

Computer Games, Film Theory and the Future of Screen Studies

November 9th 2007

Elvin Hall, Institute Of Education, University of London

This is a London University Screen Studies Group event hosted by the Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media, IOE, University of London and convened by Diane Carr.

Welcome	Laura Mulvey	10:00 – 10:05
Introduction: Games and screen studies	David Buckingham	10:05 – 10:15
Session 1: Games, players, theory	Chair: Esther MacCallum Stewart	
	Diane Carr	10:15 – 10:45
	Helen Kennedy	10:45 – 11:15
	David Surman	11:15 – 11:45
Coffee		11:45 – 12:05
Session 2: Genre and horror	Chair: Greg Singh	
	Tanya Krzywinska	12:05 – 12:35
	Ewan Kirkland	12:35 – 1:05
Lunch		1:05 – 2:00
Session 3	Chair: Andrew Burn	
Fans, adaptations and online cultures	Natasha Whiteman	2:00 – 2:30
Adaptation and <i>Blade Runner</i>	Barry Atkins	2:30 – 3:00
<i>24 The Game</i> (SCEE) An industry/design case study	Alex Sulman	3:00 – 3:30
Chairs respond to the day's proceedings and lead the closing discussion	Esther MacCallum Stewart Greg Singh Andrew Burn	3:30 – 4:00

Abstracts and Speaker Biographies

Abstracts (in running order)

Session One:

Diane Carr IOE, University of London

Ground Rules: Game analysis and film theory

In this presentation Carr will introduce some key debates, thorny questions and pertinent theory from within the field of computer game studies in order to contextualize the sessions that follow. Particular attention will be paid to the processes and perils involved in the application of theory drawn from film or literature studies (e.g. theories of meaning, text, representation, narrative or subject position...) to computer games.

Helen W. Kennedy, University of the West of England

Ludaesthetic Pleasures and New Technicities: a phenomenological approach to understanding gameplay

This presentation will draw from an ongoing research project based around the Nintendo Wii console. This research seeks to address issues around aesthetics, embodiment, pleasure and technology in relation to contemporary technocultural playforms. This greater attention to the phenomenological experience of gameplay is not a reinscription of a humanist agenda that focuses on the 'playing subject' but will be worked 'at' in order to make this model attend to the 'playful objects' through which this event takes place.

Wii play makes visible and recordable much that is hard to see and/or document in established modes of videogame play: demonstrative/performative movements are more evident, kinaesthesia for example is in general much more clearer signalled as a fundamental part of the intentional gameplay experience. This current research seeks to test out a recently developed conceptual framework alongside experiences and observations of Wii play. It is already apparent that the conventions of, and circuits between, the interface, the controllers (and parts of the human body) have to be renegotiated (for experienced players) and (visibly) learned by (non-experienced players).

David Surman, University of Wales

Digital Heroes, Disjunctive Modernity: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Onimusha 3: Demon Siege (Capcom, 2005)

Contemporary popular culture in Japan is defined by two historical sensibilities; at once celebrating the modernity of its technologies, while at the same time rehearsing a pre-modern picture of national identity that is more media fiction than historical fact. Discussion of the immediate post-war experience is lost in the gulf created between the culture of Japan's post-modern consumer modernity and pre-modern national identity. Since the dominant culture is conditioned by the orthodoxies of the economic miracle and Westernisation, that reproduce strong divisions between high and low culture, media sub-cultures become the site for the focused examination of the atomic experience, American occupation (1945-1952), and industrialisation. Manga, anime and videogames are transformed into spaces for an unorthodox critique of national identity. In these mass-cultural forms storytelling and characterisation mobilise discourses about subjectivity, frequently couching political and metaphysical commentaries within seemingly puerile escapist fantasies. The historic and the fantastic collide in stories told in both past and future tenses, across multiple media. This paper suggests that Onimusha 3: Demon Siege is paradigmatic of these cultural issues. In particular, Demon Siege's use of the star image of Takeshi Kaneshiro and Jean Reno, for the playable characters Samanosuke and Jacques, brings separate issues of technological agency and media convergence to the social and historical issues of Japanese cultural production.

Session Two:

Tanya Krzywinska, Brunel University, London

Resident Zombies in Play-space

Zombies have proved to be both a plentiful and valuable resource for many horror-based videogames: killing the already dead is a neat strategy for getting round the morally loaded act of slaying non-playing-characters that are coded as live. Hacking a way through a horde of zombies has its messy and immediate pleasures, but how does the emphasis on the player being in control and actively doing things in videogames effect the 'contagious allegories' that Steven Shaviro (The Cinematic Body 1993) argues resonate so ambiguously in George Romero's zombie films. As well as discussing the particular pleasures of killing the already dead, I ask how the interactive elements of videogames affect the meaning and representation of zombies. Does the interactive format of horror-based videogames undermine the critique of consumption that has been read through zombies in other media? Does the apparently interactive nature of dispatching zombie hordes in a game mask a passive consumption of new technology? Do videogame based zombies express a disdain for the flesh by the new 'wired' generation? What allegorical meanings accrue within the particular context of twitch-based 'new' media? In examining the specific quality of videogame media, and focusing in particular on the Resident Evil cycle across different consoles, I consider how zombies in horror-based videogames measure up to film-based representations and their interpretations.

Ewan Kirkland, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University

Silent Hill: Cinematic Conventions as Game Aesthetic

This paper explores the ways cinematic conventions inform Silent Hill, a game series promoted, discussed and criticised in terms of its 'cinematic' qualities. The theoretical and cultural issues surrounding the discussion of videogames in terms of film, narrative and aesthetics are first considered. Silent Hill's use of cinematic narrative as structuring device is then analysed. All games feature protagonists with clearly-defined psychological motivation, overcoming obstacles with a view to achieving particular goals and objectives. A cause-and-effect logic dictates the player's progression through gamespace analogous to the sequential events which make up the classical Hollywood narrative. Cut-scenes reproduce the grammar of mainstream cinema, including continuity editing, photo-realistic imagery, and an emphasis on narrative and characterisation. The aesthetics of videogame play also reproduce those of cinema, playable space being depicted by a series of virtual cameras which track player movement. Overt examples of real-time editing - together with colour and lighting effects - draw attention to pertinent aspects of the gaming environment. Finally, cinematic aesthetics in game advertisements are explored. Promotional videos for Silent Hill 2 are shown to emphasise game narrative, cut-scenes and characterisation over action and puzzle solution. This promotional strategy is understood as indicating the continued cultural dominance of cinema over videogames.

Session Three:

Natasha Whiteman, Institute of Education

Online Fandom and the Silent Hill Series

Barry Atkins, University of Wales

Remediation, Replication and Adaptation: The Example of Blade Runner

Alex Sulman from SCEE Cambridge (Sony Computer Entertainment Europe)

24: The Game - A production case study

Alex Sulman worked as a designer on the development team of 24: The Game, an action-adventure game based on the Fox TV series. He will be speaking about what went right (and

wrong) during production. Presentation followed by a Q and A session chaired by Andrew Burn

Closing session: The chairs bite back

A closing discussion led by today's chairs who will identify/comment on particular aspects of the day's proceedings while referring to a specific game/film adaptation. **Esther MacCallum-Stewart** will be discussing *Lost* and *The Sims Castaways*, **Andrew Burn** will be referring to *Harry Potter* and **Greg Singh** will discuss game conventions in action films.

Speaker Biographies (in alphabetical order)

Like most academics in the nascent field of game studies **Dr Barry Atkins'** teaching and research interests in videogames and computer games were first formed while he worked inside an already established discipline. After a beginning as a historian and literature scholar, via the teaching of film and cultural studies in an eclectic Department of English, he is now Programme Leader, BA (Hons) Computer Games Design at the University of Wales, Newport. He teaches both the theory and practice of game design, as well as contributing to undergraduate and postgraduate teaching of live action film and animation in the International Film School Wales. His research and publications include a monograph study of games and narrative (*More Than a Game: The Computer Game as Narrative Form*, Manchester: MUP, 2003), a recently published edited collection of essays (co-ed with Tanya Krzywinska, *Videogame, Player, Text*, Manchester: MUP, 2007) and a string of journal articles and book chapters concerned with games aesthetics, the phenomenology of play, remediation between film and games, and issues of temporality in games. His published work on games and film includes articles and chapters on *The Lord of the Rings*, *Blade Runner*, *Toy Story* and *Men in Black*.

Diane Carr is a Research Fellow at the Institute Of Education. She co-chairs the DiGRA Special Interest Group on Games and Film, co-convenes the London Game Research Group, and teaches games and film modules on the IOE's MA in Media and Communication. She has published ethnographic media studies work on computer games and gender, as well as textual analysis of specific games, from *Civilization*, to *Enter the Matrix* and *The Thing*. Diane is the co-author of '*Computer Games; Text, Narrative and Play*' (Polity, 2006).

Helen W. Kennedy is Senior Lecturer and MA Award Leader in the School of Cultural Studies at the University of the West of England. She has published on the subject of feminist readings of Lara Croft, female Quake players and game studies more generally. She has recently completed (with Jon Dovey) a book entitled *Game Cultures* which was published in May 2006. She is Chair of the Play Research Group within the School which has organised a number of international conferences and symposia on the subject of computer games.

Ewan Kirkland lectures in Media Studies at Buckinghamshire Chilterns University where he teaches on popular culture and children's film and television. Focussing largely on horror videogames, Ewan has written papers on psychoanalysis and gamespace design; videogame marketing and promotion; gender, race and sexuality; and the function of analogue media technologies in digital horror games. Ewan has publications pending in *Games & Culture*, *Camera Obscura*, *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media* and *SCOPE: an Online Journal of Film Studies*. He is currently researching a book-length study of the videogame series *Silent Hill*, and exploring the use of Alternative Reality Games in teaching.

Tanya Krzywinska is a Professor in Screen Media at Brunel University, London. She is co-author of *Tomb Raiders and Space Invaders: videogames forms and meanings* (IB Tauris, 2006), co-editor of *videogame/player/text* (MUP 2007), and the co-editor of *ScreenPlay: cinema/videogames/interfaces* (Wallflower, 2002), author of *Sex and the Cinema* (Wallflower, 2006) and *A Skin for Dancing In: Possession, Witchcraft and Voodoo in Film* (Wallflower Press,

2002). She convenes a Masters programme, Digital Games: Theory and Design and is President of the Digital Games Research Association (www.digra.org). She is currently working on a monograph entitled *Imaginary Worlds* and an edited collection on *Lord of the Rings Online*. tanya.krzywinska@brunel.ac.uk

Esther MacCallum-Stewart is a postgraduate research fellow at SMARTlab, the University of East London. Her work investigates social relations in games through the understanding of narratives, histories and roleplaying. She is currently also writing on the representation of warfare in games.

Alex Sulman is a designer at SCEE Cambridge (Sony Computer Entertainment Europe) who worked on the development team of *24: The Game*, an action-adventure game based on the Fox TV series *24: The Game*.

David Surman is Senior Lecturer in Computer Games Design at the University of Wales, Newport. He is currently researching media convergence, digital aesthetics and Japanese popular culture. He writes regularly for several periodicals, including *Edge* magazine and *Superplay*, and is on the editorial board for *Games and Culture* and *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. David is author of *The Videogames Handbook* (Routledge, 2007), and is currently working on book chapters examining *Lord of the Rings Online* and *Katamari Damacy*, and a new book-length study, *Sonic and Mario: the Cultural Legacy of 16-Bit Games* (MIT Press), co-authored with Christian McCrea

Natasha Whiteman (n.whiteman@ioe.ac.uk) is a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Institute of Education, University of London. Her academic background is in film and media studies and her current work takes a sociological approach to the study of online fan activity. Her thesis examined pedagogic activity in two fan communities, *Silent Hill Heaven* (a site devoted to the *Silent Hill* series of survival horror videogames) and *City of Angel* (a site devoted to the television series *Angel*). Natasha teaches research methods at the Institute on the MA ICT in Education, and in the Doctoral School, with a particular focus on Internet research methods and ethics. She is the author of 'Homeside for *Silent Hill*: Fans' Negotiation of Textual Identity in Responses to *Silent Hill 4: The Room*' in Zach Whalen and Laurie Taylor (eds) *Playing the Past: History and Nostalgia in Videogames*, Vanderbilt University Press (in press).