Bending Games: Why and how do gaymers produce porn?

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ABSTRACT

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INTRODUCTION

It is unlikely that the makers of The Sims foresaw the production of 'Truckstop Slut Service Boy' from their family-focused game. Combine the recording of gameplay sequences with the ability to alter bodies, skin, clothes, attractiveness, genitals and behaviour, and you get animated queer/gay pornography available on PornHub.

There is much academic work theorising how games and play are made queer for players (Lauteria, 2012; McDonald, 2017; Shaw, 2009, 2012, 2015; Shaw & Friesem, 2016; Sihvonen, 2011; Sihvonen & Stenros, 2019), but little study of gay/queer pornographic animations (machinima) made with the affordances of games and consumed outside the game for erotic satisfaction. This research discusses the construction of makers' screen names, how machinima titles are constructed, the nature of characters and mise-en-scéne and their relationship with the base game used. Broad categories of narrative, techniques, and content are outlined. It speculates on the makers' motivations, the machinima's relationship to other forms of gay/queer pornography, and some subcategories that feature fantastic animals and aliens.

QUEERING GAMES

Most research into queer game culture looks at the players and the internal queering of games to accommodate the desires of queer players (Shaw, 2009, 2012; Shaw & Friesem, 2016; Sihvonen & Stenros, 2019; Thompson, 2014). However, scholarship has generally overlooked the potential for modifications to affect matters outside the game including queer identity, queer culture, and in this study, gay pornography. Academic discussion rarely brings games into queering as opposed to bringing queering into games.

Game modifications are a site of scholarship but in this context usually for how they enhance the queerness of the player's experience within the game. This study investigates modifications to real-time computer graphics engines to produce a queer digital cinematic object known as 'machinima' for erotic consumption outside the game. For example, The Sims 4 has a 'nude mod', which renders Sims naked with pixelated genitals. Other mods from creator WickedWhims, allow the use of genitals and sexual animations within the game. These can be recorded, edited, and uploaded to porn aggregation websites like Pornhub.

There is little discussion of this phenomenon. Wysocki (2015) goes close because of his interest in the audience's involvement 'after their initial consumption of that media'. He also acknowledges modding for pornographic purposes speculating that modders 'undertake this labour to add content they desire to engage in' (Wysocki, 2015, p. 207). Nathan Thompson discusses Skyrim modders, proclaiming that the results 'are quite literally Queer games made by Queer people…' (2018, p. 197). He also foresees that they may affect queer culture. This gives us an insight into a strand of pornography – already emerging, where avatars execute fantastic sexual desires in digital realms.

QUEER MODS AND MACHINIMA

This study, explores the erotic products (machinima) of makers, and whether the use of modding in creating these pornographic products can be a queer act of resistance asserting an overt gay identity rather than a passive internal game concession to the minority of gay gamers. These producer/fans often seek hyper-gay, or hyper-masculine characters, the opposite of the gender and sexual ambiguity sought from game makers so that players can impose their interpretations (Bikowski, 2020). This study reaches beyond Rubin (1984) and Leap (2011) and the politics of porn, and even Evan Lauteria's (2012) resistance in play as a powerful normative process. These deliberately homoerotic machinima contrast with the passive request to game makers for diversity and inclusion. They assert resistance that shouts its homoerotic intent through hyper-gay modifications designed for erotic satisfaction independent of the game.

The content and narratives revealed in the machinima are explored using grounded theory. This forms the basis for speculation on the erotic interests of the maker/producers (machinimists) and their audience. Samples are drawn from the 'top viewed' category of machinima, predominantly from PornHub/Gay. Criteria include interplay between multiple characters, having a narrative and production using mods to a digital game. While some productions reflect the original comic meme nature of machinima, most pursue romantic storylines as projections of the authors' and fans desires and fantasies. Others are more complex to classify: where do you place inter-species and alien sexual portrayals?

CONCLUSIONS

This represents one of the first studies of multiple makers of gay/queer pornographic machinima and their digital products. The findings document the skills demonstrated by the modders and creators of these examples of queer/homoerotic machinima, and look to their expression and potential motivations. It canvases the relationship between the erotic interests of the makers, and the desires expressed in their creations and how this may contribute to their identity as queer, gamer/gaymer or gay gamers. The study contributes to the knowledge base of useful game affordances for purposes outside gameplay, specifically for producing homoerotic/queer machinima. This study only touches the surface. Much more work is needed, including how producers conceive of their work, to researching the consumers of these homoerotic machinima.

BIO

Stephen is a Masters of Digital Communication and Culture candidate in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Sydney, Australia. He has a Bachelor of Communications from the University of Technology, Sydney. His professional background includes being the principal of a digital design and communications agency and as a program manager, contributor and award-winning producer in national, educational and community broadcasting. Stephen executive produced the first national HIV/AIDS education broadcast series, 'Talk Positive', the first radio documentary in the indigenous Pitjantjatjara language, and initiated the first nationally broadcast LGBTQI+ weekly community radio series in Australia.

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