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Visual Culture in Digital Games: Fallout 4 Example

Dijital Oyunlarda Görsel Kültür: Fallout 4 Örneği

Selçuk Buğra GÖKALP [1]

[1] Selçuk Buğra GÖKALP, Dr., Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi, Türkiye

Corresponding Author/Sorumlu Yazar:
Selçuk Buğra GÖKALP
Dr.
Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi,
Türkiye
selcuk.gokalp@ogr.hbv.edu.tr

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the logos of Vault-Tec, Nuka-Cola, the Brotherhood of Steel, and the Institute within the Fallout 4 universe, focusing on their ideological representations and cultural codes embedded in a futuristic-dystopian narrative. Rather than treating these logos merely as elements of graphic design, the study approaches them as symbolic representations of the historical backgrounds, ideological stances, and ethical positions of the factions they belong to. Using visual culture theories—primarily Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, Stuart Hall's theory of representation, and Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulation—this qualitative study conducts a visual and ideological analysis of the logos. Through an examination of form, color, iconography, and compositional structure, the analysis interprets how these visual symbols convey themes of power, technology, consumption, and ethical conflict in the Fallout 4 world. The findings reveal that the Vault-Tec logo functions as a mythologized promise of safety masking unethical scientific practices; Nuka-Cola romanticizes pre-war American consumer culture and nostalgia; the Brotherhood of Steel militarizes technology to assert authoritarian control; and the Institute's minimalist logo symbolizes a vision of scientific progress intertwined with social isolation. This study thus demonstrates that visual symbols in digital narratives function not only as aesthetic artifacts but also as potent ideological tools.

Keywords: Visual Culture, Ideology, Semiotics, Digital Narrative, Fallout 4

Öz

Bu çalışma, Fallout 4 evreninde yer alan Vault-Tec, Nuka-Cola, Brotherhood of Steel ve Institute logolarını, bu fütüristik-distopik anlatıdaki ideolojik temsiller ve kültürel kodlar bağlamında incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmada, bu logolar yalnızca grafik tasarım ögeleri olarak değil, aynı zamanda ait oldukları fraksiyonların tarihsel arka planlarını, ideolojik konumlarını ve etik duruşlarını simgeleyen anlam yüklü semboller olarak ele alınmaktadır. Yöntem olarak, görsel kültür kuramları (Barthes'in göstergebilimsel analiz yöntemi, Stuart Hall'un temsiliyet kuramı ve Baudrillard'ın simülasyon kavramı) temelinde nitel bir çözümleme gerçekleştirilmiştir. Logoların biçimsel unsurları, renk, ikonografi ve kompozisyon üzerinden çözümlenerek, Fallout 4 evrenindeki güç, teknoloji, tüketim ve etik çatışmalarına dair anlam üretim biçimleri yorumlanmıştır. Elde edilen bulgular, Vault-Tec logosunun "güvenlik" söylemiyle etik dışı bilimsel pratikleri perdelediğini; Nuka-Cola'nın tüketim kültürü nostaljisini idealize ettiğini; Brotherhood of Steel'in teknolojiyi askerileştirerek otoriter bir düzen inşa ettiğini ve Institute'un logosunun bilimsel ilerleme kisvesi altında toplumsal izolasyonu meşrulaştırdığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışma, görsel sembollerin dijital anlatılarda yalnızca estetik değil, aynı zamanda ideolojik araçlar olarak işlev gördüğünü ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Görsel Kültür, İdeoloji, Göstergebilim, Dijital Anlatı, Fallout 4

Digital Games

Digital Games, Visual Culture and Images

Alev Fatoş Parsa (2024) states that since the beginning of time, every age has expressed itself in a unique language. While in Antiquity, the age of legends, myths and mythical narratives, meaning was created with the 'word' and its rules, in the Middle Ages, the permanence of 'writing' became a symbol of authority and power in contrast to the transience of the word. With the Enlightenment, the 'written language', which was included in human life, offered people freedom in narratives with the literary expression that developed day by day and the invention of the printing press. As a result of the developing technology, the title of the sovereign narrative medium of writing was first passed to the camera, then to the tools that capture moving images such as cinema and television, and the world met with a narrative genre kneaded with the unique rules of 'images and visual culture'.

John Berger (1986) in his work 'Ways of Seeing' states that seeing comes before speaking. He states that children learn to look and recognise before they start speaking, so in another sense, sight precedes words. According to Berger, we find our place in the world that surrounds us by seeing, and although we describe this world with words, words can never change the fact that we are surrounded by the world. The concept of 'image', which is produced in order to visualise things that were not there in the beginning, means a recreated or reproduced appearance. According to Berger, an image is an appearance or an order of appearances that has been detached and hidden from the place and time - perhaps a few minutes or a few centuries - in which it first appeared. In every image, including photographs, there is a way of seeing, because photographs are not mechanical records, but a view chosen by the photographer from among unlimited possibilities of appearance.

In order to make sense of visual culture, culture must first be defined. According to the Turkish Language Association's Dictionary of Educational Terms (2024), culture is defined as 'All of the products created by a people or a society in the material and spiritual fields: All kinds of tools and equipment used to obtain basic necessities such as food, clothing, shelter; applied techniques, thoughts, skills, beliefs, traditional, religious, social, political order and institutions; a collection of thoughts, feelings, attitudes, behaviours and ways of living.'

Mermi Uygur (2006), in her book 'Theory of Culture', defines the concept of culture as follows; culture is the whole reality created by human beings, in which human beings exist, in other words, everything that carries the human world, that is, everything we see human existence, is culture. If we expand the definition, culture is the way nature is humanised, the process and yield specific to this humanisation. Culture is also the creation of a world in which human beings make themselves at home, that is to say, it includes all conceivables concerning the meaning-existence of such a world: it is how and what human existence is.

The concept of visual culture is a concept that emerged in the 1990s after cultural studies and material culture studies. Visual culture, which treats images not only as representations but also as part of a language through which culture expresses itself, is based on a critical view of society that focuses on power relations and the social effects of visual artefacts (Duncum, 2003).

For a cultural artefact to be visual, it must go beyond a 'visual' dimension and be based on what the members of the society in which it is located have moulded for each other to see.

People learn mostly, or at least to a significant extent, from what they see, and each period and place shapes the visual perceptions of communication and even of the community itself, and so the visual artefacts that convey the meanings and values that make culture visual differ in each visual culture (Silvers, 2004).

Each image carries a meaning that affects the individual's view of life and brings new insights and suggestions to his/her thoughts. In visual culture, it is not the image itself that is considered, but what meanings this image produces for the individual, society and the world that gains importance. In this context, visual culture is seen as effective in the creation and questioning of meanings (Türkkan, 2008, s. 15).

Nicholas Mirzoeff (2002) states that a study of visual culture requires an awareness of the fact that 'visual culture is about visual events in which the consumer seeks information, meaning or pleasure at an interface with visual technology'. Years after Lev Manovich (2001) suggested that the computer, which had been used as a means of production since the early 1960s, had now become a universal media machine used not only for production but also for storage and distribution, it is undeniable that digital media has become a very important part of visual culture .

Wee Liang Tong and Marcus Cheng Chye Tan (2002) emphasise the importance of questioning the ways in which digital graphical interfaces, as reorganised in computer games, redefine our experience and understanding of visual narrative, given the level of graphical realism of recent computer games. Accordingly, it can be argued that a medium such as the video game, which takes place in a digital universe, has its own visual culture. In these games, there are narrative images and a way of seeing related to these images. Especially in a game such as Fallout 4, which is set in an alternative timeline outside of known reality, the visual narrative departs from conventional real-world representations. As Ian Bogost (2007, s. 10) emphasizes, procedural rhetoric refers to the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions rather than through spoken or written language or static imagery. In this sense, video games differ from traditional visual narratives in that they convey meaning not only through what is seen, but also through the interactive systems and rules that govern what can be seen and done. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that in a digital game universe like Fallout 4, meanings are constructed through both visual symbols and procedural dynamics, which may significantly differ from those in everyday visual experiences.

Fallout 4 Game Example in the Context of Visual Culture and Images

Fallout 4 is the fourth installment of Fallout, a series of post-apocalyptic role-playing video games created by Tim Cain and Leonard Boyarsky at Interplay Entertainment, a currently closed game studio. The series is set in the first half of the 3rd millennium, and its atompunk retrofuturistic setting and artwork are influenced by the post-war culture of the 1950s United States, a combination of hope for the promise of technology and the lurking fear of nuclear annihilation (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

The games are set in a fictionalised United States of America in an alternate history scenario that diverges from reality as we know it after 1945, following the Second World War. In this alternate atompunk 'golden age', vacuum tubes and atomic physics form the foundations of scientific progress, while transistors are not as important technologies as in the real world. Thus, a bizarre socio-technological status quo emerges, with computers and televisions from

the 1950s, as well as advanced robots, nuclear-powered cars, directed energy weapons and other futuristic technologies. The United States divides itself into 13 states, and the aesthetics of the 1950s and Cold War paranoia continue to dominate the American way of life in the 21st century (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

In this alternate universe, the Soviet Union has not disintegrated in the 1990s and the world is in a bipolar political structure led by the United States, the vanguard of Imperialism, and the People's Republic of China, the vanguard of Communism. After decades of fossil fuel competition, these two superpowers find the solution in a new energy source: nuclear power (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

With China taking over most of East Asia and the United States invading Canada under the pretext of protecting the largest remaining oil well in Alaska, the friction between China and the United States, bordering on both sides of the Bering Strait, has come to a head. On Saturday 23 October 2077, the great catastrophe that gives the game its name, 'Fallout', occurs and the Great War takes place (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

As a result of a giant nuclear war lasting only two hours, an estimated 500 nuclear warheads are dropped and the known world is destroyed. All states in the world that entered the nuclear winter are destroyed, and the human population of the world becomes extinct, except for the limited number of people who can escape to the shelters built underground by the giant American company Vault-Tec. The people who survive outside the bunker are subjected to mutations and turn into either 'Super Mutants', giant green humanoid creatures, or 'Ghouls', mindless zombies that attack every living thing. Animals also receive their share of radiation. Most of the animals surviving in the lands where most of the plant species can no longer grow are carnivores, and some of these carnivores have evolved to 4-5 times their pre-war size as a result of mutations and have become savage (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

Although there are many important companies and groups in the game, we will focus on four of them: the ethically controversial Vault-Tec, Nuka-Cola, which has nostalgic value in the universe, the Institute, which puts science before humanity, and the Brotherhood of Steel, which sees technology as a form of corruption.

Vault-Tec

Vault-Tec is a company operating in the pre-nuclear war era in the Fallout 4 universe and is known for building nuclear bunkers called *vaults*. Although the company promises to protect humanity against a nuclear holocaust, most of the vaults have been used as projects designed for secret social experiments (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

The official purpose of Vault-Tec is to protect human life from the devastating effects of nuclear war. However, many vaults were designed to test human psychology, social structure and the effects of isolation. For example, some vaults have conducted unethical experiments such as survival with limited resources or totalitarian rule over a group (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

Vault-Tec's experiments are one of the most striking examples of ethical violations and inhumane practices. Under the guise of survival projects, the company has manipulated thousands of people and caused the destruction of many communities (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

Vault-Tec is an organization in the Fallout 4 universe that raises questions about the limits of humanity and ethics. The abuse of power and science is at the center of Vault-Tec's story (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

Nuka-Cola

Nuka-Cola is a brand recognized as America's most popular soft drink in the Fallout 4 universe. First released in 2044, Nuka-Cola has become a major cultural icon in the pre-war era, both in taste and marketing strategies. The fact that the drink is still widely available among the survivors of the Fallout universe emphasizes its permanence and nostalgic value.

Nuka-Cola is famous for its high sugar content and a recipe that gives it a slightly radioactive glow. In Fallout 4, players can find Nuka-Cola Classic as well as other variants such as Nuka-Cola Quantum, Cherry and Grape. The Nuka-World theme park is a demonstration of the brand's cultural impact and offers a space of discovery for players.

Nuka-Cola is seen as a symbol of American consumer culture in the Fallout universe. Especially innovative products such as Nuka-Cola Quantum reflect the consumerism of the pre-war period. Furthermore, the brand's extensive promotional campaigns and its mascot Nuka-Girl are a reflection of the capitalist system in the Fallout universe.

Nuka-Cola stands out as a brand that represents both the nostalgic and critical aspects of the Fallout universe. Beyond being a sweet drink, it symbolizes the ideologies and cultural structure of the pre-war era.

The Institute

The Institute is a high-tech organization operating in the Commonwealth region in the Fallout 4 universe. Its origins go back to the pre-war Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The Institute aims to shape the future of humanity and is a pioneer in synthetic human ("Synth") technology (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

Founded by the survivors of the post-Great War MIT campus, the Institute focused on technological research, living in isolation underground. Their success in producing human-like synthetic beings ("Synth") has raised ethical and social issues (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

The Institute's actions, such as manipulating the population and secretly planting Synths, have created fear and distrust in the Commonwealth. The organization's view of the outside world as chaotic and its isolationist policies are criticized by other factions (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

The Institute is an organization that represents the tension between science and ethics in the Fallout 4 universe. Their technological advancements have a profound impact on the people of the Commonwealth, clashing with values such as freedom and security (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

The Brotherhood of Steel

The Brotherhood of Steel is a quasi-religious and military organization in the Fallout 4 universe that aims to protect technology and shape the future of humanity. Founded on the post-Great War fascination with technology and the belief that it can be dangerous in the wrong

hands, the Brotherhood is particularly determined to seize and control advanced technological devices (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

While the Brotherhood advocates the use of technology for the good of humanity, it also believes that this technology should be kept out of the reach of ordinary people. In the Commonwealth region in Fallout 4, the Institute's advanced technological activities are seen as a threat and they come into direct conflict with the organization (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

The Brotherhood's elitist policies and efforts to keep technology away from the public have been criticized. Their view of Synths as subhuman beings and their advocacy for their eradication has led to ethical debates (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

The Brotherhood of Steel is a faction in the Fallout 4 universe that represents a balance between technology, ethics and power. Despite its progressive goals, its elitist nature and rigid policies lead to conflicts with other factions and the public (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to explain how visual culture elements are reflected in the universe of a video game by including symbols and pictures of visual culture elements in this study in the example of the game 'Fallout 4' published by Bethesda Entertainment in 2015. Since the game contains many visual elements that have almost become symbols of the game, it is aimed to analyse the main and secondary meanings of these elements by evaluating them with semiotics.

Importance of the Study

Although many visual elements such as cinema and posters have been evaluated with semiotics many times until today, a video game sample was selected considering that video games, which are a very popular medium in the recent period, have not been evaluated sufficiently in this field. The game 'Fallout 4' was preferred because it was deemed appropriate to be evaluated in terms of the main and secondary meanings that the now iconic visual elements it contains in its universe offer to the user with Barthes' semiotics approach.

Methodology of the Study

In this research, semiotics, a qualitative research method, was used. The foundation of semiotics was laid by American Charles Sanders Peirce and Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. While Peirce emphasised the logical function of signs and Saussure the social function of signs, Roland Barthes aims to reveal the mechanical function of language and wants to do this through mass culture. While Barthes moves from linguistic analysis to semiotic analysis, he makes use of sign planes such as denotation, connotation and metalanguage. Pointing to photography as one of the most appropriate examples of this, Barthes states that the camera's mechanical reproduction of the object represents the denotation, while the photographer's calculation of the angle, focus, light and what will enter the frame represents the connotation. (Bircan, 2015)

Within the scope of this study, an extensive literature review was conducted, encompassing scholarly works on visual culture, digital game design, semiotics, and narrative theory. The aim was to establish a robust theoretical foundation upon which the visual analysis of symbolic elements within Fallout 4 could be constructed. Based on the conceptual

frameworks drawn from this literature, the study was designed to address the following key research questions:

1- What ideological and cultural meanings are embedded in the logos and visual symbols associated with major factions in Fallout 4, such as Vault-Tec, Nuka-Cola, the Brotherhood of Steel, and the Institute, within the context of visual culture?

2- How do these visual representations reflect broader thematic concerns such as power, consumption, technology, and ethical conflict within the narrative structure of the game?

3- In what ways do the visual narratives of Fallout 4 contribute to contemporary discourses on how visual culture is reshaped through digital game environments?

To investigate these questions, the study employs semiotic analysis, a qualitative method derived from the works of Roland Barthes and further expanded in contemporary media and cultural studies. Semiotics, understood as the study of signs and the processes of signification, enables a multi-layered reading of the visual material, distinguishing between denotative (literal) and connotative (implied or culturally constructed) meanings. Within this framework, the visual components of the selected logos—such as color schemes, iconographic motifs, geometric arrangements, and stylistic minimalism—are systematically deconstructed to reveal the cultural narratives and ideological structures they encode.

The application of semiotics in this context allows the visual designs to be interpreted not merely as aesthetic or decorative components, but as powerful communicative tools that mediate meaning in a highly stylized and politically loaded fictional universe. Special attention is given to the in-universe logic of Fallout 4, where each faction's visual identity operates as a narrative condensation of historical memory, ethical stance, and socio-political vision. The analysis is carried out with sensitivity to both intra-diegetic coherence (internal narrative logic) and extra-diegetic reception (player perception and cultural resonance).

By situating the study at the intersection of game studies and visual culture, the methodology also acknowledges the role of the player as an active interpreter of meaning, whose interaction with these symbols is shaped by both narrative engagement and cultural background. Consequently, the meanings derived from the visual logos are not seen as fixed or universal, but rather as dynamic and context-dependent constructions, negotiated through the interplay of game design, ideology, and visual semiotics.

The limitation of the research was formed by analysing the elements of visual culture only in the game narrative and through the Fallout 4 game.

Fallout 4 Universe Images and Visual Culture

'Fallout 4', like its predecessors, contains many images belonging to the alternate universe and time period in which its storyline takes place. The reason for choosing this game as an example is that its alternate universe, which has an alternate timeline and a rich background created after the Second World War, has many visual images that can be easily recognised especially by those who are familiar with the game.

Vault-Tec symbol

Figure 1. The Vault-Tec symbol including the Vault-Boy

Figure 2. Vault-Tec's first mascot, Cooper Howard

Table 1. The Vault-Tec symbol analysis

Visual and Cultural Context	Elements of Visual Culture	Place of Use

Visual Context	Colors	Blue and golden yellow
	Symbols	The gear-shaped frame in addition to symbolizing the company's advanced technology and engineering success, also represents the entrance doors of the vaults, the company's main production. The gears also represent order, control and systematic operation, as Vault-Tec's Vault systems are designed to contain people in a controlled environment.
Cultural Context	Color choices	Vault-Tec is often associated with the colors blue and yellow. These colors form the corporate identity of Vault-Tec in the Fallout universe. Blue symbolizes loyalty and security, while yellow represents progress, optimism and a vision for the future (Feisner, 2006). Aslo due to information provided by the Fallout series in 2024, the choice of blue and gold was inspired by the company's first mascot, the blue-and-gold sheriff's outfit in the western films of Cooper Howard, a Hollywood star and veteran of the Chinese-American War.
	Purpose of symbolisation	In the context of Fallout's storytelling, this symbolism of protection takes on an ironic meaning. The Vaults were established by Vault-Tec not to help humanity, but for various social and scientific experiments. The emblem embodies this irony; at first glance it appears to be a symbol of security, but underneath lies a dark story of the exploitation of humanity. The Vault-Tec emblem is at the center of capitalist critiques in the Fallout universe. Vault-Tec is a metaphor for how corporations manipulate human life for profit. The emblem becomes a symbol of this control and manipulation. Furthermore, the company's promises of security and protection parallel the Cold War-era US government's nuclear bunker projects. Vault-Tec in the Fallout universe is a reflection of the propaganda and mass paranoia of this period.

The Vault-Tec logo reflects a post-war brand image that promises security and protection. In line with Roland Barthes' (1972) mythological analysis, this logo represents not only the safety of bunkers, but also an ideology based on power and control. Rather than a simple aesthetic element, the logo is a propaganda tool that masks Vault-Tec's unethical experiments. The company's friendly design in the logo reveals the distinction between “appearance and reality” in modern visual culture.

Nuka-Cola emblem

Figure 3. Nuka-Cola bottle cap

Figure 4. Coca Cola emblem

Table 2. The Nuka Cola symbol analysis

Visual and Cultural Context	Elements of Visual Culture	Place of Use
Visual Context	Colors	Red and white
	Symbols	The emblem is distinctly designed as the game universe equivalent of the real-world soft drink brand Coca Cola. The font and the white stripe on the emblem are distinctly similar to Coca Cola's design. The design of the caps (often with a red and white color palette) complements the retrofuturistic aesthetic of the Fallout universe. This emphasizes the irony between the optimistic consumer society of the 1950s and the post-nuclear apocalyptic world.

Cultural Context	Color choices	The red color of Nuka-Cola caps symbolizes energy, passion and the will to survive. It is also an attention-grabbing and captivating image, representing the marketing power of the product (Feisner, 2006). The colour choices are red and white, again in line with Nuka Cola's aim of reflecting the alternate universe version of Coca Cola.
	Purpose of symbolisation	Nuka-Cola is a symbol of 1950s consumer culture in the Fallout universe. Similar to Coca-Cola in the real world, Nuka-Cola is not only a drink, but also a lifestyle and part of national identity. The bottle caps represent this cultural iconography. In the Fallout universe, Nuka-Cola is not just a drink, but a source of energy necessary for survival. In the post-apocalyptic world, the use of Nuka-Cola caps as currency symbolizes the transformation of objects of consumption into objects of survival. It is also a critical reference to capitalism's over-reliance on consumer objects. Bottle caps, once a useless waste, have become valuable in a post-apocalyptic economy. This ironically illustrates the transformation of capitalism's value systems. The word 'Nuka' used in the nomenclature both resembles 'Coca' in intonation and refers to the fact that the main technological premise in the Fallout universe is nuclear. In addition, the fact that a variant of Nuka Cola called 'Quantum' contains strontium-90 isotope, which is claimed to be suitable for daily consumption and originally produced for military purposes, is also parallel to the nomenclature. In addition, the fact that Nuka Cola caps being the main currency in the Fallout's post-apocalyptic world where all states are destroyed has also contributed to the iconicisation of the brand. The caps convey a sense of nostalgia for the over-consumption culture of the past, criticizing its destructive consequences for humanity, and they can be seen as a metaphor for the American dream in the Fallout universe. This symbol of the American Dream has become a story of decadence in a post-apocalyptic world.

The Nuka-Cola logo represents pre-war American consumer culture and nostalgic capitalist ideology. As Jean Baudrillard (1998) emphasized in his analysis of consumer society, this logo shows that consumers buy not only utility from a product, but also symbolic meanings. While Nuka-Cola's bright and colorful aesthetic represents the bright side of consumer culture, the fact that it still exists in the Fallout universe after its destruction is an ironic criticism of the permanence of this culture.

The Institute seal

Figures 5. The Institue seal

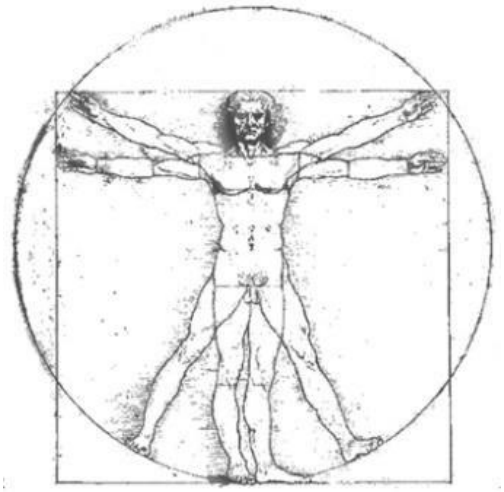

Figure 6. Leonardo Da Vinci's 'Virtuvian Man'

Table 3. The Institute seal analysis

Visual and Cultural Context	Elements of Visual Culture	Place of Use
Visual Context	Colors	Black and white
	Symbols	In the center of the seal, there is a clear reference to Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man (Da Vinci). However, some of the limbs of this figure have been replaced by mechanical parts so that it can be presented in a form that represents the combination of man and machine. The triangle around the figure can be considered as a symbol of science and perfection. The rays of light inside the triangle represent knowledge and enlightenment. This

		indicates that the Institute sees itself as a savior for humanity and a representative of progress (Cavallaro, 2000) (Williams, 2013).
Cultural Context	Color choices	Black and white offer a stark and expressive contrast. In keeping with the clean, sterile and perfectionist nature of the Faction, this choice can be read as a preference for a minimalist aesthetic that represents the Institute's quest for scientific progress and order.
	Purpose of symbolisation	The reference to the Virtuvian Man reflects the Institute's transhumanist ideology and its attempt to redefine the limits of man through technology. The Institute wants to realize the next stage of human evolution by fusing machines and genetic engineering (Sharon, 2014). The English phrase “Mankind Redefined” refers to the Institute's positioning of itself as an authority that is changing and transforming the definition of humanity. This supports the idea of creating a superior humanity through technology and genetic engineering (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015). Stars universally represent perfection and authority. Laurel branches are used as symbols of victory and wisdom. These symbols visually support the Institute's claim to self-aggrandizement and superiority (Williams, 2013). The Institute stands out as a transhumanist organization that raises ethical debates. While the emblem represents technological progress and scientific enlightenment, it also carries a subtext that questions the moral implications of this progress for humanity (Sharon, 2014). The visual is designed with a retro-futurism aesthetic, in keeping with the overall theme of the Fallout series.

The Institute logo, with its minimalist and sterile design, represents scientific progress and isolation. Michel Foucault's theory of the panopticon (1975) provides an appropriate framework for analyzing this logo. The minimalist design emphasizes the invisible and totalitarian nature of scientific power. The logo visualizes the silent but absolute control of modern science and authority over individuals.

The Brotherhood of Steel insignia

Figure 7. The Excalibur

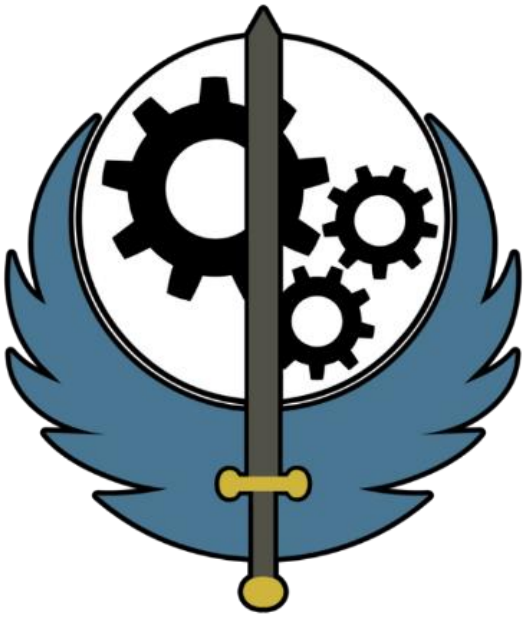

Figure 8. The Brotherhood of Steel insignia

Figure 9. Industrial Age gears

Table 4. The Brotherhood of Steel logo analysis

Visual and Cultural Context	Elements of Visual Culture	Place of Use
Visual Context	Colors	Metallic grey, black and blue
	Symbols	The sword represents the military discipline, strength and fighting determination of the Brotherhood of Steel. The mechanical gears represent the importance of technology and the Brotherhood of Steel's commitment to technology. The gears also symbolize the organization's "progressive conservative" ideology, centering on industry, engineering and technology. The wings represent the sublimity of ideals, the pursuit of freedom and the striving for ascension.
Cultural Context	Color choices	The metallic and matte colors used are a reference to the strict discipline and sword-sharp will of the Brotherhood.
	Purpose of symbolisation	The Brotherhood of Steel revitalizes the concept of "chivalric order" in the modern world. In the Middle Ages, chivalry was based on strength, discipline and a moral ideal. Similarly, the Brotherhood of Steel strives to act within a moral framework as it fulfills its mission to protect technology and keep it out of destructive hands (Gibbons, 2020). The Brotherhood's organizational structure is reminiscent of historical knightly orders. Their leader is called "Elder", while their members carry titles such as "Knight" and "Paladin". This terminology directly reflects the hierarchical structure of chivalric orders (Howard, 2008). One of the core values of chivalric orders was dedication to a cause (for example, protecting their kingdom or religious beliefs). The members of the Brotherhood of Steel are also dedicated to the mission of protecting technology and ensuring that it is used in the right hands (Gibbons, 2020).

	The sword in the emblem evokes the legendary sword Excalibur from Arthurian legend. Excalibur symbolizes power and leadership (Gibbons, 2020). The ideology of the Brotherhood of Steel parallels that of the Knights of the Round Table in Arthurian legend. These knights came together under the leadership of King Arthur to work for justice and fulfill sacred duties. Similarly, the members of the Brotherhood of Steel, under the guidance of their leader, unite around an ideal: To preserve technology for the good of humanity (Howard, 2008). There is also a reference to a sacred treasure hunt. While searching for the Holy Grail, the Knights of the Round Table undergo a process of moral purification. In the world of Fallout, the Brotherhood of Steel's efforts to collect and preserve technology parallels this quest. For the members of the Brotherhood of Steel, technology is a kind of sacred treasure (Totten, 2013). However, the Brotherhood of Steel's militaristic nature and desire to control technology can also be interpreted as a criticism of authoritarian regimes. Fallout's overall narrative emphasizes both the glorification of technology and its destructive potential in the wrong hands (Totten, 2013). The Brotherhood of Steel bridges both the chivalric ideals of the past and the dystopian fears of the future (Gibbons, 2020).

The Brotherhood of Steel logo is a visual design that symbolizes the combination of military power and technology. Guy Debord's theory of the "visual spectacle" (1994) provides an important framework for making sense of this logo. The logo presents a glorification of military discipline and technological authority as a visual "spectacle". At the same time, its design visualizes how technology is perceived as both a savior and a threat in a dystopian world.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the ideological and cultural meanings embedded in the logos of Vault-Tec, Nuka-Cola, the Brotherhood of Steel, and the Institute in Fallout 4, through the lens of visual culture and semiotic analysis. By employing qualitative methods grounded in Barthes' theory of denotation and connotation, and supported by visual culture theorists such as Mirzoeff, Baudrillard, Debord, and Foucault, the study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1- What ideological and cultural meanings are embedded in the logos within Fallout 4?

2- How do these visual representations reflect broader themes such as power, consumption, technology, and ethics?

3- What do these symbols reveal about the transformation of visual culture within contemporary digital games?

The findings demonstrate that each logo functions as a condensed visual narrative, carrying both surface-level (literal) and deeper (connotative) meanings rooted in ideology and cultural memory. The Vault-Tec logo, at first glance a symbol of protection, reveals deeper associations with control and unethical experimentation—aligning with Barthes' (1972) notion of myth as a mechanism of ideological masking. The Nuka-Cola symbol reflects nostalgic aesthetics tied to consumerism, echoing Baudrillard's (1998) critique of advertising and spectacle. The Brotherhood of Steel's emblem illustrates military-technological dominance and recalls Debord's (1994) concept of spectacle as a form of social control. Meanwhile, the Institute's minimalist iconography visualizes the scientific gaze and surveillance, linking directly to Foucault's (1975) ideas on panopticism.

Through these interpretations, the study shows that the logos in Fallout 4 are not merely design elements, but strategic cultural signs that narrate ideological struggles and social anxieties within a dystopian framework. They illustrate how visual culture in digital games can encapsulate complex sociopolitical commentary. In this respect, the logos function as both intra-diegetic narrative tools and extra-diegetic cultural critiques.

These conclusions contribute to broader understandings of how video games operate not just as entertainment media but also as sites of ideological expression and symbolic negotiation. Future research may explore how player reception and interaction shape the interpretation of such symbols, or how similar aesthetic strategies are deployed across other digital game universes.

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