Theorising Film-to-Game Adaptation

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the intersection of ludic and cinematic forms and theorises how games are adapted from films in the case of movie-licenced games. It proposes a series of film-to-game adaptation models which describe the practice of this type of adaptation based on structuralist approaches to adaptation theory, aesthetic game studies, and scholarship on transmedia storytelling.

Keywords

Adaptation, Film-to-Game Adaptation, Transmedia

INTRODUCTION

Iteration, serialisation, sequelisation, and franchise exploitation has remained a major industrial factor throughout the history of commercial videogames, with film tie-ins being a significant aspect of the videogame industry due to the economic opportunities of cross-media promotion, branding, and synergy. The relative synchronicity of release of a game adaptation in relation to the associated film release provides a useful classification criteria to consider film-to-game adaptations from this industrial perspective.

As the scope of movie-licenced games is broad, the primary focus of this paper are games which adapt plot events, situations, moments, or exhibit narrative timelines consistent with the adapted film. This paper investigates the intersection of ludic and cinematic forms to theorise how videogames adapt existing film properties in instances where a film (or film series) is the basis for a subsequent game. Employing narratological approaches to both film and game form and guided by Genette's theory of transtextuality, the paper critically analyses the transmedia storytelling strategies of a range of games. A set of film-to-game adaptation models are proposed which describe the practice of this type of adaptation based on concepts drawn from structuralist approaches to adaptation theory and transmedia storytelling.

Three research questions are posed:
1. How do the concepts of film and game form, adaptation, and transmedia storytelling intersect with respect to film-to-game remediation?
2. How are textual strategies employed from patterned use of formal features to create various modes of film-to-game adaptation?
3. What models can be imposed in understanding film-to-game adaptation?

This critical studies approach to film-to-game adaptation establishes four models that demonstrate that games provide the possibilities of reflecting, intersecting, extending, or extrapolating the core film by manipulating various factors via a range of textual strategies. Factors such as tone, theme, genre, aesthetics, narration, narrative architecture, and game mechanics are engineered using strategies drawn from adaptation scholarship such as addition, resequencing, omission, interpolation, and refocalisation.

The set of models formed by these strategies are applied to a series of games: *GoldenEye 007* (Nintendo, 1997), *Blade Runner* (Virgin, 1997), *The Thing* (Vivendi Universal, 2002), *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay* (Vivendi, 2004), *The Godfather: The Game* (EA, 2006), and *The Lego Movie Videogame* (Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, 2014), in order to demonstrate the efficacy of the models of film-to-game adaptation proposed. Comparative readings of formal features of these games and their film counterparts are undertaken in which they are described, interpreted and analysed to determine the models of film-to-game adaptation.

BIO
Scott Knight is Assistant Professor of film, television and videogames at Bond University where he teaches courses in film and videogame aesthetics, history, and culture. He has held the role of programmer of the Brisbane International Film Festival from 1993 to the present. Scott has authored papers on fan cultures, censorship issues, and videogame history. He is currently engaged in research on the formal characteristics of film-to-game adaptation.

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