

F351: Public and Private Online Communities

Collector: Jacob Cleveland

Title: (What.cd) Private Folklore in Cyberspace

Category: Music Communities

Description: A peer-to-peer sharing service based entirely off of donations and shared computing via the Internet. The site's biggest source of revenue is donations from users and a marketplace with merchandise of varying prices (mugs, t-shirts, mousepads etc.) Artist's music in varying qualities and formats are available to users with a high "ratio". Your "ratio" is a number calculated with a standard formula by the site, but simply put is your amount uploaded divided by the amount you download, enforcing a community that benefits and helps itself grow through a mutual system of sharing.

What.cd

Additional Information: This site has a one-strike policy, meaning that a misinterpretation of the rules, or posting incorrectly gets you banned permanently from the site. It has various polls and community based activities that take advantage of stat-based variables that are tracked via your computer/usage.

Collector: Jacob Cleveland

Title: (Onyxia Wipe Animation) Public Folklore in Cyberspace

Category: Gaming Communities/Internet Humor

Description: A user with a memorable eastern accent tries his hardest to maintain control in an online raid of a seriously difficult boss battle in a virtual world. These raids often contain 15-20 people to be run effectively, and furthermore, any lag or disconnection would be cause for failure. The hilarity of this event is its real world implications, despite being a video game. The "narrator" or group leader in the game (i.e the one whose voice is mainly recorded) is passionately trying to lead his team to victory and failing, often the rewards for victory in video games are simply virtual progressions provided to your avatar via items or loot, but in a modern sense can now include prize money or international recognition. So, while his yelling and over-reaction is hilarious, it is also not entirely unfounded. Losing in these games can often be extremely costly.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtvIYRrgZ04>

Both of these websites are critically important to folklore and the creation of distinct original folklore.

For example, with What.cd, their one-strike policy is entirely unique to that site. As far as I've looked on the Internet, it is the only website that will not forgive a mistake or mishap. Various Internet forums and chat-rooms have similar rules, but they don't ban site access, just posting privileges. This policy is unusually harsh, but

fosters the growth of an informed community. This highly discourages “trolling” or the “hero-syndrome” of some Internet users.

Second, and equally important to What.cd are the community “free-leeches” that take place. The concept of a “free-leech” is old news to anyone who has used Napster or Limewire in the past, as any music taken from those services was “free”, but on What.cd, the “free-leech” is an opportunity to invite new users to join the website, and also take advantage of neutral downloading privileges.

Essentially, neutral downloading privileges mean that any download you initiate on your account will not count against your ratio, your ratio can only improve as you “seed” or keep your computers files privately open for other users to nab. This helps by spreading important new music free of advertising and keeps important tabs on what is currently popular amongst users. Every user has a detailed stat sheet despite

The Online Gaming communities are important for separate reasons. They can be entirely private, but online gaming communities and the associated folklore are created much like folklore in real life, in small communities of people having discussions and telling stories, it seems in the digital age physical companionship is less necessary in forming meaningful relationships, which hurts my soul. Also, it can be observed that while a virtual world may seem barren, or disconnected from mass culture-some niche activity a couple lonely introverts take part in-it can often mimic or directly reflect mass culture. Some servers have a capacity to house 5000-15,000 players at once, more even now I’d assume, which means nearly an entire small cities worth of people could theoretically gather in a virtual city, which is insane given the diversity of our planet.

In the Onyxia Wipe Animation video, the narrator is clearly verbalizing his distaste, reminiscent of a passionate or drunken gambler who just lost his bet on a championship game of some sport. Recorded in this audio-dubbed animation are colloquial terms specific to the game like “dps” and “dots” or “agro” and “fuck” (just kidding). When the game World of Warcraft came out, those acronyms were not defined or necessarily a part of the game, but developed by users to quickly explain to other users a desired action or behavior they wanted performed quickly, as timing and placement, as well as position are critically important. Even the voice-chat service that allowed users to communicate with headsets was developed after-the-fact, which is to say, these virtual situations were important enough that people felt the need to have instant voice communication to one another to accomplish virtual goals, sometimes with real-world consequences. I know personally when I played online as a teenager, I hit on a guild leaders wife, and after many an awkward conversation between battles, the next day I received a virtual message in my virtual mailbox thanking me for making his wife feel beautiful again. Only the Internet can allow for a 14 year old to flirt with an anonymous strangers wife, and inevitably be thanked for it by virtual mail, without ever having truly known their identity.

I found both of these online communities important because each is pulling from mass culture and elite culture, but is strictly folkloric in the end, due to stories and humors that arise from the audiences that participate in them, and how often, material from high or low culture becomes parodied in these communities.