Cold War Cultural Language
Transference into Modern Media:  
Fallout 3

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Findings:

The comparison of Cold War era language from the sources and Fallout revealed that traditional American concepts like Continuity of Government, Premillenialist religious thought linking God to nuclear war, post-apocalyptic survival stories, fallout shelters, and Cold War Iconography resurface, with slight modifications, in the Fallout universe. However, rather than be primarily terrifying these concepts are rendered darkly humorous by the phenomenon of “camp”.

Application:

The language of the Cold War was born of the fear endemic of the times, and offered people ways of dealing with that fear. Eventually people realized the futility of nuclear war and began to see the whole idea as foolish, at which point use of associated cultural language became campy. Because of this, imagery that once inspired only dread can today be used as entertainment in popular media.

Method:

The research phase of the project consisted mainly of analysis of primary and secondary sources that explained how the unique language of the Cold War arose. The next step was a comparison of that cultural language with its counterpart in the video-game Fallout 3.

Development:

The idea behind this project began with the realization that the experience of the video-game Fallout 3 is enhanced by an historical knowledge of the Cold War and the language associated with it. Why is this so and how can that era’s language of fear and death be entertaining?

The Enclave: Continuity of Government as envisioned by President Eisenhower required martial law and unquestioning obedience, which the Enclave carries to the extreme.

In this Vault-Tec advertisement the ideal American family cheerfully carries out its routine amusements despite the menace of nuclear Armageddon. This demonstrates Camp: the overuse of cliché’ cultural language to create an ironic, humorous atmosphere around an otherwise serious subject.

Fallout 3 Vault-Tec advertisement for commercial fallout shelters:
A private corporation promises people security for a hefty fee, and parallels real private shelters.

Undetonated Atomic Bomb in the Fallout 3 town of Megaton:
Apart from threatening the survivors of the post-apocalyptic town, the bomb serves as sacred idol to the premillenialist inspired Church of the Children of Atom.