodsusage is a concept coined by Axel Bruns that provides a framework for a less traditional form of concept creation, development and distribution. Bruns describes prodsusage as a ‘new hybrid form of simultaneous production and usage’ (2007, p2), describes it as distributing and generating content through its participants (rather than teams of professionals), it has no formal hierarchy or group structure, it is always in the process of iterative development, and authorship is collaborative rather than ‘owned’. Prodsusage reframes the model of production from one in which a producer completes a product, distributes it, and is consumed by the end user, into one that privileges the participatory nature of content creation.

I assert that prodsusage is part of a spectrum of practices that stem from a lineage of DIY practices far preceding digital products. In understanding this lineage, we can see how this spectrum of practices can be utilised in game design in order to produce novel architecture that allows for the creation of non-normative (including heteronormative) narratives, as well as non-traditional gaming practices and experiences that provide an alternative to the repurposing of space, as queerscapes do. Instead, it is through the broader adoption of participatory culture, and more specifically, our prodsusage-based cultural production, that we can shift the window of acceptable ideas and discourse around video games into incorporating narratives that challenge compulsive heterosexuality (Adams, 2015) in video games. Thus, prodsusage is the mechanism through which a narrative no longer needs to be either compulsive *or* subversive. By presenting a radically different economic model of production, prodsusage enables a completely different approach to narrative structure that need not conform to (or simply subvert) traditional narratives and tropes.

BIO

Gemma Roberts is a PhD candidate at Macquarie University, with a research focus on how game architectures are utilised by queer identified individuals to participate in video game culture.

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