

Claustrophobia, Repetition and Redundancy in Video Games : Summary and Critique

Introduction

- Hook
- Context
- Thesis statement

One genre is particularly popular in the video game sphere while still eluding many big publishers: the sandbox genre. The article “Claustrophobia, Repetition and Redundancy: The Economy and Aesthetics of User-Generated Content in Sandbox Computer Games” by Nelson (2023) explores a particular aspect of this genre: the distinct aesthetic quality of user-generated content (UGC) within sandbox games. Nelson presents a very interesting way of looking at these games but could have gone deeper into the implications or applications of understanding this aesthetic.

Summary

- Topic sentence
- Summary of main ideas
- Concluding sentence

Nelson looks at how sandbox games, especially Dreams, mix creativity, ownership issues, and the challenges players face with platform limitations. The author starts by discussing the concept of “Game 3.0,” referring to games that integrate tools for users to generate content. He briefly discusses the grey area surrounding ownership rights over created content and how using users as “free labor” might be considered unethical. He then argues that sandbox games exist “at a densely packed postmodern intersection where the remix is constrained by copyright protections over certain cultural fragments” (Nelson, 2023, para.8). Nelson suggests that games like Dreams intensify this by folding video games, creative software, and social media platforms into a single experience, creating a unique aesthetic. Next, Nelson uses Dreams as a case study. Dreams is a sandbox platform combining 3D creation tools and assets with an internal social media network for sharing user-created games. Notably, it lacks external import/export features. To describe its aesthetic, Nelson proposes three concepts. The first, “Claustrophobia,” arises from the constraints imposed by the platform's consistent art style, lighting engine, and creation tools. In Dreams, this creates a “peculiar ‘house style’ of pastel colours and ‘floppy’ physics.” The second, “Repetition,” refers to the constant recreation of popular characters and mechanics from other games or media. This practice raises further copyright concerns. The final concept, “Redundancy,” highlights the precarious situation for users, as closed platforms risk eventual discontinuation (end-of-

support), potentially leading to the loss of user creations. Taken together, these three factors define the characteristics of the UGC-centric sandbox game aesthetic Nelson describes (Nelson, 2023).

Claustrophobia, Repetition and Redundancy in Video Games : Summary and Critique

Critique

- Topic sentence
- Supporting evidence
- Concluding sentence

While the article presents an interesting way to define a sandbox game aesthetic, its exploration of the broader significance or application of this aesthetic is limited. The article missed an opportunity by not defining why it explores this aesthetic and how it could help game designers create better games. The article could have benefited from a section exploring the practical applications of this analysis, a point Nelson seemingly acknowledges when stating “I believe this aesthetic analysis might be of further use” (Nelson, 2023, para. 19). Given that game studies is still a developing field, relying on others to find applications for this analysis makes for a risky endeavor. Nelson should have suggested potential applications or elaborated on the usefulness of the analysis. As it stands, the analysis feels somewhat incomplete without this discussion of relevance.

Conclusion

- Restated thesis
- Final thought

In conclusion, the article “Claustrophobia, Repetition and Redundancy: The Economy and Aesthetics of User-Generated Content in Sandbox Computer Games” provides a valuable look into the essence of the UGC-based sandbox game aesthetic, but the analysis lacks sufficient discussion of its broader relevance. An added section exploring potential applications of the insights provided would have significantly enhanced the article's impact.

Emmanuel Cyr
Cégep de l'Outaouais, May 2025.

Nelson, P. (July 2023). Claustrophobia, Repetition and Redundancy: The Economy and Aesthetics of User-Generated Content in Sandbox Computer Games. *the international journal of computer game research*, 23(2). <https://gamestudies.org/2302/articles/nelson>

