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Introduction

Jeff Thoss and Michael Fuchs

In 1982, at the height of the golden age of arcade video games, Disney released *TRON*, a film today largely remembered for its pioneering use of computer-generated imagery. However, the movie also constitutes an interesting early example of the kind of phenomena this collection examines. *TRON* is not only a film about video games featuring a game developer and arcade owner as the hero, it also seeks to emulate the spatial logic and audiovisual make-up of classic titles such as *PONG* (Atari, 1972), *Pac-Man* (Namco, 1980), and *Battlezone* (Atari, 1980) in the iconic scenes set in its cyberspace world called “The Grid.” In a smaller-scale version of contemporary transmedia franchising strategies, *TRON*’s release was moreover accompanied by an eponymous arcade game (Bally Midway, 1982), which recreates a number of the film’s action and game sequences in the medium they are based on. The *TRON* franchise has since expanded to include other motion pictures and games as well as novels and comic books, but the basic premise of the franchise rests on the idea of the interrelatedness of the media—intermediality.

As early as 1982, *TRON* thus showcased elements of the complex intermedial network in which video games exist, as they serve as the inspiration for the aesthetic of particular cinematic sequences, which are, in turn, adapted for the medium of the video game. These media entanglements have only increased in more recent franchise entries. For example, not only does *TRON: Legacy*’s (2010) opening sequence intelligently interweave the built reality of American cities with their virtual doubles, but the film also incorporates the first film’s iconic arcade hall. Covered up in a corner stands *TRON*—the arcade game. However, it is misplaced in the arcade, since, in the original movie, there never was such a game. As Jason Sperb has concluded, “[t]he image of that game . . . foregrounds a larger nostalgia for the era of general public video-game arcades whose immense popularity came and

went somewhere in the thirty years between the releases of these two movies.”¹ The score supports the trip down memory lane, as Journey’s “Separate Tunes” (1983) accompanies the scene from an intradiegetic jukebox. With its synth rock sound and Steve Perry’s characteristic 1980s rock voice, the selection of a song could hardly be more appropriate to evoke nostalgia for a bygone era (that never was but always could have been the way it is produced by the media). Through intermedial references, *TRON: Legacy*, a movie, thus exploits the history of video games and classic rock music to tap into the nostalgia for the 1980s, which has been nearly omnipresent in early twenty-first-century popular culture.

The relationships exemplified by the *TRON* franchise are a hallmark of the media landscape as it has recently been theorized. In their book on *Understanding New Media* (1999), Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin famously argue that “all mediation is remediation,” since “[o]ur culture conceives of each medium” on the basis of how “it responds to, redeploys, competes with, and reforms other media.”² Drawing on this idea, André Gaudreault has suggested that media, at any given time, do not aim to create independent, unique media, media different from another, characterized by media specificities.³ Indeed, as Gaudreault stresses in his history of the interrelations between cinema and (all sorts of) attractions at the dawn of the twentieth century, film was not simply influenced by other media and cultural practices, film “was vaudeville, magic lantern show, magic act[, and so on].”⁴

Digital media occupy a privileged position in this constellation. As early as 1984, Alan Kay described the computer as “the first metamedium,” since it “can dynamically simulate the details of any other medium, including media that cannot exist physically.”⁵ More recently, Lev Manovich has echoed Kay’s view, propagating a notion of digital media as software-based simulations of “previously existing” and “non-existent media.”⁶ Indeed, digital games are enmeshed in a network of media that shape one another. Cinema and literature have not simply influenced video game narratives; games have also long simulated and integrated other media in their gamespaces and user interfaces, from the remediation of print books in games such as *Ultima VII* (Origin, 1992) to the modeling of a fully-fledged media ecology in games such as *Grand Theft Auto V* (Rockstar, 2013). In turn, other media have responded to the emergence of video games with a range of intermedial practices and strategies, ranging from the inevitable screen adaptations of popular titles (e.g. *Super Mario Bros.* (1993)) and imitations of game aesthetics in television shows such as *Spaced* (Channel 4, 1999–2001) to novels featuring video games as central plot elements (e.g. Ernest Cline’s *Ready Player One* (2011)) and artistic appropriations of games, as in Cory Arcangel’s installation *Super Mario Clouds* (2002). Since convergence defines contemporary popular culture, digital

games are, moreover, often part of (if not the foundations of) larger transmedia universes, while walkthroughs, Let's Plays, and e-sport broadcasts have effectively transformed (inter)active video-gaming into a (more or less) passive spectator sport.⁷ Indeed, Steven E. Jones has suggested that "video games must be understood as parts of complex social networks."⁸ The media, and the texts these media produce, are part and parcel of this social environment. Accordingly, Rune Klevjer has noted that various aspects of the "'alien' dimension of cultural conventions" feed into gameplay, which is, he argues, always also a "textual practice, at once configurative and interpretive, both unique and intertextual."⁹

This collection explores the place of video games in these intermedial networks as well the nature of the various relationships between video games and other media. As such, we evidently take our cue from the above-mentioned scholars and the discussions that have shaped Anglo-American media studies over the past two decades. However, our endeavor also arises from the context of intermediality studies, which has largely been developed in continental Europe, taking its conceptual inspiration from, among others, Dick Higgins' notion of an "intermedia" art that is situated in-between established forms.¹⁰ Less concerned with the development and nature of the mediascape as such, scholars such as Irina Rajewsky and Lars Elleström have instead developed fine-grained models of intermedial relationships, offering a range of analytical tools to describe the precise nature of these relationships.¹¹ These theoretical works have vested the field with ideas for a wealth of studies covering the most diverse media artifacts. Video games, however, rarely take center stage in these discussions.¹²

In one of the few explorations of video games from the vantage point of intermediality studies, Hans-Joachim Backe presents an in-depth overview of the connections between comics and video games. His typology differentiates between various kinds of relationships, which are primarily arranged along two interrelated axes: whether the focus lies on the ludic or narrative dimension, on the one hand, and the difference between digitality and analogicity, on the other. Based on these principles, Backe carves out nine different types of connections. Digital-to-analog transcreation denotes analog ancillary texts (often referred to as "paratexts") accompanying video games (e.g. prequel novels and sequel comics). Digital-to-digital transcreation describes the phenomenon where a digital paratext, such as a digital comic, accompanies a video game. Analog-to-digital transcreation, on the other hand, comes in two shapes: individual transcreation (trying to recreate the features of a specific analog text in the medium of video games, such as the video game *XIII* (Ubi Soft, 2003)), which adapts a comic and adopts its aesthetics (see Armin Lippitz's contribution to this volume), and systemic transcreation, such as

when *Elegy for a Dead World* (Dejobaan Games, 2014) refers to Romantic poetry at large (see Jason Kolkey's contribution to this volume). Representation is the wholesale inclusion of another medium, such as Ellie reading comics in *The Last of Us* (2013) or college students playing *Halo: Reach* (Bungie, 2010) in the opening minutes of the movie *Shark Night* (2011). Integration, on the other hand, refers to the "invisible" incorporation of another medium, such as the frameless "Previously On" segments which recapitulate *Alan Wake's* (Remedy, 2010) earlier episodes and the "re-start" logic characteristic of video games driving movies like *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014). Pastiche describes a mere surface aesthetic "without content-level references," as Backe stresses. He uses the example of a cel shader mod for *Crysis* (Crytek, 2007), which has been hailed for its photorealism, suggesting that cel shading recreates the visual style of comics. However, we do wonder how this type of a visual reference to another medium can ever remain "merely on the surface." Does the appropriation not highlight the constructedness of photorealism? That even comics, which are visually much farther away from physical reality, can create realism without being photorealist? Finally, appropriation includes all sorts of "less apparent" (as Backe puts it) interrelations between comics and other media. In the particular case of the connections between comics and video games, Backe singles out visual elements that are not part of the diegetic world but still visible to the reader/player, such as motion lines in comics and experience points popping up after eliminating an opponent in role-playing games.¹³

As with any typology, Backe's model quickly reaches its limits—a fact that he himself acknowledges. Accordingly, we have decided not to establish a working typology for the case studies which follow. After all, this collection seeks to demonstrate that video games are one of the richest areas with regard to intermedial phenomena in the current mediascape. In so doing, this collection places European and North American scholarly traditions into a productive dialog that enables a deeper understanding of the intermedial dimension of video games, on the one hand, and their various roles in today's media environment, on the other.

Still, we have divided our subject matter into three main areas of investigation, each of which features several essays. To begin with, there is the question of how and why video games so frequently incorporate other media. This dimension covers what intermediality studies has discussed under terms such as "intermedial reference"—one medium "thematizes, evokes, or imitates elements or structures of another, . . . through the use of its own media-specific means"—or, more generally, the representation of one medium by another.¹⁴ In the case of video games, such evocation, imitation, or representation, of course, often takes the form of a literal simulation. The focus here is on the specific techniques games use for the incorporation of

other media as well as the resultant effects this has on their place within the wider mediascape. A second line of inquiry leads us to what one might dub the reverse side of the equation, the ways in which other media have responded to and used video games for their own ends, as well general processes of exchange between video games and other media. Here, we are once again looking at a range of practices that fall within the category of intermedial reference or media representation, but also at the classic case of adaptation, the transfer of one medium's content into another.¹⁵ The section hence includes one case study of video games adapting subject matter from another medium, without however, integrating the other medialities. As before, we consider individual relationships between digital games and other media to reveal something (and we are decidedly vague here) about the intermedial network at large, be it in the way that "old" media react to the emergence of a "new" one or in how the relationship among "new" media is itself continuously renegotiated through intermedial transfer. A final section deals with video games' location in transmedia universes, where the concept of adaptation, with its clear-cut relation of source and target medium, yields to a notion of content being simultaneously distributed across multiple media.¹⁶ Here, our interest lies specifically with what video games bring to the table as specific gateways into a transmedia universe.

The first section opens with two chapters exploring digital games' debt to cinema for numerous of its stylistic devices. The connection between video games and film was among the first to be explored systematically, and it remains one of the few that has a substantial body of criticism devoted to it.¹⁷ Håvard Vibeto takes us right into the matter of games imitating cinema, as he focuses on the ways in which the contemporary military first-person shooter adapts the spectacular aesthetics of Hollywood blockbusters. Rejecting the notion that graphical prowess is mere "eye candy" that detracts from gameplay, Vibeto argues that audiovisual spectacle instead constitutes the main attraction in a genre whose gameplay mechanics have not substantially changed since the 1990s. Vibeto shows how recent entries in the *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield* series have used increasing hardware capacities and advances in game engine design to recreate the "impact aesthetics" audiences know from blockbuster cinema.

In the second chapter, Bernard Perron, Hugo Montembeault, Andréane Morin-Simard, and Carl Therrien deal with one of the most frequently discussed notions in the context of the interrelations between video games and film, namely that of montage. However, theirs is not another argument against or in favor of a particular critical vocabulary. Rather, the authors adopt a metaperspective on the issue and, departing from the sociolinguistic concept of discourse community, examine how and why the connection to concepts

from film (studies) was made in the first place. Surveying a broad corpus of journalistic writing on the one hand and scholarly writing on the other, this contribution not only shows how the understanding and purpose of particular terms differs in the two communities but also how strongly it is shaped by the social context in which communication takes place.

The next three chapters in this section examine video games' connections to three different media: photography, print literature, and comic books. Sebastian Möring and Marco de Mutiis map the increasingly complex field of in-game photography. Bringing together concepts from visual culture studies and game studies, they develop a typology of four basic forms of intermedial relationships that are situated between simulation and remediation of photographic practices in digital games. The authors distinguish two cases where photography is directly implemented into a game, either as a central part of gameplay mechanics essential to the progression through a game or as an optional photo-mode suspending the actual gameplay. Moreover, Möring and de Mutiis also consider two cases where photography is brought to the game from outside, either through the practice of taking screenshots or through photo-oriented user modifications.

Next up, Jason I. Kolkey tackles *Elegy for a Dead World*, an indie game drawing its inspiration from Romantic poetry whose main form of interaction consists in prompting users to compose short pieces of literature. For Kolkey, *Elegy's* reference to the Romantics is no coincidence, for they developed the notions of creativity, genius, and collaboration that are still valued in today's digital culture, especially in the guise of technoromanticism. The game, however, is no emphatic celebration of these concepts but rather uses them to critically reflect on our understanding of games as well as on the ideological underpinnings of authorship as it is understood in the context of digital media.

In the closing contribution of the first section, Armin Lippitz examines the incorporation of comics into video games. For Lippitz, these amount to more than aesthetic or narrative effects; in a series of case studies ranging from the 16-bit classic *Comix Zone* (Sega, 1995) to the mobile game *Framed* (Loveshack, 2014), he discusses operational borrowings that games have made from comics, attempts to transform elements such as panel borders and the space between them—the gutter—into gameplay mechanics. As seemingly media-specific features are thus “gamified,” the resultant games also dynamize their source medium and avoid merely static reproductions of comic book pages.

The four chapters in the second section look at examples of how other media have taken up and transformed elements of digital games for their own ends as well as at the phenomenon of adaptation. Up first, Ricardo Fassone discusses a number of related phenomena that have radically transformed video-game culture and as well as digital games' place within the mediascape

at large—the emergence of Let’s Plays, streams, e-sports broadcasts, and machinima. The author notes that the activity of watching video games, though always present in the culture, has generally been sidelined in academia, where the theorization of users’ ergodic interaction with games has been a prime concern. What can be observed in these new media formats’ remediation of games is, following Fassone, a linearization of play that brings back the issue of video game spectatorship with a vengeance. The chapter explores this issue in connection with the notions of aspiration, nostalgia, and performance. The next two contributions examine intermedial transfers between digital games and literature, albeit in different directions.

Laurent Milesi takes on French avant-garde writer’s Chloé Delaume intricate engagement with *The Sims* games in a series of works—including the author’s website—created over several years. As Milesi demonstrates, Delaume’s texts do not merely attempt to recreate game-like structures with the means of a novel or blog; they fundamentally blur the border between literature and video games as well as that between reader and player, author and character, reality and simulation. Drawing upon the tradition of French autofiction, Chloé Delaume fashions herself as an avatar to be performed and played with by recipients, as a being that is virtually embodied in game and text form. The chapter thus highlights how intermedial strategies are used to question identity constructions as practiced in this age of the multiplication of online selves.

Marco Caracciolo, in turn, studies video game adaptations of a literary classic, Edgar Allan Poe’s body of short stories. He specifically focuses on the dream logic and oneiric atmosphere characteristic of Poe’s writing. Caracciolo argues that Poe’s handling of dreams can be considered “realistic” with regard to how current cognitive scientists conceive of dreams, and that it is this cognitive realism which serves as the basis for adaptations. What video games take from Poe’s tales, then, are not simply narrative elements but an atmosphere in line with the structural features of dream experiences, an atmosphere which is translated into a multimodal and interactive form.

Stephan Schwingeler concludes this section with a study of video game art. Based on philosophical discussions about the transparency and opacity of media, he argues that artistic appropriations of video games tend to interfere with and disrupt the drive toward hyperrealism and illusionism characteristic of digital games’ development. Schwingeler discusses artists who modify games to render them virtually unplayable or in some cases even create self-destructive games, foregrounding the medial and technical apparatus that ordinarily ensures gamers’ seamless immersion into virtual spaces and effaces itself in this process. As the author shows, these artistic strategies do not exist in isolation, but are interrelated with an art tradition that ranges from early modern meta-painting to Dada and Fluxus takes on mass media as well as analog games.

Our collection concludes with three explorations of video games' role in the transmedia franchises that have come to dominate the popular imagination over the last few decades. Tim Summers surveys the varying functions of scores in *Star Trek* games, beginning with the re-use of the original TV series' music in Interplay's adventures games. Here, the author finds a remarkable congruence between the two media, facilitated by the score's emphatic, repetitive, and modular nature, which works equally well in both contexts. Later film or television productions, in contrast, starkly differ from *Star Trek* video games with regard to their scores. While the former have generally favored subdued background music, the latter have continued to use music that is clearly "to be heard," leading to the same composers adopting different styles for different media and, at least in one case, a prominent song spreading from a game to other *Star Trek* works.

Mattia Thibault examines the transmedial expansion that has arisen around the Lego construction sets. His interest here is first and foremost with a comparison of analog play and digital games, in which a seemingly insurmountable gulf between the two becomes visible: video games have typically eschewed the open-ended, free-play potential of the Lego bricks in favor of a stringent narrativization with limited to no possibility of building without restrictions. Yet, as Thibault demonstrates, Lego construction toys are nevertheless ideally suited to the demands of convergence culture. Their semiotic properties, notably their modularity and high degree of abstraction, make it possible to produce Lego versions of virtually any existing franchise.

Our final contribution comes from Christophe Duret, who examines *Second Life* role-playing games that have been created in the Gorean subculture surrounding John Norman's series of fantasy novels. Duret shows that, as with other popular cases of transmedia storytelling, what is translated from the novels into the games is very much their world (Gor), and his interest lies specifically with how the RPGs handle Gor's ethos, its society's organization, customs, laws, etc. The author terms the mechanism via which these are recreated on the *Second Life* platform "procedural expansion," meaning that Gor's social configuration is used to create gameplay possibilities and constraints. The result is a gameworld that Duret describes as a "thetic space," as the manifestation of a particular political doctrine, philosophy or ideology, which, due to Norman's controversial views on gender, also causes divisions within the Gorean subculture.

Compared to many of the examples discussed by our contributors, the relationship between films and video games as evinced by *TRON* in the early 1980s may seem almost quaintly straightforward. As digital games continue to make inroads into the very heart of contemporary culture, and as new media forms continue to populate the mediascape, the complexity of the

intermedial networks games find themselves enmeshed in will likely only increase. Stemming from a diverse range of disciplinary backgrounds, the twelve chapters in this collection propose to conceptualize and thus reduce some of that complexity. It is our hope that they will spark discussion of the intermedial dimension within games—their being *intermedia* games—as well as games' relationship to and place within a larger media ecology—their being games *inter media*—among researchers and students alike.

Notes

- 1 Jason Sperb, *Flickers of Film: Nostalgia in the Time of Digital Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 133.
- 2 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 55.
- 3 André Gaudreault, *Cinéma et attraction* (Paris: CNRS, 2008), 44.
- 4 Ibid., 113; our translation; emphasis added.
- 5 Alan Kay, "Computer Software," *Scientific American* (September 1984), 59.
- 6 Lev Manovich, *Software Takes Command* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 44–5.
- 7 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
- 8 Steven E. Jones, *The Meaning of Video Games: Gaming and Textual Strategies* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 2.
- 9 Rune Klevjer, "In Defense of Cutscenes," in *Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conference Proceedings*, ed. Frans Mäyrä (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 2002), 194.
- 10 Dick Higgins, "Intermedia (With an Appendix by Hannah Higgins)," *Leonardo* 34, no. 1 (2001).
- 11 Irina Rajewsky, *Intermedialität* (Tübingen: Francke, 2001); Irina Rajewsky, "Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality," *Intermedialités* 6 (2005); Lars Elleström, "The Modalities of Media: An Model for Understanding Intermedial Relationships," in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. Lars Elleström (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Lars Elleström, *Media Transformation: The Transfer of Media Characteristics among Media* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
- 12 Studies rooted in the discourse of intermediality studies which tackle video games include: Britta Neitzel, "Performing Games: Videogames and Intermediality," in *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature—Image—Music—Sound*, ed. Gabriele Rippl (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015); David Ciccoricco, "Games of Interpretation and a Graphophilic God of War," in *Intermediality and Storytelling*, ed. Marina Grishakova and Marie-Laure Ryan (Berlin: De Gruyter,

- 2011); Benjamin Beil, *First Person Perspectives: Point of View und figurenzentrierte Erzählformen im Film und im Computerspiel* (Münster: LIT, 2011); Kevin Corstorphine, "'Killer7' and Comic Book Aesthetics in Contemporary Video Games," *International Journal of Comic Art* 10, no. 1 (2008).
- 13** Hans-Joachim Backe, "Vom Yellow Kid zu Super Mario: Zum Verhältnis von Comics und Videospielen," in *Comics intermedial: Beiträge zu einem interdisziplinären Forschungsfeld*, ed. Christian A. Bachmann, Véronique Sina, and Lars Banhold (Essen: Bachmann, 2012).
- 14** Rajewsky, "Intermediality," 53; Elleström, *Media Transformation*, 27–35.
- 15** Adaptation goes under such names as "media transposition" (Rajewsky) and "transmediation" (Elleström) in intermediality studies.
- 16** Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*.
- 17** Studies on the interrelation between film and video games include: Tanya Krzywinska and Geoff King, ed., *ScreenPlay: Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces* (London: Wallflower, 2002); Robert Alan Brookey, *Hollywood Gamers: Digital Convergence in the Film and Video Game Industries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Gretchen Papazian and Joseph M. Sommers, ed., *Game On, Hollywood! Essays on the Intersection of Video Games and Cinema* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013); Riccardo Fassone, *Cinema e videogiochi* (Roma: Carocci Editore, 2017).

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