
*Game On, Hollywood!* is a volume of collected essays offering fresh insights into how stories migrate from cinema to video games and vice versa. Its aim is ambitious as it sets out to explore the intersection of these two fields of study within the context of adaptation studies as well as that of intermedial narratology. Surely many a researcher in these fields—as well as in New Media Theory, Cultural Studies, and Computer Games Studies—would welcome such a book, since any attempts to explore how new, digital, and hybrid forms (like video games) interrelate with the traditional arts of the novel and cinema—and even more rarely with television—are quite scarce. As a matter of fact, there is only one scholarly precursor in the field of cinema-video games interplay, Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinski’s collection with the title *Screen Play: Cinema/Videogames/ Interfaces*, published in 2002, which as the editors of *Game On* point out is “already out of print” (4).

Gretchen Papazian and Joseph Michael Sommer’s edition is an encouragingly fresh addition to the existing bibliography, as the fourteen essays of the collection, exploring, in their diversity, the ways and possibilities of storytelling in different media, are placed in a sound and convincingly argued theoretical framework, that of adaptation, a theory whose revival should be attributed to the seminal notions of Robert Stam, Linda Hutcheon, James Naremore and others, as expressed in recent publications.1 The question of how “narrative” fares in the age of new technologies and multimedia storytelling is treated with critical acumen and sensitivity. Papazian and Sommer’s “Introduction: Manifest Narrativity—Video Games, Movies, and Art and Adaptation,” aptly locates the problem of narrativity in computer games within the on-going scholarly debate of “narratology” versus “ludology”; however, they surpass this false theoretical dilemma with expert ease by concentrating on the hybrid nature of video games, as it combines old and new aesthetics with new modes of experiencing the narrative text. Both the introduction and the various essays throughout this volume emphasize “the three ways stories are told (showing, telling, interacting)” (12). As for their transfer or adaptation, this is conceived “as a process of creation, a process of reception and a product” (12, italics in original).

The contributors in this volume focus on interesting theoretical issues pertaining to the convergence of narrative texts in the landscape of contemporary media by particularly emphasizing “the intersections emerging in relation to contact between video games and other media (especially, but not exclusively, film)” (13). The first five essays comprise Part I of the book with the title “Rules of Engagement: Watching, Playing, and Other Narrative Processes,”

---

and draw attention to modes of storytelling (showing, telling, and interacting) as well as to ways audiences respond to texts. Part II of the book, with the title “The Terms of the Tale: Time, Place and Other Ideologically Constructed Conditions,” consists of four articles that investigate “the sociological conditions of storytelling (time, place, and ideological underpinnings)” (14), since the kinds of texts that are adapted from one medium to another are completely different. The final section, Part III bears the title “Stories, Stories Everywhere (and Nowhere Just the Same): Transmedia Texts,” and deals with the broader phenomenon of adaptation in contemporary media studies; it also calls attention to story crossovers in various media forms. The case studies these essays propose are also quite interesting as they offer comparisons between video games and their film, TV, and even literary counterparts. Some of the titles examined are indicative of their artistic/commercial/cultural value as, for example, *The Warriors* (1979 film; 2005 video game), *GoldenEye* (1995 film) and *GoldenEye 007* (1997 and 2010 video game adaptations), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (2001-2004 TV series) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds* (2003 video game), *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* (2003 a video game; 2010 filmic adaptation), *The Star Wars* saga in all its franchise versions (1977 and on), *Afro Samurai* (2009 video game), and Disney’s *Epic Mickey* (2010 video game).

In the first essay of Part I, entitled “Playing the Buffyverse, Playing the Gothic: Genre, Gender and Cross-Media Interactivity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds*,” Katrin Althans argues that the video game adapted from the TV series is not simply just another franchise. For “a truly authentic Buffy experience” (21), the video game player’s agency must capitalize on the genre and gender conventions as these are offered in the TV show. By deconstructing the conventions of the Gothic through play, gamers “construct their own understanding of the ideologies of the Gothic and gender” (22), experiencing what is called “cross-media interactivity.” The immersion into the gameworld of the Buffyverse constitutes a totally different experience from the traditional TV experience that entails watching and entertaining oneself from a safe distance with interactivity being what Althans focuses on here. Moreover, Deborah Mellamphy, in her paper “Dead Eye: The Spectacle of Torture Porn in *Dead Rising*,” examines a particular genre in computer games, that of Torture Porn, “an especially graphic, violent version of Horror that seems to take pleasure in brutality” (13). She attempts to raise an interesting point on spectatorship/agency when comparing the violence in Torture Porn games, as is the case of *Dead Rising* (2006), with cinema violence that appears, for example, in respective Horror films, such as *Saw* (2004) or *Wolf Creek* (2005). In particular, the audience in the video game “becomes the proponent, the actual agent, of violence” (14), not merely the spectator of it (as happens with movies). Jason W. Buel, in his essay with the title “Playing (with) the Western: Classical Hollywood Genres in Modern Video Games,” also takes on a genre, that is the western in video games, such as *The Oregon Trail* (1971) and *Red Dead Redemption* (2010), so as to argue that the conventions of the Western not only enrich the artistry and prestige of western games as a cultural form, but also invite the user to develop “a more critical reflection on the ideologies imbedded in these genres (especially the sense of American exceptionalism, fixed in the Western)” (14). This is brought about via the active
participation of the player, who, by interacting with the game, becomes the principal agent of the construction of western ideologies. Ben S. Bunting Jr. and Marcus Schulzke take a different approach in their respective chapters in the volume in their attempt to comment on modes of storytelling (showing vs. interacting) in relation to adaptation. Investigating why game-to-film adaptations often fail, they point out that the key to an adequate translation from a game to film is the type of interactivity involved; for them, this should be rendered according to the affordances of the adapted medium. Bunting, for instance, brings the case of *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*, the 2003 video game which was adapted by Disney into the homonymous film in 2010. This film seems to be one of the exceptionally successful translations from game to film, because it borrows from the game those elements that work well on the screen (spectacular setting, swashbuckling kinetics, and adventurous plot devices, including the time-shifting trick of the dagger) in addition to enhancing narrativity and downgrading interactivity, elements that stay “true” to the filmic medium. Perhaps, also, this has much to do with the fact that the original game designer gets himself actively involved in the screenplay writing of the film.

In Part II, the essays focus on the context conditions for the making of adaptations. Aubrey Anabel, in “Playing (in) the City: *The Warriors* and Images of Urban Disorder,” is concerned with representations of violence, as Mellamphy does, and points out that despite the twenty-six year time span of radical change in political and social matters that separate Walter Hill’s film *The Warriors* (1979) from Rockstar Games’ 2005 adaptation into a game, the impact of the story’s ideological messages on urban violence is as strong as ever, and affects the game as much as it does the film. Denise A. Ayo, in “When Did Dante Become a Scythe-Winding Badass? Modeling Adaption and Shifting Genre Convention in Dante’s *Inferno*,” makes a comparison between a literary text, Dante Alighieri’s *Inferno* (c. 1308), and its game adaptation, Visceral Games’ *Dante’s Inferno* (2010). She finds the game adaptation from such an old poem quite successful, “despite, or even more because of, its hypermasculinization and sexualization of the medieval poem’s characters” (14). David McGowan, in his essay “Some of This Happened to the Other Fellow: Remaking *GoldenEye 007* with Daniel Graig,” complicates matters even more by tracing changes in the storytelling mode from a James Bond Film, Martin Campbell’s *GoldenEye* (1993), to its adaptation into a game, that is Rare/Nintendo’s game *GoldenEye 007* (1997), to the remake of the game Eurocom/Activision’s *GoldenEye 007* (2010). He calls attention to aspects of the systems of production and commercial interests that greatly affect text make-up and storytelling in multiple media. Finally, Stewart Chang deals with a game to game adaptation, adding another interesting dimension to the set of essays contained in Papazian and Sommers’ volume on the context of storytelling. He focuses on the sociological conditions of location and national culture when a Japanese game is remade for American audiences. He argues that some aspects of Japanese culture (especially those that are gender-sensitive) need to be erased when the game is “localized” for Western markets, lest they would appear to be offensive to Western sensibilities; while, on the other hand, some oriental social stereotypes need to be retained “paradoxically ‘allow[ing] American consumers to derive racial
and misogynistic pleasures,’ by incalculating an image of a racialized, sexualized, Asian ‘Other’” (16).

Finally, in Part III, the essays open up the discussion to issues of adaptation and its central role in media studies as well as to transmedia storytelling. Michael Fuchs, in “‘My name is Alan Wake. I’m a writer’: Crafting Narrative Complexity in the Age of Transmedia Storytelling,” concentrates on the narrative structures of a game, as is the case of Remedy Entertainment’s Alan Wake (2010) and its web series counterpart, Bride Falls, in order to illuminate strategies at work that “reshape—or even eliminate—the storytelling divide between video games and other visual media” (16). Felan Parker, in his “Millions of Voices: Star Wars, Digital Games, Fictional Worlds and Franchise Canon,” looks upon the vast field of franchise and media transformations in the universe of the Star Wars saga. He addresses the larger questions of what constitutes the authentic or non-authentic text, the original from the non-original creation, the canonical from the non-canonical field of production in an array of media forms—film, TV, toys, books, video games—in which the Star Wars omniverse expands and distinguishes the “official” from the “non-official” stories. TreAndrea M. Russworm’s essay, “The Hype Man as Racial Stereotype, Parody and Ghost in Afro Samurai,” which focuses on racial stereotypes and the character Ninja Ninja in Namco Bandai’s 2009 Afro Samurai, develops the argument that “the game’s story” and its various “adaptations of established characters, ‘deliberately make dilemmas surrounding stereotype, parody, and psychology’” (16). The game’s controlling figure, Ninja Ninja, serves as an “extension of an ideological system that produces controlling images of Black masculinity as racialized caricature” (16). The final essay by Lisa K. Dusenberry, “Epic Nostalgia: Narrative Play and Transmedia Storytelling in Disney Epic Mickey,” explores how the Disney brand travels through and across various media. She points out that the emotional process of immersion in the story (and engagement with the game) “operates much like adaptation itself” where the tension created through the story’s immediacy is counterpointed by the text’s hypermediacy: “a consciousness of the ways in which one media draws on the devices associated with another” (16). In other words, for a successful and rewarding gameplay experience, the player becomes conscious of having to draw on his or her former experiences of historical Disney texts (film, cartoons, television, theme parks) as well as on the Disney elements that turn into vivid representations of the gameworld when remediated in the gameplay, which enhances further the player’s competencies.

The book Game On, Hollywood! is a pioneering collection of essays, offering new insights into the theoretical discussion of how to treat this rather new cultural form of video games. If it is too early to answer the question whether video games are an art, this volume and the essays that it holds have tried to theorize and generate fresh approaches towards the narrative texts of today (as well as their media of film, television, and video games) and how they affect and shape each other. Although the tendency so far has been to examine how games have been affected by cinema, it is to the credit of the editors of the present book to examine the intersection of video game and cinema from both directions: “film as game, game as film” (4). As such this collection comes to complement and counterpoint the first seminal volume dealing with these matters by
King and Krzywinska. Another instance of original thinking in this volume is the theoretical placement of the transmedial stories within the context of adaptation studies. The majority of the essays and the case studies they propose for analysis are about adaptations and modes of storytelling. The contributors have tried to illuminate the points of convergence (or divergence) of media, to show how modes of storytelling are affected by the ways the different media borrow or adapt from each other, and to highlight “the social, cultural, historical, and political implications of such relations” (4). It is for its opening of new in-roads that the scholarly value of this edition will increase in time.

Michalis Kokonis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece.

Works Cited

