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'Audiences Across the Divide: Game to Film Adaptation and the Case of Resident Evil'

Audiences Across the Divide: Game to Film Adaptation and the Case of Resident Evil

Abstract

This paper explores the responses of players of the video game series *Resident Evil* to its adaptation in film. Initial research of gamers on the internet movie database's (Imdb) *Resident Evil* message board revealed significant disagreement. At the same time, however, the gamers seemed to have agreed on what they should be disagreeing about. The research uses discourse analysis to identify discourses which connect with wider discourses already established in the social world. But a new discourse may be emerging from the world of the gamer that is being brought to bear on film in the light of the game to film adaptation. It centres on experiential differences between games and films. Film makers, of course, have always relied heavily on adapted products. But this paper seeks to show how games and films offer very different experiences. Can game to film adaptations ever really cross this experiential divide? Indeed, should they seek to cross it at all?

Keywords: video games, film adaptation, discourse, *Resident Evil*, ergodic pleasures

Introduction

In January 2005 I finally watched the first film adaptation of the popular game franchise, *Resident Evil*. I was not sure what to expect, or what I should be expecting. The divide between watching a film and playing the game seemed like a void and I had no idea how to cross it. After viewing I still had no idea and turned to the Imdb *Resident Evil* message board to see what others had made of it. And I found similar confusion, but also significant disagreement. I also found, however, that the respondents seemed to have agreed on what they should be disagreeing about. I found this fascinating and so this research project was born.

This paper is concerned with how those who had played *Resident Evil* – from here described as gamers – and who had written about the film had responded to it. However, to provide a fuller analysis, it seemed necessary to contextualise what they were saying

with the film maker's intentions and within the context of the *Resident Evil* franchise. As a consequence, this paper asks: how did gamers respond to the adaptation of *Resident Evil* in film? In addressing this question, the paper raises further questions: how far did the film's makers seek to adapt elements of the game and did the film maker's adaptations meet the expectations of the gamers? What does it *mean* to post on the Imdb *Resident Evil* message board? What discourses can be identified in the gamers' writing and how do they connect with the wider social world?

The paper is presented in five parts. Part one seeks to understand the similarities and differences between games and films. Part two introduces the reader to the *Resident Evil* universe and acknowledges, importantly, that this universe is also a highly successful franchise and a valuable intellectual property. Part three outlines the methodology used and situates the work within the critical frames of discourse analysis. Part four presents the findings of the research. Part five discusses the findings in relation to the discourses identified. A concluding section draws together some of the key arguments and ideas, raises what I hope are some interesting questions for scholars and issues a plea for further work in this area.

Part One Films and Games: drawing (and crossing) the line

I am a fan/player of the *Resident Evil* games and I have an interest in the emergent field of games studies and the distinctions between disciplines. While a growing body of work on gamers and the pleasures and practices of game play can be evidenced (see, for example Wright, Boria and Breidenbach (2002), Schott and Burns (2004) and Taylor (2006)), little work to date has been done on gamers' responses to game to film adaptations. This is the focus of this study. It is not my intention to appropriate games into film studies. I acknowledge the line between the two disciplines. But it is my duty to cross it. More than ever audiences are engaging with multiple media forms on a daily basis, and as a film studies scholar I want to understand where audience experiences of film intersect with other media forms. The following section 'crosses the line' between films and games unapologetically.

1.1 Similarities

A review of the literature reveals a number of suggested similarities between games and films. The similarities identified include the use of genre, structure, narrative, character types, camera-work and editing. Such studies suggest that these elements in games tend to be drawn from cinematic expression. Thus for Rehak (2003), videogames 'remediate' cinema: '…they demonstrate the propensity of emerging media forms to pattern themselves on the characteristic behaviours and tendencies of their predecessors' (2003: 104).

Videogames often draw on existing genres and use the codes and conventions associated with specific genres. In their introduction to *Screenplay –*

Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces, King and Krzywinska (2002) argue that there are clear generic parallels in terms of the kinds of games produced. Drawing on Poole (2000) they suggest that certain genres are more appropriate for use in the game world. They state:

> The appeal of such environments is partly their cinematic association but also, as Poole (2000) suggests, the more prosaic fact that stylised landscapes, such as those of tech-noir, science fiction and horror, lend themselves to the limited and particular representational capacities of games (2002: 11).

The horror genre has been particularly successful in the cross-over from novel, to screen to console. Krzywinska (2002) points to several features of the horror genre that have enabled it to cross successfully into the game world. She states:

> The horror genre has made the transition to videogames for a number of reasons. Horror offers death as spectacle and actively promises transgression; it has the power to promote physical sensation, and the genre appeals to the youth market that is central to the games industry (2002: 207).

In addition and by way of extension of this last point, genre provides a long-established short hand to the kinds of experiences one hopes to gain from a specific genre product. It is hardly surprising that the ready-made associations of genre should be exploited by the games industry. If there are ready-made audience expectations then there is a ready-made market.

For Perron (2005) horror games and films provide similar pleasures and experiences to audiences which might at least partially explain why horror films and games lend themselves so well to adaptation. Perron argues: 'What horror video games — labelled survival or not — actually offer is similar to what the mainstream contemporary horror cinema proffers. To refer to the well-known expression of Isabel Pinedo, it's a 'bounded experience of fear' (1996: 25 and 2004: 106 in Perron 2005).

In the survival horror game, the player experiences these feelings and physical sensations more intensely, since the 'survival' of the game avatar is literally in their hands. Thus, in terms of use, function and the experience of genre – particularly the horror genre – videogames and films, then, are broadly similar but not exactly the same.

Lindley (2002) suggests that structurally films and games are similar in that they tend to have a three part structure: beginning, middle and end. However, as Lindley (2002: 206, in King and Krzywinska (2002: 25)) notes, the middle or second act is hugely extended as this is the site of the 'core game play'. It is also worth noting that in many instances, the gamer may also have to wait for any resolution since mastery of the controls and the game may require several attempts to complete.

In narrative terms, Eskelinen (2001: 16) sees narrative as subordinate in games. Eskelinen takes film and literary theorists to task for focussing on the dramatic and narrative elements of games in their discussions. He argues that the gaming situation

operates in a completely different way and identifies its component parts as: '…the manipulation or the configuration of temporal, spatial, causal and functional relations and properties in different registers (2001: 1).

While narrative may at times be subordinate in games and the game-play situation quite different to the spectatorial one, the narrative frameworks derived from generic conventions are central in understanding the appeal of such games franchises as *Resident Evil*, *Tomb Raider*, and *Silent Hill*. As King and Krzywinska argue:

> Resonances such as those derived from narrative frameworks – from cinema or other sources, from particular films, genres or broader cultural archetypes can play into the game context, and this is likely to be one of the appeals of games (2002: 25).

After all, could one conceive of *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* in the same way without George A Romero's zombie horror films, or Lara Croft without Indiana Jones? Cultural referents that are shared by the intended audience are as important in the framing and realisation of games as they are to any other media form.

Another significant link to film can be found in what are termed 'cut scenes'. Cut scenes are short film sequences that 'cut in' to the game play. If a cut scene is running there can be no interaction with the avatar. Some cut scenes can be over-ridden with a press of a button, but not all. This can be a source of frustration for the game-player who continually fails a challenge set up by a cut scene and is doomed to view the cut scene repeatedly until they acquire the skills necessary to progress (see also Perron 2005: ibid).

Howells (2002) explains the uses of the cut scene in video games succinctly. He states:

> The intro movie introduces the characters and scenario (the game world) and establishes the game's fundamental conflict, while subsequent cut scenes continue causal lines, introduce new plot elements, show character interaction and continually delineate explicit goals. Once the goals have been stated, the player moves to an action sequence… (2002: 113).

According to King and Krzywinska, cut scenes: '...frequently employ the same expository devices as cinema, using a combination of long shots, mid shots and close ups to provide orientation for the player…'(2002: 12). These scenes are used, then, to set up the story in the beginning, to provide information to players at various intervals throughout the game and also provide rewards for progress made. They interrupt the flow of game-play and render the player and the avatar inactive as the scene plays out.

Point-of-view is used in largely the same way in survival horror games as are used in film. As King and Krzywinska state: 'Predetermined framing of this kind acts like that of a film, to some extent, directing the attention of the player and creating visual diversity through shifts of perspective, although at the expense of player freedom' (2002: 13).

Hand also notes this appropriation of cinematic point of view in the *Resident Evil* games. He notes:

> Aside from the first-person shooter point of view in *Resident Evil: survivor*, the games incorporate distinctly cinematic points of view, which construct fixed mise en scene shots. These take on a montage effect when the player moves the avatar through the environment… (2004: 128).

To sum up the similarities between films and games generally discussed in the literature, it is possible to determine similarities in the use of genre and generic conventions, particularly in relation to narrative frameworks like those of the horror genre. Videogames have also adapted other formal features of classical Hollywood cinema, including concentration on a single protagonist, camera angles, editing and point of view. That said, in my view, the differences far out-number these similarities but would the gamers' responses articulate this?

1.2 Differences

Eskelinen (2001) might well berate film theorists for their insistence on 'reading' games from the standpoint of their narrative and dramatic elements, but as already stated, the success of many games, including *Resident Evil*, is in part due to the resonances they carry over and remediate from cinema. But he is right to stress the significant differences between games and films.

The temporal and spatial relations in film and games constitute major differences. For Krzywinska (2002) videogames are dependent on a sense of the traversal of space, even as the player sits with the joypad. The whole game world is there to be explored and is indeed a prerequisite for progress to be made.

In films, space and time are organised around narrative. But in most games, due to the extended mid section of game play, narrative is subordinated to action. Thus the strong tethering of progress to narrative action in films is not found in games. Although as Krzywinska points out, the goal of the player is to achieve a near-seamless session of game-play that is more film-like in its continuity (2002: 215).

The traversal of space privileges curiosity. The essential curiosity of game-play is worked into the game structure and narrative. Curiosity is the driving force of games and is rewarded with progress. But Krzywinska notes how in films, curiosity is often punished (2002: 217).

Aarseth (1997) explains why the difference between games and films is so important for the spectator. He states: 'A key difference between games and films…is that games 'raise the stakes of interpretation to those of intervention' (1997: 4 in King and Krzywinska 2002: 23).

But interactivity alone is not the crucial conception in this formulation. It is the interactivity of the player through the figure of the avatar that holds the key here and gives credence to their claims (see also Carr 2001). As Rehak (2003) observes, here is the impossibility of cinema that Metz described: '…everything may come to be projected, there is one thing and one thing only that is never reflected in it: the spectator's own body' (Metz 1982: 45 in Rehak 2003: 103).

While the avatar does not exactly reflect the player-spectator's own body, the player-spectator accepts that she is making the avatar move. The psychological and emotional attachments to the figure of the avatar in games are felt by the game-player. It is the player's interactions directly with the game through the figure of the avatar that alters what it means to spectate and participate. As Rehak states: 'The video game avatar, presented as a human player's double, merges spectatorship and participation in ways that fundamentally transform both activities' (2003: 103).

For Rehak, one such transformation occurs in the effects of suture. He argues: 'The disavowal necessary to game play is like the 'yes that is what I see' of successful cinematic suture, but goes further: it is 'yes, that is what I do'(2003: 121). Suture is the effect that draws and anchors the spectator to the action. Suture creates the 'me-shaped-hole' in films and games (Huber 2004: 1). In games, suture operates in a different way to films. As Huber states:

> It is not only the gaze of the actor or the camera, or the patterns of anxiety in the filmic plane that create the positions in reception, but also the goals and interactive regime of the game, even the joystick's tactile feedback, the direct address and call-to-action of the game (Huber 2004: 2).

Other theorists have sought to understand the nature of the game/player relationship and have found them to be different to those relationships between users of other media forms. For Juul (2001), the reader/story, player/game relations are different. Juul argues that: '…the player inhabits a twilight zone where he/she is both an empirical subject outside the game and undertakes a role inside the game' (2001: 17 in King and Krzywinska 2002: 23). Film does not reject the spectator but a video game can reject the game player as it is possible to fail the game and never reach a resolution. The avatar can 'die' and be re-started until the specific skills required to 'stay alive' have been learnt by the game player. And in this sense, it is clear that different skills are required to traverse the game world and succeed in it (King and Krzywinska 2002: 23).

For some theorists, games are seen to be asking something different of their users. Games require different 'work' from players than the work of cinematic spectatorship. Aarseth (1997) usefully describes work of this kind as *ergodic*. The term, appropriated from the world of physics, is derived from the Greek words for work (ergon) and path (hodos) (Aarseth 1997: 1). I suggest that this is a useful way of conceiving of the differences between game play and cinematic spectatorship since it places emphasis on the work the player must perform to progress in the game. This idea of a *work path* also

connects to Krzywinska's observations on the unique spatial and temporal features of games.

The *Resident Evil* gamer utilises many skills in game play. As Rouse (2001) suggests:

> …films present a consistent media experience for the audience. Games, on the other hand, still mix media in seemingly unnatural ways, forcing users who may just want to play a game to have to read a bit of a book, watch a movie, and then only actually get to play (2001: 223-4 in King and Krzywinska 2002: 24).

In the *Resident Evil* games maps, books, and diaries must be read and the information must be processed by the game player and *then* acted upon. Cut scenes must be watched for orientation and progress. These activities are interspersed throughout the game play, which itself requires the gaining of experience with and control, of the joypad. The *Resident Evil* game player is a highly active and interactive player. Thus, this study sets out to explore the pleasures a film adaptation of the game might offer to gamers already familiar with the *Resident Evil* universe.

This part of the paper has sought to underline some of the key similarities and differences between games and films identified in literature drawn from games studies and films studies. As noted earlier, the film-makers also sought to play with the differences and similarities between the game and film versions of *Resident Evil* and the game-like aspects were picked up on by a number of critics. But how did gamers respond to the adaptation? Can issues relating to the differences between game-play and film viewing be found in the gamers' responses? In broader terms, this paper seeks to contribute to an understanding of how contemporary users of media products negotiate their inter-medial experiences.

Part Two 'Welcome to the World of Survival Horror'

Having explored the perceived similarities and differences between games and films the paper turns its attention to the world of *Resident Evil*. I begin this section by first placing the franchise in context. I then outline the world of the games, emphasising the elements of the game that were considered to be ground-breaking and that offered gamers something new and different in 1996. I then go on to explore the making of the film and discuss the ways in which Anderson and his crew sought to 'bring the game to life'.

2.1 Resident Evil: The Franchise

The Japanese games manufacturer Capcom released the first *Resident Evil* game in 1996. Since that time the corporation has turned it into a $600 million dollar worldwide franchise (Lai 22 August 2001). The first game received critical praise for its atmospheric presentation of a new genre that became known as 'survival horror' although it was criticised in some quarters for its perceived violent and gory game-play. Since the original

game launch, the franchise has extended the repertoire to six games with a seventh and eighth game currently in production. The franchise includes novellas, comic books, films, action figures and other merchandise like t-shirts, mugs and mouse-mats.

According to ign.com, many of the games have exceeded a million copies in sales. They state:

> Combined sales of the original *Resident Evil* and the *Director's Cut* for PlayStation 1 total almost 2 million units in the US alone. The follow-up, *Resident Evil* 2, sold 1.7 million copies in America. Even *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* sold more than 1 million copies on the system….by this point the PlayStation's installed base had skyrocketed to massive numbers and the franchise had a nearly-unequalled audience of adult players (IGN 16 January 2004).

More recent figures quoted on *Totalvideogames.com* are taken from Capcom's own financial report. According to Leyton (2006) the *Resident Evil* games franchise has sold 30 million units. This marks something of a swell in profits from the franchise which was seemingly flagging in the wake of newer games. But *Resident Evil 4* alone sold 3 million units. The two films, *Resident Evil* (2002) and *Resident Evil: Apocalypse* (2004) have grossed over $200 million dollars at the box office worldwide (Capcom 1March 2007). The series is to be completed by the release of the final episode in the trilogy, *Resident Evil – Extinction* scheduled for September 2007.

2.2 Resident Evil: The Game

The *Resident Evil* franchise began with the game, *Resident Evil* produced by Capcom in 1996 played on the Playstation platform. It was originally released in Japan as *Biohazard*. The game was designed by Shinji Mikami who was inspired by the Japanese game *Sweet Home* (1989) developed by Famicom and produced by Capcom (Gamespot UK accessed 20 September 2007). The game achieved significant critical acclaim for its atmospheric game-world and was played by a high proportion of adult gamers in spite of its 15 rating. Rather than the by then standard first person shooter game, *Resident Evil* achieved a cinematic sensibility through its use of a third person perspective where characters were seen from fixed angle perspectives. This cinematic sensibility is carried through in the graphical representation and well-worn tropes of zombie horror films. Indeed, it is often claimed by critics and fans alike that the *Resident Evil* universe was inspired by George A Romero's Zombie trilogy, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and *Day of the Dead* (1985).

At the start of the game, the game player selects from two identities: the male Chris Redfield and female Jill Valentine. The game is set in the fictitious Racoon County in 1998 where a number of strange murders had taken place. The victims had been partially eaten. The Special Tactics and Rescue Squad (S.T.A.R.S) Bravo Team are sent in to investigate but they disappear. A second unit – Alpha Team – are sent to find out what has happened. The cut scenes see Alpha Squad (Chris, Jill, Barry and team leader

Wesker) chased by attack dogs forcing them to seek refuge inside a creepy mansion. The Team splits up, agreeing to look for clues as to what has happened to Bravo Team. And this is where the game action begins. Gradually, through extended game-play, a dark and twisted tale of corporate conspiracy is woven as the mighty Umbrella Corp. are revealed to be involved in a series of sinister bio-weapons developments. Alpha Team members are exposed as double agents for Umbrella and Chris or Jill must face monsters and zombies, puzzles and challenges alone and with limited weaponry. This is the essence of 'survival horror'. And what started as a mission of discovery ends in a frantic fight to escape the mansion and its many deadly secrets.

The *Resident Evil* series now includes *Resident Evil* 1996 on PlayStation, *Resident Evil 2* 1998 on PlayStation, *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* 1999 on PlayStation, *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* 2000 on Dreamcast, *Resident Evil Zero* 2002 on GameCube and the hugely successful *Resident Evil 4* on GameCube. *Resident Evil 5* is already generating interest in spite of its unconfirmed release date of 2008.

2.3 *Resident Evil: The Film*

Inside a top secret research facility – known as the Hive - owned by the mysterious Umbrella Corporation a virus has escaped, killing the research staff and re-animating them. The Red Queen – a computer controlling the facility - shuts down the base to prevent the virus spreading beyond the confines of the laboratories and out into Racoon City. Umbrella Corp. sends in a crack team of soldiers to regain control. But upon their arrival, the team meet Alice, who is suffering from amnesia, an after-effect of the gas the computer released into the Hive as a control measure. As the story progresses, Alice's memory slowly returns and she realises that she has played an important role in what has occurred in the Hive. The soldiers' orders are to shut down the Red Queen. But she is not going to go without a fight. Alice survives but after managing to escape The Hive, she emerges into the city and realises that the worst has happened: the virus has escaped.

The first foray into cinematic adaptation of the franchise came with *Resident Evil* (2002) directed by Paul W Anderson. Anderson it seems was considered a safe pair of hands after George A Romero left the project. Paul W Anderson had already handled a game-to-film adaptation competently with *Mortal Kombat* (1995) and had achieved some critical acclaim for *Event Horizon* (1997). Anderson has long claimed to be a fan of the series and describes himself as a *fanboy* and his love of the games the reason for his agreeing to take on the project. In an online interview with *Sci Fi Weekly* he stated:

> [And] I literally lost like two months of my life playing *Resident Evil*. I became totally addicted to it. And I played the first three games back to back. And by the time I kind of emerged from my house, completely unshaven and tired-looking after two months, I was like, we've got to make this into a movie. (Anderson cited in Lee 18 March 2002)

The director was acutely aware of the power of the fans and their expectations. This dictated his approach to the making of the film. Anderson stated: '… if you're adapting a very popular game like this, what you have to realize is that there is an incredibly huge and committed fan base, and they know absolutely everything about the world of *Resident Evil*' (ibid). For Anderson – as for the fans – *Resident Evil* is not so much a franchise as a fictional universe. Part of the challenge for Anderson was incorporating his film within the existing universe of *Resident Evil*. He states:

> It's a complicated universe. And as the writer/director, you have to be aware of that universe, because you have to deliver a movie that exists within that universe. If you break the rules of that universe, the fans won't forgive you for it. And I think it's one of the things that we really learned on *Mortal Kombat*. You have to deliver to the fans, first and foremost (ibid).

Given the pre-existence of this universe, Anderson's approach was to make this first *Resident Evil* film a prequel. The action takes place a month before the first game and seeks to provide a history for the franchise. The problem for Anderson was to satisfy fans by incorporating enough from the game world but providing something fresh for fans and non-gamer film audiences. In this respect, the film has come under intense criticism for its deviation from the parameters of the orginary game. However, Anderson defended his decision by explaining that the film seeks to also bridge a gap between the film and the first and second games. As Anderson argues:

> …it totally feeds into the game in that those characters are moving through locations and situations that are very familiar to the game's players. And the movie kind of eventually segues straight into ... [and] actually meets the world of the video games at the end of the movie (ibid).

So, if Anderson deviated from the original game in terms of narrative and character, what elements of the game's universe did Anderson seek to retain? What, for Anderson were the essential components that were required to make this part of the universe? For the director, weapons, monsters and game sets were important. Anderson states:

> Although the characters are new, per se, they're very much archetypes from the game. We kept the signature creatures, absolutely. I talked to a lot of fans before I started on the script and also on the movie. It became obvious that some of the creatures, like the zombie dogs, were like everyone's favourite. You can't make *Resident Evil* without the zombie dogs. And you can't make *Resident Evil* without the Licker. So you find like everyone's favourite creatures from the games are in the movie. (ibid)

Anderson also sought to bring the sets from the game to life by building replicas: '... you'll recognize pieces of hardware and sets from the game. We rebuilt some of the sets from the game. Like in *Resident Evil 2*, there's a big train. We built that train' (ibid). In addition, Anderson ensured that plot elements from the games were included in the film and

various characters from the games were referenced. As Anderson states: 'There are story points and references to characters. It really operates within the world of the video game' (ibid). The film departed from the game world in a bid to bring what Anderson described as 'added value' for fans. For example, while having favourite monsters from the game world in the film, the director added a new monster. He states:

> But it also has one special one that we've designed just for the movie. Because the idea is, for the games' players, it's like added value. You see things in the movie that you don't see in the games. You know, you see reflection of the games, but you also see something bigger and better. ..(ibid).

In addition to these game-like features, the film also sought to emulate the investigative mode of the game. This is done through the use of labyrinths. As set designer, Richard Bridgland explained: 'When you play the game you never know what is going to be around that corridor' (Bridgland 2002). One of the stars, Michelle Rodriguez reiterates this. Her take on the narrative flow of the film mirrors that of the game. She says: 'You have to solve things at every turn you take' (Rodriguez 2002). Bridgland makes clear the intentions of the film makers in tackling the adaptation. He states:

> We wanted to create something new, people want to see something new. You know, they've played the games, they want to go to a different place now. It's almost like doing a live action version of a new version of the game' (Bridgland 2002).

For producer Bernd Eichinger, some scenes in the film are 'very close to shots in the game' (Eichinger 2002), although Capcom executive and head of production, Yoshiki Okamoto sees the relationship between the game and the film in a different way. For Okamoto the cinematic elements of the game make it an exciting possibility for adaptation into film. He states: 'We've been told that the game contains movie elements and we hoped that the game would become a movie as soon as possible' (Okamoto 2002). The camerawork has been interpreted by critics as resembling some of the angles in the game. Heilman (2002) for example, states in his review of the film:

> Sometimes, [Anderson] uses a long shot, usually from above, that shows protagonist and audience surrogate Milla Jovovich walking across the screen, and the impression it leaves deliberately recalls the exploration sequences of a videogame. The audience will probably be reaching for their control pad during these scenes since the camera angles and shot durations, as well as the placement of scare scenes, have been ripped directly from the *Resident Evil* game. This feeling that the film more closely resembles an interactive game than a non-interactive film (Heilman 09.04.02 *MovieMartyr.com*).

Indeed, this was a deliberate strategy in the adaptation. As Bridgland states: 'The spaces and the angles are designed to be very disorientating and that was one of the big things we wanted to take from the game' (Bridgland 2002).

But how did the games' players respond to this prequel and its game-like features? Were the game-like features enough to overcome any sense of loss or lack of interactivity, or did they, as Heiland suggests, respond to the film as an interactive game rather than a non-interactive film? And if the latter is the case, *what would such a response look like*? This paper seeks to explore if there was a palpable sense of a divide between game and film. The following section outlines the methodology utilised in the research.

Part Three Methodology

This research seeks to understand how gamers responded to the film adaptation of the video game *Resident Evil*. How do fans of a franchise established in one media form relate to the franchise and this new product when adapted into a different media form? Given the differences discussed in the previous section, what could fans expect in exchanging their interactive role for that of the spectatorial one?

3.1 Research Approach: VIPS and SPACES and Resident Evil

This research draws on the work of Barker and Brooks (1998) and their research on viewers of the film *Judge Dredd* (1995). Barker and Brooks themselves draw on the work of art historian Michael Baxandall ([1972]1988) who argues that paintings cannot be understood fully unless three aspects are taken into consideration. According to Barker and Brooks these are: the principles governing the making and placing in public spaces of the paintings, the patterning of elements within the paintings, and the ways in which these provided specific kinds of opportunities for use and response (Barker and Brooks 1998: 138).

In their application of Baxandall's approach, Barker and Brooks focus their inquiries on *Judge Dredd* across three sites: audiences, production and publicity, the film. This research acknowledges the value in this multi-site approach and as a consequence, I also seek to understand the film adaptation of *Resident Evil* within the context of the game's universe, but also within the context of *Resident Evil* as a franchise. The aim here then is to contextualise the gamers' responses to the adaptation in terms of the film-makers aims and within the ongoing metamorphosis and extension of *the Resident Evil* universe (for fans), or franchise (for Capcom).

Barker and Brooks' approach to audiences is of central importance to my research approach. Barker and Brooks interviewed viewers of *Judge Dredd* in order to identify the ways in which they talked about the film. These patterns of talk constituted what they term Vocabularies of Involvement and Pleasure (Barker and Brooks 1998: 139). Drawing from a long list of sixteen proposed Vocabularies of Involvement and Pleasure, the authors identified six patterns of talk, '…each organised around a different set of key concepts' (ibid: 145). These were: *the joys of being done to, the pleasures of spectacle, Dredd's deserts, Sylvester's measure, the magic of cinema, the pleasures of talk and the*

dangers of sad. These VIPs provide an invaluable starting point and framework for my research.

I will now briefly detail each VIP and elaborate on the implications of each and the questions and issues they raise in the case of my sample. However, it is noted that *Sylvester's Measure* does not really apply in the case of *Resident Evil* since the film-makers did not cast actors with established canons of work and consequently, the film was not marketed in terms of its 'all-star cast'. Also, the magic of cinema has been omitted from the framework since the reviews of the gamers do not always include where films were viewed or in what format. Barker and Brooks were also interested in the experience of cinema, and whilst this would have been an interesting addition to the research, it is beyond the parameters of the project and the data do not provide sufficient evidence for analysis. Therefore, further consideration of these two VIPs is not included below.

3.1.1 The Joys of Being Done To…and the Pleasures of Doing To

Barker and Brooks observed in their sample a pattern of talk that focused on the ways in which some viewers wanted to experience cinema in a 'physical' sense (ibid 146). This VIP was characterised by phrases that emphasised this, such as 'being knocked out of my seat', 'making me jump' and 'hitting me between the eyes' (ibid). Did the gamers I sampled express themselves in similar ways? Furthermore, since these gamers are used to *being done to*, to the extent where their avatar's (and their own) progress can be thwarted by being *done to*, did they feel they were *done to* in similar ways to the game? In addition, the gamers sampled are also used to *doing to* objects, monsters, puzzles and so forth. Did they express any sense of loss in their ability to interact?

3.1.2 Spectacle and the Frustrated Gamer/Spectator

Barker and Brooks' VIP of the pleasures of the spectacle observed a pattern of talk that emphasised 'the scale of a film, its 'spectacular qualities'. Special effects formed part of this language and there was an emphasis on the visual quality of the film (ibid). What interests me here in relation to my own sample is how far spectacle is readily exchanged and accepted for the ergodic pleasures of game-play. After all, the arrival of some nasty beastie in the game world may first be presaged in a cut scene where the gamer is unable to act. But after this spectacle comes action. Indeed, spectacle is often a sign of or call to action. Can a sense of frustration that this call cannot be answered, be determined in the gamers' responses to the adaptation in film?

3.1.3 True Adaptation, Justice and Likeness: Dredd's Deserts and Resident Evil

A large number of Barker and Brooks' respondents were fans of Judge Dredd and readers of *2000AD*. In their VIP entitled "Dredd's Deserts", the viewers' patterns of talk revolved around the discussion of 'what Judge Dredd was really like, and what he deserves' (ibid). This VIP articulated 'a language of insiders' knowing appreciation' (ibid). I anticipate patterns similar to this will emerge from my research. *Resident Evil Fans*, like

Dredd fans are in a sense stake holders, and curators of knowledge. How would they respond to the film makers' attempts to assign the film as a prequel? Will they accept this new history of the *Resident Evil* universe? And if they are concerned with the film being 'like the game', what does that actually mean, since games and film offer similar but also different pleasures?

3.1.4 The Other Side of 'Sad'?

Barker and Brooks' VIP, "the pleasures of talk and the dangers of 'sad'" is very interesting in relation to my research because many of the gamers sampled would perhaps qualify as 'sad'. They state:

> The emphasis here is on the manner of participation. You go, and you watch, as a group-member – never as an intense loner. The point is to have no point. It is participation as its own purpose, leading nowhere except the pub. To do otherwise is to be obsessive, a fanboy, 'sad' (ibid: 148).

The gamers posting on Imdb's *Resident Evil* message board had a point in posting: to varying degrees they are all recording and publishing their views on the film for themselves and others they anticipate are like-minded. There is no reply facility so gamers do not talk to each other about the film. Are they as solitary and 'sad' as the fanboy tag suggests? Do they show awareness of talking to others, as gamers, as fans of *Resident Evil* and/or film reviewers or are they locked in their own private, obsessive worlds? What, ultimately, does their participation on this site *mean*?

3.2 Method

Given that both my and Barker and Brooks' research are interested in adaptations in film of a non-filmic product, I was curious to see where our work might intersect and where it might differ, and the reasons for any differences or intersections. How far did the Vocabularies of Involvement and Pleasure observed in the case of *Judge Dredd* reflect the patterns of views and opinions of the gamers sampled through the course of my research? Of course, my goals and intentions differ from those of Barker and Brooks in two important ways.

Firstly, my sample is drawn from viewers who have stated that they have played *Resident Evil*. They all expressed this in their posts. Barker and Brooks' sample are not made up of *Dredd* fans alone as they are interested in more diverse and broader patterns of audience cultural responses, experiences and involvements. In short, the gamers in my sample had an investment already in the *Resident Evil* universe prior to viewing the film. In Barker and Brooks' study it was not a necessary prerequisite to know the *Judge Dredd* universe. Secondly, Barker and Brooks' research differs in their data gathering methods. The authors used interviews and focus groups. My research centres on the writing of

audiences. And if, as they state, little had been written on audiences and the languages of pleasure (ibid: 143), then even less has been done on their writing.

For Barker and Brooks, each pattern of VIP represents a culturally-generated space or 'SPACE - Site for the Production of Active Cinematic Experiences' (ibid: 154). Each space is a model of a possible orientation to a film, constituted by reasons for going, expectations, preparations, choice of cinema (or video), company, ways of participating in the film, pleasures and dislikes, surprises and disappointments, judgements, wind-down and aftermath (Ibid).

Instead of spaces – which is in Barker and Brooks' work applied to *Judge Dredd* and the film viewing experience – my 'spaces' are critical positions: the positions taken up by gamers who watched the film and commented. During the pilot study, while looking for these positions it became clear that the gamers' positions derived from their media preferences. In spite of intimating that they had played the *Resident Evil* game, the gamers could be further broken down by exploring where they were coming from, critically. From this pilot study, I proposed five critical positions: *Resident Evil Fans*, Film Critics, Horror Film Fans, Zombie Film Fans, Video Game Players. It is important to draw a distinction between *Resident Evil Fans* and Video Game Players because although it was evident from the posts sampled that all had played *Resident Evil*, the Video Game Players were not necessarily fans of the game itself, but rather were fans of videogames as a distinct media form.

Another question I sought to explore was whether critical positions were combined with others or were singular critical positions taken up? Barker and Brooks argued that spaces of *Judge Dredd* viewers were often combined. Would I find a tendency for one critical position to dominate whilst others are presented as secondary?

Barker and Brooks adopt discourse analysis in their study. For the authors, discourse analysis allowed them to study the responses of film viewers to *Judge Dredd* in the context that 'discourse analysis starts from a belief that all acts of human communication are complex structural processes' (ibid 109). However the central issue for research using discourse analysis is, in Barker and Brooks' view, ensuring that the discourses identified through research are indeed microcosmic examples of wider discourses circulating in culture and society. To this end they argue that one proviso must be met when making claims as regards the presence and identification of discourses – that only provisional claims are made (ibid 117). For Bertrand and Hughes (2005), discourse analysis in media and communications is a specialised form of textual analysis that: '… sets out to analyse how audiences understand messages, that is, they are interested in the processes of making meaning, rather than just the meaning itself' (Bertrand and Hughes 2005: 174). Furthermore, for them, and helpfully for my research, they argue that discourses are 'constructions of a particular telling from a vastly larger potential story' (ibid 213). This is the approach on discourse I take in this paper.

The research draws on 118 reviews (6) of the film *Resident Evil* posted on the internet movie database's *Resident Evil* message board between the film's release in 2002 to the beginning of this research project in February 2005. These posts have been selected from an original sample of 250 posts because they all state they have played the *Resident Evil* games and have watched and are reviewing the film. Analysis was used to identify specific critical positions from the gamers' posts. This was done by drawing up categories, based on observations from the pilot study. The categories sought to identify dominant and secondary critical positions by first, looking at how the gamer described themselves. Because not all gamers were explicit on this, those posts were subjected to further analysis to determine the categories of criticism that they privileged. The findings are presented in Table 1.

I then sought to identify the various patterns of critical ideas for each critical position. I follow the rationale of Barker and Brooks in that I attempt to understand how people's responses to films [like *Dredd*] can be studied as social phenomena' (Barker and Brooks 1998: 115). It is my contention that the adaptation of *Resident Evil* in film and gamers' responses to it can tell us something about the nature of contemporary adaptation, the expectations and experiences different media forms offer, the ways in which audiences compartmentalise distinct pleasures. As Barker and Brooks state: 'A film is a body of social meanings. So is going to see it. So are people's responses. We need to listen to their talk' (ibid).

Discourse analysis was carefully conducted by analysing the posts against categories drawn up via a pilot study of twenty posts. The gamers' posts were analysed in accordance with their dominant critical positions. I was able to determine several key discourses. This approach differs to Barker and Brooks in that in their study, the authors present their patterns of talk first before assigning these patterns to certain spaces/SPACES. My research does the reverse. It looks for the critical positions first and then examines the gamers' posts for discourses that help to articulate their position. The reason for doing things in this order acknowledges the fact that these gamers elected to post their views and in so doing had framed their critical positions prior to writing. I suggest that writing a review is not as spontaneous as having a conversation with a purpose (Mason 1996: 43) as in the case of qualitative interviewing. It became clear from the pilot study that the critical angle frames the pitch, and not vice versa.

Part Four Findings

In this part of the paper, I present the research findings. The central research question: how did gamers respond to the adaptation in film of the video game *Resident Evil* needs to re-assessed in the light of the findings. The research showed that while all posts sampled were written by individuals who stated they had played the game, there were many different critical positions taken up by the gamers in their posts. This is explored in

the first part of this section. Analysis of their reviews revealed a number of common discourses and this is the concern of second part of this section.

4.1 Critical Positions

It was clear from the analysis that the gamers took up a number of different positions in their critical appraisals of the film. By critical position, I mean the specific critical angle the posts *were coming from*. Were they more concerned with how the film compared to the game, or did their critical reviews centre on reviewing the film itself? Furthermore, the gamers typically adopted more than one critical position. However, in the vast majority of these had a preferred or dominant position that could be determined from the analysis of their critical views. The critical positions identified in the research were: *Resident Evil Fans, Film Critics, Horror Film Fans, Zombie Film Fans and Videogames Fans*. It is important to note that a distinction has been drawn between *Resident Evil* Fans and Videogame Fans because not all of the Videogames Fans were also fans of the game. They were, primarily, fans of the form (videogames) rather than the content (the game) or in some cases, other types of content (other videogames) and those articulating from this critical position made this clear in their posts. Table 1 below shows the different types of critical positions observed in the analysis.

Table 1 Critical Positions

Critical positions: dominant and secondary	Number of gamers adopting specific critical positions
Resident Evil Fans	15
Film Critics	7
Horror Film Fans	1
Resident Evil Fans (dom) Film Critics (sec)	31
Resident Evil Fans (dom) Videogame Fans (sec)	14
Film Critics (dom) Resident Evil Fans (sec)	10
Resident Evil Fans (dom) Horror Film Fans (sec)	6
Resident Evil Fans (dom) Zombie Film Fans (sec)	5
Film Critics (dom) Videogame Fans (sec)	4
Videogame Fans (dom) Resident Evil Fans (sec)	4
Videogame Fans (dom) Film Critics (sec)	4
Horror Film Fans (dom) Film Critics (sec)	4

Table 1 demonstrates how the majority of gamers adopted more than one critical position in their critical reviews of the film. By far the most prevalent dominant position is the *Resident Evil* Fan position – seventy one of the 118 gamers. Across the whole sample, being a *Resident Evil* Fan is clearly an important critical position for fans to emphasise. If the 118 posts, eighty five gamers expressed the *Resident Evil* Fan critical position when dominant and secondary positions are combined.

But while love of the game is clearly important to the majority of gamers analysed, it is important also to remember that they are reviewing a film on a film-site message board (Imdb). In this context, the second most prevalent critical position taken up by the gamers analysed in the sample is the film critic position. Of the 118 posts sampled, twenty one gamers expressed their dominant critical views from the film critic position. When combined with those taking up this position in a secondary capacity, some sixty gamers occupy a film critic position. Given that the subject of their reviews is a film adaptation of a game and the platform for their views the Imdb, it is no surprise that the most prevalent type of critical position is the combination of *Resident Evil* Fans and Film Critics (thirty one posts).

Having established that the gamers did not approach their reviews from one critical perspective, I now turn attention to the patterns and rhythms of their reviews. The different critical positions taken up by the gamers meant that their responses were oriented in different ways and a number of discourses were identified. The three most prevalent critical positions (*Resident Evil* Fans, Film Critics and Horror Film Fans) and the discourses identified in their posts are discussed in the following section. However, the video game fans were added to the analysis in the section on game play versus spectatorship as they had some very specific contributions to make.

4.2 Critical discourses

The critical positions identified did orient the reviews in different ways. The research found that each dominant critical position had separate sets of critical concerns. For example, for *Resident Evil* Fans, being like the game, the quality of game to film adaptations, and the choice of director for the film were the key critical discourses. The Film Critics were especially concerned with generic identification, the choice of director, the quality of game to film adaptation, and undertaking what I have termed *holistic film criticism*. The Horror Film Fans main critical discourse centred on the 'scariness' of the film. These findings are now presented in more detail.

4.2.1 *Resident Evil* Fans *as Dominant Position*

These gamers' discussions focussed most closely on the game/film comparison but they were weighted heavily in favour of the originary text and tended to end with an overall verdict on the worthiness of the adaptation. A number of key discourses emerged. These were a concern with how far the film was like or not like the game, how far an adaptation of the game in film should reflect the game, the perceived poor quality of previous films adapted from games and in relation to this last point, the instatement of Anderson as the director rather than Romero.

4.2.1.1 *Being like the game*

Of all the discourses of their reviews, the discussions surrounding how far the film was like or not like the game were the most prevalent. This is a complex issue since when being like or not like the game is unpacked, it is made up of four quite distinct components: game iconography, story and plot, characters, and *feel*.

Game Iconography

As already discussed Anderson and his crew attempted to translate some of the games' features into the film. At the same time they attempted to construct a prequel to the games. To recap, the features that were for the film's makers essential to include in the film were character archetypes drawn from the games, various monsters (zombies, dogs and the licker) and villains (Umbrella Corporation), some of the game settings (the mansion, Racoon City), key story elements (the T-virus, S.T.A.R.S, the escaped virus), and the exploratory narrative (Alice's amnesia, labyrinthine corridors). On the whole, these gamers were content to see familiar iconographic features of the game. Thus Anderson had correctly identified these all important features. However, the film differed from the games in that none of the characters from the games were present, the story – being a prequel – did not match or follow any of the existing games' storyline but rather sought to insert itself into the *Resident Evil* universe at a point prior to the original game at the start of the film to the start of the second game by the film's climax.

It is clear from the posts that measuring the likeness to the game was a consistent preoccupation for those assessing the film from the dominant position of the *Resident Evil* Fan. In the main, Anderson seems to have correctly identified the monsters that the fans would like to see *brought to life*. But the main areas of contention for these gamers centred on the non-adherence to the *Resident Evil* story, the lack of characters from the game, and interestingly, the concept of *feel*.

Storyline and plot

The fans did not express a consistent view of the adaptation's storyline. Responses on this issue tended to be divided between two positions: *Resident Evil* purists who rejected the film's attempt to historicise and contextualise the *Resident Evil* story and who resisted, ignored or misread the film's prequel intentions, and those *Resident Evil* Fans who believed that a game replica in film would not work. In terms of the former, gamers 60, 6 and 41 comments are typical. The language used to describe the story included words like 'warped', 'twisted', and 'distorted'. Gamer 60 disliked the film's story and suggested that the reason for their negative view of the story relates to their expectations drawn from the game. Gamer 60 states:

> …if they had followed the story of the game this could have been one of the best horror films ever made. If it wasn't based on a videogame I think I may have enjoyed it but because I was comparing it to what I expected I was very disappointed (Gamer 60 12 April 2004).

Gamer 6 expresses concern about the new material added to the *Resident Evil* story by Anderson and in so doing expresses a tacit sense of being a stake-holder in the game. They lament: 'Why was this movie anticipated so much? Because people thought it would be based on their favourite videogame, they were terribly wrong…The script from the game was horribly twisted in that most of the material was new' (Gamer 6 10 December 2002).

For Gamer 41 the story had been twisted to make the film into a more marketable commodity: '*Resident Evil* (the game) had a very interesting and atmospheric story…with an exciting plot. The Movie however, distorted EVERYTHING into a cheap sci-fi movie' (Gamer 41 14 May 2003).

In spite of these kinds of criticisms, the other take on the story and its adaptation took on board the differences between games and films and the difficulties in adapting games into films as can be seen in the posts of Gamers 13, 71 and 113. Gamer 13, for example, states:

> Having played all the games, I watched the movie with anticipation. No, it doesn't follow the same script, but that's a good thing else it would have been a bit dull knowing what was about to happen…if you want a true to script game to movie go and watch *Tomb Raider* and when you realise just how crap that is, you will understand why this was changed (Gamer 13 18 December 2002).

Gamer 71 took other fans to task for expecting a game-like replica:

> I am a die hard fan of *Resident Evil* videogames…Many fans of the game complain about the plot. They don't like the fact that it isn't based on any of the games' scenarios 100 per cent…But I think it's a good thing. It just wouldn't be fun. Everyone would know what is going to happen and how it is going to end (Gamer 71 15 October 2004).

Gamer 113 altered their view of the film after a second viewing. This gamer paid some considerable attention to the question of game to film adaptation:

> To be honest the first time I saw this I didn't care for it. It did not follow the storyline of the game and that made me very unhappy with this endeavour. Upon realisation that a video game is 'dumbed down' for the players to be able to concentrate, however, I opted for a second viewing (Gamer 113 13 January 2005).

Characters

Those reading the film from a dominant position of the *Resident Evil* Fan were more unified, if not wholly so, in their disappointment in the lack of characters from the games. Gamer 23 is fairly balanced in their review of the film but notes that the film does have its 'downfall' in the lack of characters from the game. Gamer 60 expressed disappointment

at the lack of characters from the games and a sense of bafflement as to why such fundamental game features were missing from the adaptation. They state:

> I was beyond disappointment when I saw the movie. Why would anyone base a movie on a videogame and not even use characters from the game. It made no sense to me…the characters are pretty dull and boring in my opinion. (Gamer 60 12 April 2004).

Gamer 67 echoes this sentiment. They state:

> For starters, there is no-one in the film who is actually from the game…Milla Jovovich ruins it too. The entire film focussed around her and what involvement she has with Umbrella. I can tell you that – NONE! She is the main character and yet is not in any of the games' (Gamer 67 22 November 2004).

Gamer 95 still found the lack of characters disappointing despite multiple viewings of the film. Gamer 95 states: 'I would liked to have seen some of the characters from *Resident Evil* 1 in this movie. Not the second movie' (Gamer 95 21 January 2003). And Gamer 108 is equally disappointed by the lack of characters from the game series. They state: '…not even the real characters from the game are here: Chris Redfield, Claire Redfield, etc. Not a damn one' (Gamer 108 7 June 2003).

A small number were quite positive, like Gamer 50, who thought that the film was less predictable without the characters from the games. They state: '…the characters from the game not being in this helped the movie because guessing who is going to live and who is not is a bit hard' (Gamer 50 1 November 2003). Gamer 74 was hostile to the lack of characters from the games during their first viewing of the film. But after a second viewing they revised their opinion and provided guidance to other *Resident Evil* Fans on how to manage and renegotiate their expectations:

> I love the game and have played all but one and when I first saw the movie I was disappointed that not one of the main characters were in the movie. But it was ok. But the more that I sit and watch it the more that I find I like it. It is a good movie, but be prepared if you are an avid *Resident Evil* gamer. You might be disappointed but give it a chance (Gamer 74 19 March 2004).

Gamer 61 thought the characters were 'strong and effective' (Gamer 61 8 April 2004). Gamer 73 showed appreciation for the characters and the difficulties Anderson faced as a consequence of the interactivity of gamers. They argue: '…try and favour Anderson's adaptation of the game's horror devices into movie ones. It can't be easy because we don't get to control the characters' (Gamer 73 17 January 2004).

Other gamers were critical of the characters in the film for a different reason: the lack of empathy they felt for them. Gamer 6 blamed the actors for poor performances: '*Resident Evil* is horribly cast, the acting is from a B movie, none of the characters are interesting and none show any emotion or feelings (Gamer 6 10 December 2002). Gamer 54 links

the lack of scares with the lack of interest they had in the characters. They state: 'There was not one genuine scare in the movie because you don't care about any of the characters – they are all badly written clichés' (Gamer 54 3 January 2004). Gamer 83 expressed strong negative feelings towards the adaptation and singling out the characters for particular criticism:

> I have seen the film twice (to my disgust!) and STILL I don't know character names, only one, and I even looked them up on imdb.com before watching it for the second time! I STILL don't feel any empathy for the characters and basically I didn't care if they made it out or not! (Gamer 83 26 May 2002)

Feel, Ambience, Atmosphere

Perhaps the most interesting issue contained within the critical discourse of being like the game relates to the notion of *feel* and for many who assessed the film from the *Resident Evil* Fan position the film did not deliver. It is my contention that *feel* is particularly important to survival horror gamers because, as Krzywinska suggests, game-play amplifies the horror effect well-known to viewers of horror films. The *feel* of *Resident Evil's* survival horror is created by the interaction between the game-world and the player. Survival horror, as already discussed, sets a lone character on a horrific journey of discovery that becomes a fight for survival, with deliberately limited weaponry and resources.

Feel is enhanced from the interaction with the game-world and from the increased sense of immersion and telepresence offered by the videogame play. Murray defines immersion as: '…a metaphorical term derived from the physical experience of being submerged in water. We seek the same psychologically immersive experience that we do from a plunge in the ocean or swimming pool: the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality' (Murray 1997: 98-99 cited in McMahan 2003: 68). The immersion of game-play in *Resident Evil* contributes to the "creepy feel" of the game and amplifies the horror.

The horror is further intensified by the sense of telepresence involved in game-play. Telepresence, according to Steuer (1992): '… is the extent to which an individual feels present in a mediated environment' (Steuer 1992: 73-93 cited in McMahan 1997: 72). Telepresence is attained when: '…perception is mediated by a communication technology' which in turn forces the individual 'to perceive two separate environments simultaneously: the physical environment in which one is actually present, and the environment presented via the medium' (ibid). It is argued here that there are higher degrees of immersion and telepresence involved in game-play than there are in cinematic spectatorship. Since telepresence and immersion amplify *feel* it is perhaps easier to understand its importance to the gamers sampled.

Gamer 7 found the experience of watching the film similar to that of playing the game as a consequence of the *feel* the game created: '…a few scenes creeped me out, just like the game does, while playing it alone, in a dark room with the volume turned way up'

(Gamer 7 9 December 2002). Gamer 10 also implies in their review that feel is connected to the 'rules' of game play: 'The movie follows the same basic rules of *Resident Evil* (eg creepy atmosphere, wonder, zombies, zombie dogs and eerie areas)' (Gamer 10 27 December 2002). Gamer 51 was equally enthusiastic about the film's recreation of the game:

> Just beautiful to see the underground labs, the Umbrella squad working, the zombies, and most important, the feeling that the games gave me while playing them, just giving in to the movie and letting you think you are in *Resident Evil* world, just like the games did. Of course, you can only feel this way about the movie when you've played the games (Gamer 51 1 November 2003).

For this gamer, then, only by playing the games previously can you re-experience this play through the film. *Feel* in this respect adds a new dimension to the sensation of 'losing oneself in a film'. *Feel* is a more tactile proposition in games than in films.

Not all thought that the *feel* had been successfully recreated in the film. Gamer 46 attempted to speak for disappointed *Resident Evil* Fans and lamented the elements missing in the film that made the game so unique and special. They state: 'We wanted to endless scares, suspense, a creepy environment. We deeply wished to see the dark atmosphere present in the game, but we get nothing of this' (Gamer 46 27 July 2003).

Gamer 104 argued in their post that the defining characteristic of the game was the *feel* invoked by the 'disturbingly claustrophobic corridors and it's ever present nightmarish atmosphere' and laments that director Anderson does not 'cash in' on these key features (Gamer 104 20 July 2003). The use of the term 'ever present' here reflects the gaming situation as the game only progresses if the gamer is present. Thus the term again, in my view, provides further evidence that for many *Resident Evil* Fans, *feel* is more than milieu or filmic ambience. Is *feel* – its presence or lack - an articulation of an experiential gap between game play and film spectatorship?

4.2.1.2 Game to film adaptations

Many of those gamers who adopted the dominant *Resident Evil* Fan position in their posts admitted that they had low expectation of the film because of previous game to film adaptations. This critical position was the most often taken up dominant position. However, the *Resident Evil* Fans were perhaps the most divided on the success of the film and this can be seen in analysis of their expectations. To clarify this point, I have compiled a table of expectations (see table 2 below).

Table 2 Expectations of gamers occupying *Resident Evil Fans* critical positions

Categories of expectation	High expectations	Low expectations
Adaptations	0	1
Director	1	4

Film style	1	0
Game	23	10
Game to film genre	3	11
Industry/finance	0	1
Zombies	1	0

Gamer 7's post demonstrated that they had rather low expectations for the film because of this, although perhaps part of the reason for their anticipation could be attributed to the two previous examples of game to film adaptations that were satisfactory :

> First of all I must admit that I am an avid *Resident Evil* player and was sceptical of this film at first, yet still anticipated its release. After walking out of the theatre I was astonished. I remembered the days when video games first came onto the big screen. I remembered the disappointment following such flops as *Super Mario Bros*, and *Street Fighter*. But then there was the satisfaction of *Mortal Kombat* (not the sequel which sucked hard core) and *Final Fantasy: the spirit within* (Gamer 7 9 December 2002).

Gamer 15 took a gamble on the film in spite of being disappointed by game to film adaptations in the past: 'Only got it because of the videogame series. I knew I was taking a chance because usually video games made into movies really suck' (Gamer 15 25 February 2003). Gamer 49 also decided to give the film a try because they had played the games but had low expectations because of previous game to film adaptations. They write:

> Does everyone like this film???? I mean, I enjoyed the game and decided to give this movie a try even though most remakes of computer games to date have left me pretty bored, and this is definitely no exception (Gamer 49 6 November 2003).

Gamer 50 sought to place the film within the canon of game to film adaptations by claiming it to be 'one of the better' video game to film adaptations. But it is clear this gamer does not expect much. They write: This movie is no great movie but it is a worthy video game movie' (Gamer 50 1 November 2003). Gamer 72 articulates the same opinion: 'Ok, video games to films? Not very good admitted. *Super Mario Bros* attests to that' (Gamer 72 27 January 2004). For Gamer 76, the problem with game to film adaptations is the ratings system which they suggest is responsible for turning R rated games into PG13 films for children. In a lengthy discussion of this topic, Gamer 76 argues:

> …I was sceptical on seeing another translation from videogame to movie, as most have been awful…The failures of other games into movies were to rate them PG or PG 13 just to get kids in the seats, good plan, but not always the way to do it. The best example being *Mortal Kombat* and its even worse sequel. When the MK games debuted, they were extraordinarily popular and notorious as being the most

violent games ever made. SO turning it into a hammy PG 13 movie really destroyed its hopes of relying on its history and turned off hardened fans of the games' series (Gamer 76 25 February 2004).

For some gamers, Paul Anderson and game to film adaptation go hand in hand. For Gamer 88 the fact that Paul Anderson, director of the *Mortal Kombat* game to film adaptation, had been given the go-ahead as the director of *Resident Evil* almost reduced them to tears. This gamer states:

> …when I heard of this film I thought, 'I hope it's someone good directing'. But when I heard Paul who has directed Mortal Kombat I almost began crying…The next thought was: has there ever been a good game to film movie? *Super Mario Bros, Tomb Raider, Street Fighter, Mortal Kombat* – all of those are really crap!!! (Gamer 88 22 September 2004).

Few of these gamers had anything positive to say about game to film adaptations. It was noted, however, that some of the gamers thought that Anderson's *Resident Evil* was the best attempt yet.

4.1.2.3 Wrong direction

Three issues around the choice of director emerged from the analysis of the posts by dominant *Resident Evil* Fans. The first discourse around direction centres on Anderson as a director of previously poor films and his work on *Mortal Kombat* was especially panned by this group of gamers. Anderson is seen as a game to film specialist and as we have seen in the previous section, that is not something that would impress most *Resident Evil* Fans. Gamer 81 is something of a rarity in that Anderson's game to film work is appreciated: 'Paul W S Anderson has made another great video game movie… The best videogame based movie since the original *Mortal Kombat*' (Gamer 81 4 September 2003).

The second discourse encountered concerning direction concerns the sacking of George A Romero from the project. Romero is seen as the master of the zombie film sub-genre and many of these gamers advanced arguments to the effect that it should have been Romero because the game developers were influenced by *Night of the Living Dead*. However, in all my research – for work and play - on the games, I have yet to find any evidence of this. Rather, the story is as we have seen based on the Japanese game film and game, *Biohazard* which itself was influenced by the Japanese game *Sweet Home* (1989). It is the games' fans who have likened the game to *Night of the Living Dead* or other films like *Alien* (1979) and *The Shining (1980)*, in much the same way as professional games and Film Critics pronounce on whether a game or film is derivative of this or that game or film. Gamer 107, for example, states:

> The games were based on George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* so a *Resident Evil* movie is essentially a remake of *NOTLD*…The problem is that Paul W S Anderson (not to be confused with the brilliant Paul Thomas Anderson) seems

to have cornered the market on making videogames into movies – bad movies. The guy is a hack who couldn't direct his way out of a paper bag (Gamer 107 28 June 2003).

Gamer 65 was like several of these gamers, extremely upset that Romero had been removed from the project. They state: 'The brain dead suits at Capcom made a big mistake when they let George Romero go and hired someone who had never made a zombie flick' (Gamer 65 22 April 2004). Gamer 84 was also a Romero fan and had followed the Romero 'is he or isn't he' saga from the beginning. Gamer 84 states: 'The fact that Romero didn't 'green-light' it cost it. Greatly. Romero is, in my opinion, the god of zombie films, especially when teamed with Tom Savini's high quality special effects. Sadly, Anderson had neither' (Gamer 84 24 July 2003).

Gamer 96 also blames the lack of Romero's input on the film. They state: 'God, there is no way to convey the terribleness of Paul Anderson's crimes…Rent a Romero film instead. To think Romero could have directed this film brings a tear to my eye' (Gamer 96 19 January 2003).

There is a third discernible discourse around direction noticeable in the gamers' posts and that is an accusation that Anderson has exploited the sacred game to further his career and make money for the 'suits'. This language is seeded with accusations that Anderson is not a 'true fan' and, worse still, had not even played the games. It was noted that those fans with the greatest regard for the game had the highest expectations and when these expectations were not met they quite often blamed Anderson for not having played the game. Gamer 12 articulates this view quite clearly:

> Writer-director Anderson is to blame, and one can only assume that a) he never actually saw the game, and b) he is so out of touch that he thinks if you like video games and horror, you must be a young, male heavy metal fan (Gamer 12 21 December 2002).

Gamer 66 takes on a highly emotive stance in their post, accusing Anderson of 'raping fans'. They argue:

> Quite frankly, anybody who thought or says that this film stays true to the roots of the game has NEVER played the games. This idiot of a director raped all us fans of a long awaited film. He made this disgrace claiming he himself is a fan…I say every TRUE fan of the game series tracks down this appalling monster [Anderson] and inject him with some deadly virus…stay clear of anything with Paul W S Anderson on it!! (Gamer 66 24 November 2004).

The range of responses to the choice of director for the project stem not from Anderson's skills in the direction of the film. Rather, the discourses articulated demonstrate the knowledge fans brought with them to their viewing of *Resident Evil*.

4.2.2 Film Critic as Dominant Position

These posts were noticeably longer and made more attempt at traditional film criticism in that the film was the focus of their discussions rather than the game. These gamers tended to take a typically holistic, systematic critical approach, evaluating features like direction, acting, special effects, score, lighting, editing and camerawork. These gamers were most likely to connect the film to genre and to reference other film texts in comparison to the film. Film Critics typically gave a brief plot synopsis, situated the film within the context of cinema more broadly with only brief contextualisation of the film with the *Resident Evil* universe. Most provided a verdict on the film pronouncing on its value as genre product, game adaptation, quality cinema, or its entertainment value. The key discourses of the Film Critics were genre, and the quality of previous game-to-film adaptations.

4.2.2.1 Genre

There was a pre-occupation with this group of gamers with defining the film generically. Some posts analysed saw it has a classic zombie film. Gamer 11 for example described the film as a 'Saturday night zombie flick' (Gamer 11 23 December 2002). Some described it as a horror film, like Gamer 70, who opens their post with the words 'Glossy horror'. A significant number of gamers who held the Film Critic dominant position, however, criticised the film's horror credentials seeing action as undermining any horror genre claims. Others saw it as an action film but interestingly, some like Gamer 43 assigned this label to the film because it was in their view a failed horror film. Gamer 43 states: '…this isn't scary at all. It is an action movie with a touch of gore now and again' (Gamer 43 28 August 2003). Gamer 80 made a similar point and arrived at the same conclusion: 'Don't expect horror, don't expect a lot of suspense…but if you are looking for a fun, unique action film, this is a good one to see' (Gamer 80 4 October 2003). This generic betrayal is seen as being in stark contrast to the games' survival horror pedigree. In their discussion of Anderson's new villain, The Red Queen, they state: 'The use of the Red Queen in the movie removes any horror elements remaining…nowhere do you feel anxious or claustrophic' (ibid).

Gamer 105 cut right to the chase: 'The problem with *Resident Evil* is that it is basically an action movie masquerading as a horror movie' (Gamer 105 7 July 2003). A belief that horror has been sacrificed for action was observed several times in the sampled posts and was a constant discourse – mostly for Film Critics, but it was observed across all dominant positions. I suggest that expectations drawn from playing *Resident Evil* – a survival horror game – fuelled these criticisms.

Some gamers viewed it as a science fiction film, like Gamer 68 who opens their review by labelling the film for the potential reader: Anyone who likes Sci-Fi thrillers that at the end make you want to stop crime the kick ass way, this is a movie for you' (Gamer 68 5 November 2004). Another gamer claims the film is 'billed as action/thriller/science fiction/horror film and proceeds to detail the portions of the film where the perceived different genres dominate (Gamer 101 21 August 2004). This generic confusion can also be seen in Gamer 115's post. They argue:

This film had two possible directions. It could have been a gore fest zombie film, or a psychological deep thriller…Unfortunately, Paul W S Anderson seemingly has trouble with this concept and opted to follow both. He ends up with one of the messiest films I've ever witnessed (Gamer 115 4 January 2005).

So, not only were these fans concerned with labelling the film by genre, there was significant disagreement about in which genre the film belonged.

4.2.2.2 Game to film adaptation and quality

Like the gamers who posted from the dominant *Resident Evil* Fan position, the Film Critics also had a concern with game to film adaptations. Gamer 4 was sceptical about the quality of the film prior to seeing it because 'I expected another videogame adapted to the big screen to score what money it could and the end result would be crap' (Gamer 4 25 November 2002). Gamer 31 was concerned about the game to film genre and had been monitoring the development of the production prior to the film's release:

> Like most people, I was a little worried on how this movie would turn out. I tried to keep abreast of its production and was on tenterhooks over the famed Romero – will he/won't he saga. The finished product was a pleasant surprise seeing how most video game conversions are pretty dire (Gamer 31 12 March 2003).

Gamer 43's review was interesting. This gamer was surprised by the film because as a game to film adaptation, it was an average film rather than the bad film they were expecting. The film was deemed to be above average for a game to film adaptation. But this gamer and film critic was most interested in replay value: 'Overall, *Resident Evil* is way above average as far as video game to silver screen goes, however the movie itself only provides enough entertainment to cover you watching it maybe 2 or 3 times, after that the movie becomes kinda boring'. This replay value was observed time and again in the sample and we shall return to this at the end of this study.

Gamer 48 also did not think the film was great, but thought that for a game to film adaptation it exceeded their expectations: 'I have to say that *Resident Evil* is one of the few video game movies I have ever been at least moderately entertained by. I didn't think it was a good movie, but it was an entertaining mindless romp of zombie killing fun' (Gamer 48 7 November 2003). Gamer 101 seemed incredulous that anyone would expect a game adaptation to make a good film and so in this respect did not so much pre-judge game to film adaptations as find them a puzzle: 'I'm baffled as to why people have high expectations for movies based on videogames. No matter how good the source material is, you can't expect a videogame to do good as a movie' (Gamer 101 21 August 2004).

4.2.2.3 A Holistic Approach to Criticism

These gamers were not so focused on the game aspects – in spite of having played the games – as the *Resident Evil* Fans. These posts were almost all characterised by

attempts to evaluate the film holistically. As a consequence, consideration of the game is but one aspect of their critical evaluations. For these gamers, editing and pace, special effects, acting and characterisation and plot are of equal importance to the likeness – or not – to the game. It is their holistic approach to reviewing the film that separates them out from the *Resident Evil* Fans. Many good examples of this were evident from the research. I have selected one example which exemplifies best this holistic quality. Gamer 2 displayed a dedication and interest to film in that they followed the production carefully throughout and scoured film magazines to find information on the film prior to the viewing. This gamer displayed a high investment in film, in Barker and Brooks' terms. Their review takes in acting, tension, special effects, narrative structure and plot, and the score. They begin by showing an impressive knowledge of *Resident Evil* pre –production trivia:

> I've been waiting for this movie ever since I saw it go into Greenlight back in 1998. I read in *Empire* magazine the film was in the works, and who was the lead back then? None other than Sarah Michelle Gellar. Although it wasn't confirmed, I was thrilled when I read the basic plot, as my brother got me playing the games not long before I read the article (Gamer 2 27 November 2002).

Gamer 2 then provides assurances for non-*Resident Evil* gamers that they do not need to play the games to enjoy the film. They then go on to discuss the cast and their performances, and where the game fits in with the *Resident Evil* chronology presented in the games they had played. The review then goes on to discuss in some detail the way tension and scares are delivered in the film – through the surprise death of Rain (Michelle Rodriquez). Special effects and their effectiveness are paid attention to in particular and are tied to the creation of tension and scares:

> The licker showdown at the end provides a few tense moments. It's not right to say the thing didn't look real, or convincing, because this is a film about zombies. I have no idea what the licker was all about, or if it is a reference to the games, but it keeps the action going when the crew are rid of zombies. Just as everyone is out fine, the thing appears and sees off one of the crew, while another turns into a zombie. The ending was slightly perky for a moment, so the re-appearance of the monster and two deaths is my kind of ending (ibid).

The' Manson score' is then commended and then Gamer 2 ponders the relation between the ending and the *Resident Evil* games, pointing out that they could probably do with 'a trivia site' to help them fill in the gaps in their knowledge of the *Resident Evil* universe. Gamer 2 ends in characteristic film critic style, by pondering also whether they would recommend this film to others:

> Generally I am not too sure I'd tell anyone to see this. Some people aren't too keen on, or convinced by the whole zombie discourse, or find action scenes annoying and loud, but I enjoyed the entire film (ibid).

4.2.3 The Horror Film Fan as Dominant Position

Thematically these gamers were most concerned with 'scares' and the techniques for achieving them. They showed little interest in the game to film discourse so prevalent in the posts of the *Resident Evil* Fans and the Film Critics.

4.2.3.1 Scare tactics

The biggest issue for those taking up a dominant horror fan position was whether the film provided enough scares. Here the Horror Film Fans drew on dual expectations: the scares they had experienced through playing the games and the scares they anticipated from a product they perceived to be a horror film. Interestingly, these gamers did not express the same degree of generic confusion expressed by the Film Critics. These gamers fully anticipated *Resident Evil* to be a scary horror film, just as the games were scary survival horror games.

Gamer 3 was satisfied with the adaptation as they were 'scared from the beginning' (Gamer 3 25 November 2002). Gamer 79 also partially measured the success of the adaptation by the scares it afforded them. In their final verdict on the film, they state: 'It was an engaging story, it moved like lightening and had some excellent scares' (Gamer 79 8 October 2003). However, Gamer 18 recommended *The Shining* for those who wanted 'a real scare' (Gamer 18 14 February 2003).

For Gamer 116 a sense of generic confusion did undermine the film's success: 'To think of this film as being a horror movie is a gross miscarriage of justice. This is more an action-adventure movie than anything and has nothing to do with horror at all' (Gamer 116). This gamer made every effort to feel scared by the film, but failed: I tried to feel scared throughout the movie, but there was nothing to make me feel scared' (ibid). Gamer 25 expressed the same frustrations in relation to genre expectations and scares: 'You call this a horror film more like action film there was little gore not even scary…' (Gamer 25 3 March 2003).

Two of the Horror Film Fans linked the choice of director to the scares they anticipated. Gamer 42 argued: 'I feel this movie would have been more horrific if Mr Romero had written the screenplay and directed the film' (Gamer 42 8 May 2003). Gamer 69 on the other hand liked the scares Anderson achieved in the adaptation of *Mortal Kombat* and was satisfied with the scares in *Resident Evil*: 'Just like with *Mortal Kombat* from the computer game, Paul Anderson has once again succeeded in creating an amazingly horrifying yet interesting film' (Gamer 69 31 October 2004).

To sum up here, then, for these gamers, scares were the central focus of their reviews. Scares were connected to their expectations of the genre, the game and the director.

4.3 Game-Play versus Spectatorship

This part of the research was perhaps the most fascinating for me as a researcher as it hit upon the question that I – as a player of video games, and the *Resident Evil* games in particular – really wanted to explore. After many hours of game-play, sitting in darkened

rooms alone late at night, scared to press x on my joypad, or 'hiding out' in a safe room after a particularly hard-fought battle with mutant beasts, I wondered why I was initially disappointed with *Resident Evil* in film? What did I expect? Was it frustration at the lack of ergodic pleasures on offer?

Some of those taking up the Videogame Fan dominant critical position expressed such a frustration, which focussed almost exclusively on the 'killing' of monsters and the sensations of 'virtual' weapons use. This can be evidenced in Gamer 86's review:

> No shotgun (the survival horror's weapon of choice) or grenade launchers (because every female alive uses one)…Oh and automatic weapons are for WUSSIES! You're not a man if you can't take down a zombie with a combat knife! Shotguns, pistols and grenade launchers will protect you forever, trust me (Gamer 86 20 April 2003).

This was also articulated by Gamer 99: '[And] to make matters worse, it, for the most part, lacks the shotgun to head satisfaction value that made *Resident Evil* a hit in the world of video games' (Gamer 99 2 September 2004). Gamer 86 also seemed to be missing having the ability to interact with the screen. They lament: '…And no crate pushing! CRATE PUSHING!' (Gamer 86 20 April 2003). Gamers taking up the Videogame Fan position were a small minority of the sample, as table 1 showed. However, this frustration of ergodic pleasure was not confined to this group but was evident in almost a quarter of the posts sampled.

The Videogame Fans were not the only ones for whom the differences between game-play and film spectatorship mattered. In this section, the sample is taken as a whole i.e. irrespective of critical position in order to examine the ergodic aspects they felt did or not deliver a game-like experience. Did gamers articulate a sense of loss or lack from game to film? Were viewers/gamers of *Resident Evil* frustrated spectators?

The findings demonstrated that almost a quarter (27 gamers) of the sample expressed either ergodic pleasures or ergodic frustrations in viewing the film. Of these, 18 gamers had occupied the dominant critical position of the *Resident Evil* Fans, whereas five were primarily Film Critics, two were Videogame Fans, and the Horror and Zombie Film Fans each had one gamer, respectively.

But how were these ergodic expressions articulated? What were they saying about watching the film and playing the game and the divide that might exist between the two experiences? Their responses indicated four areas in which their talk was concentrated: *1. Investigation of the landscape and narrative progress, 2. Character apathy, 3. Game rules, 4. Physical pleasures.*

4.3.1 Investigation of the landscape and narrative

As noted in the section on differences between games and films, films do not reject the spectator. Successful game-play, however, demands successful mastery of the joypad –

the interface between the player and the game. For Gamer 2, the story of *Resident Evil* presented in the film provided them with back story they had failed to gather from their unsuccessful game-play. They expressed uncertainty as to the faithfulness of the film's story line and why certain characters were omitted as they had not managed to survive the game previously: 'I didn't quite follow…I may have missed something in the game there. I'll admit, I'm no whiz at playing them and staying alive' (Gamer 2 27 November 2002).

As Krzywinska noted, investigation and exploration are rewarded in game-play. Some spoke of this in their reviews. For example, Gamer 12 attempted to explain why the film disappointed them. For this gamer, the film did not reflect the game's premise of '…a lone character in a genuinely spooky mansion never knowing what unspeakable horror was round the next corner…' (Gamer 12 21 December 2002).

Gamer 20 articulated clearly and concisely the activity required of the *Resident Evil* game-player and found that the film attempted to work for the spectator in the same way. They state:

> The often overlooked fact that as a *RE* gamer, you usually have at least in part a lot of information in the world around you. You know things you couldn't otherwise know. For example, how things work, maps, where things are, etc. This movie does a great job of keeping the viewer informed in this manner, without going so far as to ruin the surprises' (Gamer 20 10 February 2003).

Gamer 113's frustration at the characters not doing what the *Resident Evil* avatar and the player would do is palpable:

> I was disappointed with how it played out because there were no cures along the way, they made little notice of records and files lying about, no matter ho relevant they were or not…I realise that to do things this way would have severely hampered the flow of the movie itself and would have made it far less active' (Gamer 113 13 January 2005).

This same frustration was also expressed by Gamer 14: 'No clues, no upgrading on weapons along the way' (Gamer 14 16 December 2002). However, some gamers were well aware of the limitations of adapting games to film. For example, Gamer 28 argued:

> The film itself isn't particularly faithful to the game, but I don't think it could be really. The game involved you exploring a mansion alone, fighting off beasties and solving puzzles. Good idea for a game. Bad idea for a film' (Gamer 28 14 April 2003).

Gamer 70 echoes this sentiment. They point out that expectations are bound to differ, since the two forms are fundamentally different: …it didn't take place in a mansion, and it didn't involve exploring lots of rooms and solving puzzles. That's because it's a movie. A

literal translation of *Resident Evil* would probably be really dull. Games and movies are very different mediums' (Gamer 70 8 October 2003).

4.3.2 Character apathy

As discussed in the section on the differences between games and films, the relationship the film spectator has with a film differs to that of the relationship between video game and game player. The avatar in a game does not have the depth of a film character. It is, however, an extension of the game-player. Some of the gamers expressed dissatisfaction with characters in the film that went beyond the mere lack of characters from the games in the film. Gamer 85, for example, states: 'All characters are new (and very bland and one dimensional). We don't know them and we never do' (Gamer 85 16 December 2002). And Gamer 102 extended this point: 'Every character in this 'film'…is paper thin and more transparent than oxygen. The result of this is that you absolutely do not care or give a damn for any of these mentally challenged disposable extras that inhabit this compete waste of celluloid (Gamer 102 13 August 2004). But as Gamer 70 argued, is this not the fate of most horror film characters. They are there to be killed or maimed. Gamer 70 reasoned: 'In terms of critical comments, yes, you don't really care about the characters but how often do you really care about the monster fodder in horror films?' (Gamer 79 8 October 2003).

The lack of involvement or empathy for characters had in some cases an impact on the success of the scares in the film. As Gamer 70 pointed out: 'Where the game was scary because of the player's depth of involvement, the film fails to fully engage due to poor characterisation and a pretty lame story ' (Gamer 70 18 October 2004). And Gamer 73, as we have already seen, pleaded Anderson's case by arguing that the lack of character control by audiences makes achieving similar horror effects to the game impossible. They state: 'But try and favour Anderson's adaptation of the game's horror devices into movie ones, it can't be easy, because we don't get to control the characters' (Gamer 73 17 January 2004).

4.3.3 Rules of Combat

Some gamers articulated extreme frustration with the film's apparent breaches of the games' rules. These rules seem to centre on ways and means of despatching certain monsters in the game. But their frustration is, in my view, more than an articulation or display of specialist knowledge. It is a frustration at the ease in which monsters that might have cost the gamer their 'life' several times over during game-play are destroyed in the film. This was clearly articulated by some of the gamers, as the following examples demonstrate.

The Doberman pinschers from the first game were a popular monster from the game-world and while many gamers were pleased to see them 'brought to life', Gamer 43 was more concerned with the ease in which they were despatched: 'In places this movie

does get kind of stupid. The dog sequence comes to mind where she manages to kill five or six dogs with one bullet each' (Gamer 43 28 August 2003).

In the games, zombies, you learn, are best killed with a couple of shots to the head. However, Gamer 54 took great exception to the bending of the rules in the film: 'The action was boring and stupid there was on real battle with the zombies and in it they just kept shooting them in the chest magazine after magazine in the chest…' (Gamer 54 3 January 2004).

Gamer 84 was particularly aggrieved at the breaking of the game rules. This post is characterised by a threading of game-play 'reality' with the 'unreality' of the film: 'Lickers are scary. But most of the time, people are smart enough to shoot them, removing the fear, unless they, for example, jump through a window the first time you've played *Resident Evil 2*' (Gamer 84 24 July 2003). Gamer 84 continues the discourse:

> What the hell? Running up a wall to kill a Cerberus by kicking it in the head…And it kills the dog! Easy as that! How stupid can you get!? Now she goes through 1 Clip and kills ALL those dogs? That's about 2 or less bullets a dog. Now, I don't recall EVER having the pleasure of only using 2 shots to kill a Cerberus. Ever (ibid)

Gamer 88 must have struggled with the licker in their game-play and found the film's licker a poor and unrepresentative substitute. 'The Licker is just too much of a pussy and dies almost right away' (Gamer 88 22 September 2004). Gamers want others to know how hard they have fought to get to the end of the game. They do not want to see foes they have struggled to defeat so easily killed on screen.

Games' visual devices used in the film were noted by one gamer. Gamer 93 likened the camera work to shots from the game. They state:

> The screenplay that is the stuff of RPG video games – i.e. flipping a switch, and then a camera shot of some far-off room's lights coming on – is captured quite well in this movie. And the camera zooms and pans that you find when objects like trains are accelerating and slowing down are captured in cinematic genius as well. The brief flashes of the licker that you might recall from the game's beginning are also captured in the film' (Gamer 93 27 January 2003).

Aside of this visual continuity, another ergodic aspect involves the differences between the way the film and the games established the rules of combat. For example, the viewer only has to see the bullet-time and slow motion kung fu of *The Matrix* (1999) once to establish that these seemingly fantastical manoeuvres are within the rules of the film that the audience are tutored to accept.

Games establish the rules using a similar tutoring function and begin by tutoring the new game-player. They start with an easy level where the new gamer learns which monsters are out there at this level and the kinds of weapons and number of shots or stabs required to eliminate them. Gamer 8 articulates the need for this 'tutoring': 'Also, a few

more scenes where one or two zombies appear would have been nice, instead of the mass hoards of the constantly flooding the rooms' (Gamer 8 3 December 2002).

Gamer 37 yearns for more structured one-to-one combat as found in some sections of the games. They state: '…but when the zombie appear there could be more fighting with them, more gore (I'm not some kind of maniac but this was one of the main features of the games)' (Gamer 37 3 June 2003).

4.3.4 Physical pleasures: Don't just sit there, do something!

As Barker and Brooks noted, some viewers of *Judge Dredd* expressed pleasures of 'being done to'. This is evident from the gamers but this being done to is afforded greater significance to some gamers. The *Resident Evil* player might have been mauled by zombies, lickers, hunters and Tyrant. They may have been poisoned by a giant snake or triffid-like plant and die before they can solve the puzzle that makes the antidote. Whatever has been done to the *Resident Evil* game player, chances are 'You died' many, many times.

But, in addition to this high degree of 'being done to', through the figure of the avatar the game player gets to 'do to' a huge variety of game objects: killing a range of monsters, pushing furniture, opening doors, switching switches, assembling equipment, playing instruments, reading files and rifling dead bodies.

Some gamers clearly were frustrated at the lack of activity as film spectators. For these gamers, the film could not provide the physical sensations they enjoyed while playing the game. By physical I do not mean to suggest in any way that the gamers actually imagine they are shooting and stabbing, but they are doing something physical – mastering the joypad and enjoying the simulation of movement on screen. For example, Gamer 99 '*Resident Evil*, despite its reputation, was never a great video game…But at least you could blow a zombie's head off with a shot gun [the film] for the most part, lacks the shotgun-to-head satisfaction value that made *Resident Evil* a hit in the world of video games' (Gamer 99 2 September 2004). Gamer 37 echoes this sentiment: 'We can only hope that the second part will be much better. (Finally some shotgun fire – smiley face symbol)' (Gamer 37 3 June 2003).

The medium of film brought too much dialogue and not enough activity for Gamer 83 They wrote: 'Most of the scenes are either too wordy and bored me, or the room is so full of zombies that you can't pick out the characters' (Gamer 83 26 May 2002).

As suggested, this physical dimension also alludes to what the game is doing to them. Mostly, the game brings shocks, scares, and jumps, and the film was measured by Gamer 7 in this respect: 'Both the game and the movie are edge of the seat fright fests that will definitely get your heart racing' (Gamer 7 9 December 2002). Similarly Gamer 27 measures the film's success through 'jumps' but found it wanting: 'I was expecting a spooky mansion with plenty of jumps and chilling special effects. Whilst playing the videogame I jumped hundreds of times and I jumped no times during this film' (Gamer 27

23 April 2003). For Gamer 58 the film and the game physically captured them in different ways. For them the film '…doesn't make you jump from your chair, instead it glues you to it' (Gamer 58 13 November 2003).

For Gamer 51 the immersion of the game was achieved through the film viewing. This gamer explained that:

> [The] feeling that the games gave me while playing them, just giving in to the movie and letting you think you're in *Resident Evil* world, just like the games did. Of course, you can only feel this way about the movie when you've played the games. If you haven't played the games, it's a must to go and play them now! Go deeper into the *Resident Evil* world (smiley face symbol)' (Gamer 51 1 November 2003).

To sum up this section, then, the differences between game-play and film spectatorship were articulated in a number of ways across the sample. These differences centred on several issues: the frustration of ergodic pleasures, the lack of involvement and empathy with the characters in the film compared to those in the games, spatial-temporal features found in the game but not present – or indeed possible – in the film adaptation, and the breaking and bending of game rules. The discourses surrounding the frustration of ergodic pleasures are now discussed in more detail.

Part Five Discourses of Adaptation, Inter-Textual Promise and Ergodic Frustration

In this final part of the paper, I draw out some of the key findings from the audience research and connect them to a wider plain – the social world. So far the findings have revealed that gamers shared patterns and rhythms of criticism. However, analysis is needed if the findings are to be little more than a list of statements by arbitrarily connected individuals.

This study has attempted to understand gamers' responses to the film adaptation of *Resident Evil* in great detail, getting close to their reviews. Critical positions were identified as were key discourses in their posts. But this is not enough to ensure the utility and validity of this pursuit. The findings must now be connected to social and cultural spheres. Here I reiterate that my intentions are similar to Barker and Brooks, who state that they 'want to be able to understand…how people's responses to films like *Dredd* can be studied as social phenomena' (Barker and Brooks 1998: 115).

For Barker and Brooks, triangulating their findings across three distinct areas allowed them to make observations on what electing to watch a film like *Judge Dredd* means in a social and cultural context. This paper now seeks to triangulate its findings on the gamers' posts, with the research in part two on the status of the franchise and the film makers.

As the findings show, the majority of gamers approached their reviews of the film from the critical position of the *Resident Evil* Fan. For this significantly large group of gamers the over-riding preoccupation was with comparing it to the game and they 'measured' them by assessing the game iconography, the plot and storyline, the characters and the *feel*. Essentially, then, while the film was the catalyst for their reviews, the games were always present and in most cases, was fore-grounded as their primary focus. Some of these gamers acknowledged the impossibility and in a few cases, the undesirability of making the film 'game-like'. But this did not prevent them from discussing how 'like the game' the film really was for them.

The thematic analysis of the gamers' posts also revealed that they were also expressing their views about things beyond the text. I think one of the most important points that Barker and Brooks seek to make is that watching a film is about much more than the film itself. It is about expectation, preparation, and what comes after the viewing experience, how the film viewer makes sense of what they have seen within wider social and cultural contexts. The gamers in my research demonstrated this, too. Two of the most consistent discourses across the sample were a concern with the 'nascent genre' of game-to-film adaptation, and the 'debate' about the choice of directors for the project. Both discourses required the gamers to go beyond the film, in their critical assessments.

The gamers' views of game to film adaptations coloured their expectations of the film prior to viewing. These gamers consistently cited the films previously adapted to film - *Super Mario Bros., Mortal Kombat, Street Fighter and Tomb Raider* – and on the whole found them disappointing. They used these films as a measurement in their assessment of *Resident Evil*. But more than this, the prevalence of this discourse across three of the five dominant critical positions could be viewed as a discourse on the contemporary film industry. This discourse has an intrinsic set of assumptions that the gamers articulated time and again and can be encapsulated in the following statement: *the game to film 'genre' is new, it is establishing itself, the films are bound to be bad to begin with as the new genre develops. Anyway, do not expect game to film adaptations to make quality cinema because they are adaptations of low-brow video games*.

In a sense, this discourse teaches gamers to expect to be disappointed when they view a videogame adaptation in film, but keeps them interested – and viewing – with a promise that the adaptations will eventually improve. For gamers, this offers a kind of promise of deferred pleasure. For the film and games industries, this means a steady supply of hopeful punters. The veracity of this statement can be seen perhaps in my sample. A quick count reveals that 26 of the 118 gamers sampled were looking out for the sequel – 11 of whom disliked the first adaptation. Only two gamers said that the film was so bad they would avoid the sequel at all costs. Around a quarter of the gamers had also seen the film more than twice – some of these to their "disgust" and "surprise".

The discourses surrounding the choice of director are complex and also reveal how work is done by viewers prior to the viewing of a film. As we saw in the findings, criticisms relating to the choice of director were found with some regularity and consistency in the

posts of the those expressing the dominant critical position of the *Resident Evil* Fans, but they were also evidenced in other critical positions with less frequency. The three specific discourses relating to the choice of director revolved around Anderson as specialist in the already denigrated game to film 'genre', Anderson's credentials as a fan/player of the games, and the Romero sacking.

As we have seen, game-to-film adaptations do not offer instant pleasures for these gamers because of the connection the films have to their favourite games. They have to negotiate and overcome expectations of yet another poor game-to-film adaptation. So, it is perhaps unsurprising that some of the gamers responded to Anderson as the director of choice in this way. Anderson directed *Mortal Kombat*, one of the first game-to-film adaptations and in a sense he represents a kind of poster-child for the nascent genre. This status carries with it all the associations and (low) expectations of game-to-film adaptation. In this way, this discourse places Anderson on the most hated lists of many a gamer as a representative of all that is bad with game-to-film adaptations. This means that this discourse is actually an extension of the game-to-film discourse discussed above.

The discourse concerning Anderson's game fan/player credentials can be encapsulated in this statement: *the film is so unlike the game that Anderson could not have played the game and is masquerading as a fan in order to convince Resident Evil's fan community to accept his prequel and to watch his film.*

In a sense, the gamers who are articulating this discourse are rejecting Anderson's attempts to align with/join the fan community, to be 'one of them'. Barker and Brooks note with regard to occupiers of the *2000AD*-Follower SPACE, that these viewers are 'fans, people with rights' (Barker and Brooks 1998: 163). This is also the case with these gamers. They have 'rights', and they do not believe that Anderson had the 'rights' to adapt their game. Anderson replaced Romero as the film's director prior to production because of alleged creative differences. So, for the gamers, Anderson's claim about playing the game and feeling the urgent desire to make it into a film is viewed with suspicion and scepticism since he was not slated to direct from the outset.

The discourse surrounding the Romero/Anderson story is also interesting in the context of Barker and Brooks' findings. The authors argue that conflicts and stresses surround films and these can have an impact on audience expectations and indeed, on their decisions as to whether to view the film or not (ibid: 232). I think this argument is borne out very well in the case of my research and the gamers' views on the sacking of Romero from the film and his replacement with Anderson. This decision was rarely viewed as anything other than a mistake by the gamers sampled. For them, the promise of realising the intertextual relations between the game, the film and Romero's status as author of the *Living Dead* films was hard to resist and the disappointment expressed by these gamers when they learned that he had been fired was palpable. The discourse articulated here, then, is best described in this statement: *the film partly failed as film and as adaptation because Romero was the natural choice of director and he was fired*.

The Frustrated Spectator: an experiential divide?

In the first part of this paper, I established a set of similarities and differences between games and films. This was done for two reasons. Firstly, I wanted to understand more fully the differences between games and films. And secondly, I wanted to begin to map any potential experiential divide I might encounter in the gamers' posts. It was revealed in the findings that almost a quarter of gamers commented on the game-play experience and the differences between game-play and spectatorship.

There were four specific discourses surrounding this issue: investigation of landscape and narrative progress, character apathy, game rules, and physical pleasures. Most of these discourses were articulated from a position of lack or loss of interactivity and in this respect, seem to confirm Krzywinska's claim to this effect. I will now discuss each discourse in more depth.

Krzywinska argued that video games and films are organised around different conceptions of space and time (2002: 217). While temporal differences were not referenced by any of the gamers, the loss of the spatial dimension was. This was articulated through an investigative, exploratory discourse identified in the gamers' posts. This discourse reflected upon the pleasures of exploring and investigating in the game and the lack of their own ability to interact with files, papers and record "lying around" was further amplified by the characters in the film that did not do any of this exploring for them. However, this was expected and accepted by most gamers, as an unavoidable limitation of the medium of film. Some gamers, however, appreciated some of the films attempts to bridge this experiential gap, although few identified all such attempts by the film makers to do this. For example, Alice's amnesia device was an attempt to draw parallels between the viewer and character. Just as the gamer 'knows' as much as their avatar so Alice knows as much as the spectator as the films progresses. Her discoveries are the spectators' discoveries and this is similar to game-play. The amnesia device was not widely discussed by the gamers and none of them linked this device to the player/avatar relation in games.

An important dimension of the games' exploratory exposition also relates to *feel*, since in survival horror, you are not only exploring, you are doing it alone – even if you are playing with ten friends in the room watching your progress. This sense of being alone in a creepy environment brings about physical sensations in the game player such as tension, apprehension, and anxiety. Indeed, palms may become so sweaty from the anxiety that operating the joypad effectively at moments of high suspense or action can become impossible. However, for many of the gamers the *feel* of the game was lacking in the film. I would suggest that the lack of *feel* also in some ways reflects a sense of frustration at the lack of ergodic pleasures on offer in the film.

Apathy towards the characters was another discourse identified in the gamers' posts that might be attributed to an experiential divide between game play and film viewing. I was first made aware of this in the posts by the remarks of one gamer who claimed that the game had gritty and in-depth characterisations whereas the film had bland, two-dimensional characters. I have played the games. The only thing we know about Jill Valentine for instance is that she is the 'master of unlocking'. From where does this depth come? I would suggest from the player and their relationship to the avatar in the game world. This discourse argues that the characters in the film are bland, boring, 'paper-thin'.

But more than this, some gamers do not care about them. It is not unusual for viewers of films to feel nothing for film characters, but viewers who are more used to being players seem to expect to care. After all, if they did not care for their avatar, they would 'die' thus being prohibited from progressing, and ultimately rejected by the game. The game player, as Juul suggests, is both inside and outside the text and I argue that this discourse reflects that. Avatars are depthless archetypes and the avatars of *Resident Evil* are certainly no different. Anderson made the decision to base the prequel's characters on archetypes drawn from the game.

For the gamers who articulated this discourse, clearly, Anderson had failed. Game avatars do not require in-depth characterisation as players bring themselves to the avatar. Film characters do require more depth of characterisation, their motivations need to be established and they need to be situated in relation to other characters. The archetypes in the film adaptation were neither fish nor fowl and for some this rendered them useless.

A sense of frustration was evident in relation to the film's flouting of the rules of *Resident Evil's* game-play. Analysis of the gamers' posts reveals that there were two aspects to this. However, one aspect of this was formulated from a discourse of frustrated ergodic pleasure articulating an experiential divide between game and film, while the other aspect was not.

The first aspect concerns the killing of monsters and articulates, in my view, a discourse of frustrated ergodic pleasure. As I pointed out earlier in the paper, progress in the game is often dependent on killing specific monsters in specific ways, using specific manoeuvres via the joypad. As the game progresses it becomes harder, the monsters become more difficult to kill and ammunition begins to run out. This is quintessential survival horror. Its narrative mode is vertical in that its narrative is based around levels of increasing difficulty. In addition, it is worth noting, too, that in the games, the player can choose the level of difficulty of the game before it commences. The ending of the games always features the most deadly foe. Now, whilst that is also true of the film, the film spectator does not have to progress or to work so hard to get there. The film has not rejected them countless times before reaching the ending, and they have not had to *learn to do* anything before they can access the film's climax. So, when gamers articulate their disappointment at the easy slaying of a monster, I would suggest this is an articulation of the discourse of ergodic frustration. As Aarseth says, '…games raise the stakes of

interpretation to intervention' (Aarseth 1997: 4). Film makers minimise the importance of this to gamers at their peril.

The second aspect of this is not part of a discourse of frustrated ergodic pleasure at all. Rather it is generated from the discourse of being like the game and is applied in critiques of character actions, notably the scene in which Alice kills zombie dogs by kicking them in the head. This does not happen in the game, dogs cannot be kicked to death, and therefore it is not 'true to the game'.

The final discourse of frustrated ergodic pleasure identified in this research was the discourse of physical pleasures. Barker and Brooks noted that physical pleasures – being done to by a film - formed a prominent Vocabulary of Involvement and Pleasure for their interviewees. These physical aspects were observed in my sample. The Horror Film Fans, for example, were primarily concerned with the generation and quality of 'scares' in the film.

Many of the gamers sampled, however, made comparisons with the game and its wealth of scares in comparison to a dearth of scares in the film. Where this occurred, I would argue that much of their disappointment stems from the experiential differences between game and film. The scares mean something different to a gamer than a viewer. They are more than the jumps one experiences in the cinema or at home in front of the television. In the game world, scares have to be overcome very quickly if a monster is about to bite off the avatar's head and end the players game. The scares come at the behest of the player not the director. They choose to press x on the joypad which may or may not lead to a confrontation with something 'deadly'.

A discourse of frustrated ergodic pleasure was also identified in relation to the firing of weapons and this adds an extra dimension to the Barker and Brooks' physical pleasures VIP. Some of the gamers sampled expressed a strong sense of this in their detailing of the weapons they liked to use and what the liked to do with them (killing dogs and zombies in the main). In addition, to this a few of the gamers clearly lamented the loss of their ability to interact with objects.

To sum up here then, I have argued that several discourses have been identified through the course of this research that in my view provide interesting insights into the ways gamers responded to the film adaptation of *Resident Evil*. Some of these discourses relate to the filmic plain (game to film adaptations, choice of director), some to industrial and cultural practices (game to film adaptations, low brow games, and some to the specific pleasures of the game (being like the game) and game-play (frustrated ergodic pleasures). In my conclusion, I attempt to draw the research together – audience, film and franchise – in order to assess how far an understanding of all three facilitates a better understanding of the social and cultural significance of media adaptations and their audiences.

Conclusion: Game to film - between *franchise* and *universe* in the case of *Resident Evil*

As observed by Rehak, videogames remediate cinema in that they draw on the tendencies and characteristics of their predecessors. In this regard *Resident Evil* the game is no different. But it seems that the film did not remediate the videogame effectively for the gamers. Many misidentified the film's genre as *action* rather than *horror*. Furthermore for the Horror Film Fans, the film failed as horror because of the lack of scares expected in a horror film. But it did not only fail as horror in this respect because the film also failed as a remediation of the survival horror videogame. This failure, as we have seen, can be found in the lack of empathy for the film's characters, the lack of the pleasures of ergodic activity associated with game-play, and with the lack of the videogame's distinctive *feel*.

It could be argued that the only area where remediation was successful was in the appropriation of the game's iconography. The findings demonstrate that, for the gamers sampled, Anderson had partially misidentified the aspects of the game that were important to them. While he was more or less spot on in his incorporation of the games' iconography, the gamers were more often dissatisfied with the storyline and with the lack of characters from the game.

The concern with the storyline is a fascinating finding for this researcher, since it shows quite clearly that the pleasures offered by media adaptations are very much context specific. Barker and Brooks' found that their film viewers were not particularly concerned with narrative. In addition, Eskelinen also argued that in games 'narrative is subordinate to action' (Eskelinen 2001: 16). So why were these gamers so concerned with the story? Since the gamers were aware they would be trading their interactivity for spectatorship, they did not expect to *lose the story* too. In addition to this, the dissatisfaction of the story for some stemmed from their rejection of Anderson's prequel ambitions, especially in the light of his questionable fan status. In this respect, their dissatisfaction could well stem from Anderson's unqualified attempt at re-writing the history of *their* game. This is why, I believe, the story is important to the gamers.

Anderson also misidentified in terms of the film's characters and while this also may be connected to the re-writing of the *Resident Evil* universe and the unanticipated loss as the game crossed over into film, it also has I believe a particular significance for some gamers. The depth of involvement one feels when playing a game, controlling the avatar, interacting with 'objects' is a powerful motivation for game-play. There was a sense of loss or lack of avatarial control observed in some of the gamers that manifested in a lack of empathy for the characters. The lack of *feel* exacerbates this.

None of these concerns prevented a high proportion of gamers from going to see the sequel. Many of them have invested years in the *Resident Evil* universe and one film adaptation was not going to end their involvement. Of course, what is a universe to some is a franchise to others. Not least of all to Capcom. The question is, does it matter if a film

adaptation of a successful game is any good or not, as long as the franchise keeps expanding? Fans can choose to accept or reject them, but it seems, they *will* watch.

And they will talk and criticise on sites like the Imdb. But what does writing a review on the adaptation of *Resident Evil mean*? And what relation does such an activity have to the wider social world? I would argue that posting a review on this Imdb message board fulfilled certain 'duties'. For the *Resident Evil* Fans the principal duty was to 'report in', to inform other *Resident Evil* Fans of the merits and values of the adaptation and the likeness to and justice done to the game. For the Film Critics, their duty was to label and contextualise the film, providing comments holistically and in a balanced, systematic way on the film as film, for other film fans. Horror Film Fans were duty-bound to assess the scares. What these gamers are doing is reporting back, reviewing and measuring. But knowing what they are doing is not the same as understanding what it means to post on the site. Why post a review? I suggest it is to join in a social process of making sense of the film, and its relation not only to the Resident Evil universe but also in the wider context of game to film adaptation and the logic of contemporary film production. I say this because the level of disagreement on the merits of the film was such that gamers were divided on almost every aspect. But, significantly, they seemed to agree on which aspects up for debate and discussion. As many pointed out, the 'genre' is in its early development and what is and is not expected of a game to film adaptation is still very much open to debate. The discourses identified connect with wider discourses already established in the social world, for example the value of video games, quality cinema versus trash, and Hollywoodisation. But a new discourse may be emerging from the world of the gamer that is being brought to bear on film in the light of the game to film adaptation. It centres on experiential differences between games and films, as this paper suggests. Of course, ascertaining this will require further work by researchers as to date I have found very little work in this area.

Film makers, of course, have always relied heavily on adapted products, and in addition, fans of products adapted into other media forms are often dissatisfied with the results. But as I hope this study has shown the game to film adaptation poses unique problems for producers *and* the gamer-spectator. Games and films are very different media forms and the gamers' responses to the film adaptation of *Resident Evil* articulate this. Films and games offer distinct pleasures and come with different expectations. Different work is required of the viewer and the gamer. And there is more space for the "me-shaped hole of suture" in games than in films. This means that the way gamers relate and respond to videogames will always differ markedly to the way film spectators respond and relate to films. Can game to film adaptations ever really cross this experiential divide? I do not think they can. But the logic of contemporary media production suggests that as long as audiences keep watching and as long as the *Resident Evil* franchise remains popular, the industry will continue to attempt to bridge the gap between gamer and spectator and between game and film.

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