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Why Some Worlds Fail. Observations on the Relationship Between Intertextuality, Intermediality, and Transmediality in the RESIDENT EVIL and SILENT HILL Universes

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Martin Hennig

**Why Some Worlds Fail.
Observations on the Relationship
Between Intertextuality,
Intermediality, and Transmediality
in the *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*
Universes**

Abstract

Both the *Resident Evil* and the *Silent Hill* series were among the most famous and successful franchises of video game culture until the film adaptations appeared, which initiated a slow but unstoppable decline. The films remained artistically independent, but the game experience of the following parts of the game series increasingly converged with the movies. The *Resident Evil* series put the focus on more action instead of horror and puzzles and the *Silent Hill* series adapted itself to the narrative design and dramaturgy of the cinematic franchise. This resulted in both game worlds no longer being able to replicate their earlier artistic and economic successes—the most recent parts, *Resident Evil 6* (2012) and *Silent Hill. Downpour* (2012), were considered the low points of the series. In this article, reasons for this loss are discussed by describing the processes in both transmedial franchises with the related concepts of intermediality and intertextuality. A starting point of this article is the assumption that each storyworld includes a specific set of general rules (characters, settings, conflicts, etc.), which can be varied to a certain degree in a transmedial adaptation. Nevertheless, video games seem to include media-specific rules whose violation within the same medium is perceived as a

break in the structural coherence of the storyworld. A closer look at the *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* series indicates that, in these cases, new releases are considered to stand in an intermedial or intertextual, but no longer in a transmedial relationship to the original texts.

1. Introduction

What is transmedial storytelling? The superordinate concept of intermediality can broadly be defined as the totality of crossmedia phenomena (cf. FRAAS/ BARCZOK/DI GAETANO 2006: 7),¹ involving a crossing of borders between media (cf. RAJEWSKY 2005: 46), for instance in the form of an adaptation of a text² in another medium, whereby the two media stand in hierarchical relation to each other. It follows that the crucial difference between inter- and transmediality lies mainly in the fact that the indication of an original medium is not important or even possible within a transmedial system (cf. RAJEWSKY 2002: 13); the essential characteristic of transmediality is the media-independence of its objects (cf. POPPE 2013: 39). In this case, certain plots, themes, motifs, or compositional strategies are realized across multiple media with the formal means specific to each medium (cf. RAJEWSKY 2005: 46), thus accentuating the intrinsic value of any involved medium. Jenkins therefore defines transmedial storytelling as a non-media-specific, platform-neutral phenomenon:

Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes it[s] own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story. (JENKINS 2007: n.pag.)

Then, however, two questions arise:

1. What does media independence mean, if this refers not only to a single transmedial phenomenon, but also to an entire transmedial franchise?³ A production-aesthetical approach is commonly taken to help specify this. This line of argumentation has also already been created by Jenkins:

Transmedia storytelling reflects the economics of media consolidation or what industry observers call »synergy«. Modern media companies are horizontally integrated—that is, they hold interests across a range of what were once distinct media industries. A media conglomerate has an incentive to spread its brand or expand its franchises across as many different media platforms as possible. (JENKINS 2007: n.pag.)

While a degree of simultaneity is connoted here with the image of horizontal integration, the offshoots of a transmedial franchise are of course not always released at the same time. However, if the temporal dimension is not im-

¹ I exclude phenomena of media combination here, since these are also related to the term multimediality.

² »Text« is not used as a literary term in the following; rather, it refers to various forms of medial articulation, which are composed of signs and produce meanings.

³ JENKINS 2007 refers, for example, to the *Matrix* universe or several superhero franchises.

portant, at what point exactly is it no longer possible to specify an original medium?⁴ This question is all the more justified since textual origins seem to be very well perceived in the cultural consciousness and form an intrinsic basis for valuation when a cultural artefact makes its own contribution to a franchise. As it said in a review of the video game to the hit TV series *Lost* (2004–2010): »This is a game for the fans, which only fans can appreciate. But at the same time—in a strange bit of paradox—this is a game that will disappoint almost every *Lost* fan« (GOLDSTEIN 2008: n.pag.). The TV series therefore seems to form the yardstick for measuring all subsequent offshoots of the franchise—and so the question arises as to the difference between intermediality and transmediality in the process of transmedial storytelling.

Nevertheless, this differentiation is becoming increasingly important, especially for the field of game studies, because the contemporary video game can be considered a paradigmatic pioneer of the processes described by Jenkins. This needs to be verified. A sub-type of intermediality is formed by intermedial references,⁵ specified by Rajewsky as a simulation of the functioning of one medium in another, as far as intermedial references by definition imply a crossing of media borders:

Intermedial references, then, can be distinguished from intramedial [...] by the fact that a given media product cannot *use* or genuinely *reproduce* elements or structures of a different medial system through its own media-specific means; it can only *evoke* or *imitate* them. [...] And yet it is precisely this illusion that potentially solicits in the recipient of a literary text, say, a sense of filmic, painterly, or musical qualities, or—more generally speaking—a sense of a visual or acoustic presence. (RAJEWSKY 2005: 55, original emphases)

Following this approach, the video game relies less and less on intermedial strategies (for example the adaptation of literary structuring patterns); instead, it positions itself increasingly in transmedial systems, in which its own medial specifics are emphasized. The episodic adventure series *The Walking Dead* (2012–), for example, accentuates its interactive quality compared to the previous comics and the TV series as its unique selling point.⁶ This is already becoming apparent in the introductory text message that follows directly after the start of the game: »This game series adapts to the choices you make. The story is tailored by how you play«. This example again suggests that transmediality has less to do with the chronological order of publication than with a general independence of the productions involved.

⁴ Schröter points out that the impossibility of speaking of specifics of media any longer is a general problem of the transmedial perspective: »1. On the one hand, [...] the thought of such a directed transfer of a procedure [...] has to assume that the procedure is *media-unspecific* enough in order to be able to appear in another media context as the same, that is, as a re-identifiable principle—this being the basis for every transmedial comparison. 2. On the other hand, the procedure has to be *media-specific* enough in order to still be able to point in its new media context to the medium from which it was borrowed, or from which it originates« (SCHRÖTER 2012: 24f., original emphases).

⁵ On the various types of explicit and implicit intermedial references, cf. WOLF 2014: 29–37.

⁶ Cf. SCHMIDT 2014 for detailed explanations on transmedial aspects of the franchise of *The Walking Dead*.

2. But how can this independence be defined more precisely? A related question is: How does it differ from the concept of intertextuality? Intertextuality in the narrow sense denotes the reference of a text to another text, but this reference is not crossmedial in the sense that the mediality of the original text is not important (although the texts may belong to different media).⁷ As an analytical concept, intertextuality examines how an independent meaning (i.e., one *different* to the original text) is created by intertextual references. The single text as a closed entity is not questioned in this way (cf. BECKER 2007: 140). When each medium in a transmedial system contributes to the whole in an independent manner, this, conversely, means that each text is, in principle, a closed structure, and that the relationship between these independent texts can also be defined as an intertextual relationship.

Hence, the distinctions between intermediality and transmediality as well as between intertextuality and transmediality are difficult to draw within a transmedial reference system. On the other hand, the concepts of intertextuality and intermediality can help describe the processes of transmedial storytelling in greater detail. This will be discussed in the following on the basis of two exemplary franchises, where reactions from fans and critics suggest that new releases, at a certain point, are no longer accepted as parts of the respective franchises.⁸ This means that new releases in these cases are considered to stand in an intermedial or intertextual, but no longer in a transmedial relationship to the original texts.

The *Resident Evil* and the *Silent Hill* series will serve as examples, since both were among the most famous and successful franchises of video game culture until the film adaptations appeared, which initiated a slow but unstoppable decline. Since being made into a film in 2002, *Resident Evil* has become a successful series with four sequels to date. The movie *Silent Hill* in 2006 has already produced one sequel. Although both films went artistically independent ways, in terms of their game experience, the subsequent parts of the game series converged increasingly with the movies. This resulted in both series no longer being able to replicate their earlier artistic and economic successes—the last parts *Resident Evil 6* (2012) and *Silent Hill. Downpour* (2012) were considered the low points of the series, which can be verified by comparing the ratings on www.metacritic.com. In contrast to their paradigmatic, highly rated predecessors (*Resident Evil 4* [2005], PS2: Metascore 96, User Score 8.9/*Silent Hill 2* [2001], PS2: Metascore 89, User Score 8.8),⁹ *Resi-*

⁷ Following a narrow, literary understanding of the term ›text‹, intertextual references could be also described as *intramedial* references (cf. WOLF 2014: 22).

⁸ Some exemplary user comments: »An absolute mess of a game, you call this ›Resident Evil?‹« (Lokizarro); »I used to be the biggest Capcom and RE fan ever, but I wont be buying another Resident Evil game after this one« (Pfhor); »Silent hill is coming to an end with downpour« (carpejason); »This game is atrocious as a Silent Hill sequel« (Inccubus). Of course, there are also positive reviews and dissenting opinions, but it is conspicuous that negative reviews usually refer to deviations from the *Silent Hill* or *Resident Evil* brand.

⁹ ›Metascore‹ is the legally protected term from the *Metacritic* website for an arithmetic mean of existing reviews from professional testers, the ›User Score‹ is based on consumer reports. Even if the calculation of the average is not transparent, tendencies can be read here nevertheless.

dent Evil 6 achieved a Metascore of 67 and a User Score of 5.0, while *Silent Hill. Downpour* achieved a Metascore of 68 and a User Score of 7.3.¹⁰

What happened? One way to explain these processes lies in a further defining characteristic of transmedial franchises, which are equipped with a greater openness compared to other texts:

The encyclopedic ambitions of transmedia texts often results in what might be seen as gaps or excesses in the unfolding of the story: that is, they introduce potential plots which can not be fully told or extra details which hint at more than can be revealed. (JENKINS 2007: n.pag.)

It is therefore useful to refer to the premises of the storyworld concept, which is based on a holistic understanding of narrative texts in the process of interpretation and also takes into account blank spaces:

More generally, *storyworld* points to the way interpreters of narrative reconstruct a sequence of states, events, and actions not just additively or incrementally but integratively or »ecologically«; recipients do not just attempt to piece together bits of action into a linear timeline but furthermore try to measure the significance of the timeline that emerges against other possible courses of development in the world in which narrated occurrences take place. (HERMAN 2002: 14, original emphasis)¹¹

The potentiality of the storyworld is introduced here in contrast to the fixation of narrative texts in a traditional understanding. From this perspective, it is important to ensure consistency across all media products involved in a transmedial franchise and to give the impression that the developed fictional universe is at least potentially perfect and can be explained by logical reasoning, without, of course, excluding fantastic elements (cf. BRÜCKS/WEEDEL 2013: 336f.; THON 2015).

With regard to this impression of logicity, Marie-Laure Ryan argues that each storyworld includes a specific set of general rules (existents, setting, physical laws, social rules and values) that are essential for maintaining narrative coherence (cf. RYAN 2014: 34ff.).¹² These rules can apparently be varied to a certain degree in a transmedial adaptation, such as in the *Star Wars* video game *The Force Unleashed* (2008), where the player is located on the dark side of the Force. Nevertheless, video games seem to include media-specific rules whose violation within the same medium is perceived as a break in the structural coherence of the storyworld. This is the case in the examples of *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*. Accordingly, I will go on to discuss the specific transfer processes between the original *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* games and their cinematic adaptations as well as the related modifications of the game series, in order to be able to reconstruct the essential storyworld rules on a ludic and a narrative level. On this basis, the relationship between intertextuality, intermediality, and transmediality in both fictional universes will be described in more detail.

¹⁰ Both values are based on the versions for the Xbox 360.

¹¹ For an application of the storyworld concept to the field of video games, cf. BACKE 2008: 215–232.

¹² Ryan calls such rules static components and separates them from dynamic components (physical and mental events) (cf. RYAN 2013: 91).

2. From Games to Movies¹³

An innovative quality is often denied to cinematic adaptations of video game franchises, because, as Bittanti states, »the logic behind the adaptation strategy is purely economic: In most cases, these films simply try to draw a pre-existing fan base to the cinema rather than expanding the cinematic discourse on video games« (BITTANTI 2001: 219). The *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* movies, in contrast, contribute to the narrative context developed in the games in a media-reflexive manner, in the form of a simulation of the ludic mechanisms of video games on a narrative level.

The *Resident Evil* movies include an independent plot: the protagonist Alice does not appear in the games. Parallels can be found particularly in an intermedial sense. The cinematic franchise is based on a dramaturgy that is typical for games: it includes short cutscenes with little explanatory dialog, followed by long action sequences. The narrative fragments of the films also correspond to the conventional *topoi* of video games. Nothing less than the fate of the world is on the line and all characters besides the main protagonist Alice (Milla Jovovich) are peripheral. Alice's heroic role in the plot consists in her turning out to be the ultimate weapon against the zombie invasion of the world. Consequently, Alice functions as the center of all depicted events. Additionally, in a striking number of scenes, she is positioned centrally in the picture, like a game avatar.

Especially the fifth part of the movie franchise, *Resident Evil. Retribution* (2012) is characterized by a complete conversion to game dramaturgy. The main location, a Research Institute of the dubious Umbrella Group, functions as a simulator of different settings, such as Moscow or an American suburb. Some are known from the previous movies, since Umbrella has tested different zombie scenarios in the simulation. Each environment acts as an individual game level with special enemies in each section (e.g., communist zombies in Moscow). Even reincarnations are possible here, which are reminiscent of a game-specific restart button. Several dead characters from the first parts of the cinematic franchise return for a guest appearance and even Alice herself is marked as replaceable: in a clone faculty, she meets dozens of images of herself.

The first *Silent Hill* movie also includes references to several game mechanics and the initial situation of the film roughly corresponds to that of the first game. When Sharon DaSilva (Jodelle Ferland) suddenly gets visions of Silent Hill, her mother Rose (Radha Mitchell) drives her to the town, where Sharon disappears only a little later. Rose begins the search for her missing daughter in the Midwich Elementary School in Silent Hill, which also acts as the first major setting of the game. Additionally, Sharon has to use the same items as her virtual predecessors, such as a map or a flashlight; she must

¹³ A retelling of the extremely convoluted plots of the two series is limited to what is necessary in the following.

also fulfill game-like tasks (a search for keys, etc.), and a noisy radio signals approaching enemies, which is one of the trademarks of the games series.

At the same time, the movies adapt the narrative model of the games to film-specific conventions. This will be illustrated with reference to the *Silent Hill* franchise.¹⁴ For example, the explanatory models are more scientific than in the games. The omnipresent fog in *Silent Hill* is explained explicitly for the first time in the franchise as originating from a subterranean fire and causing a permanent ash rain. The population of *Silent Hill* is also much more present in the movies, with members of a twisted religious cult providing monological explanations for the mysterious events. The locations in the first parts of the games were, in contrast, empty wasteland, where the social history of the place had to be decrypted from textual fragments and dialogues with the few minor characters. In the movies, this process of demystification is supported by a conversion to conventional narrative *topoi* such as the classical two-worlds model of the fantastic film. The *Silent Hill* movie adds a storyline to the plot of the first game, in which Christopher DaSilva (Sean Bean), the husband of the disappeared character Rose, searches for his wife in a ›real-world‹ version of *Silent Hill*, visualized by an alternating scene, in which Rose is located on a street in *Silent Hill*, while her husband searches her at the corresponding place in his reality. In the games, however, the ontological state of the town remains unexplained, because they do not include an external perspective on the location.

In addition to these disambiguations, there is a shift toward classical American horror cinema, by changing the sex of the main character in relation to the first game. This is underlined by the fact that Rose acts as a typical ›scream queen‹ in the first half of the film. Genuinely cinematic models are therefore used to adapt the gameplay to the medium, with this trend being intensified in the second part of the movie series. *Silent Hill. Revelation* (2012) broadly follows the dramaturgy of the slasher genre: every time the protagonist Heather (Adelaide Clemens) discovers another setting, another monster that resides there pursues her, so that Heather is constantly busy running and hiding. This leads to a traditional heroes' journey, where the heroine only starts to fight against the monsters and followers of the cult after the first two thirds of the film.

These changes on the narrative level cause a crucial change in the subtext. While the place *Silent Hill* represents a psychologically motivated manifestation of the personal hell of several main characters in the games, it is charged with characteristics of a Christian connoted imagination of hell in the movies (e.g., in connection with the aforementioned subterranean fire, which causes a blazing inferno beneath the streets of the town). Another ex-

¹⁴ However, the *Resident Evil* films are also based on as many game-related allusions as TV or cinematic references. The character Chris Redfield, for instance, is double-coded because he not only refers to the game character with the same name but is also played by the main actor of *Prison Break* (2005–2009), Wentworth Miller. Accordingly, Chris is the only person who knows the way out of the zombified prison in *Resident Evil. Afterlife* (2010), which is used as a running gag throughout the film.

ample concerns the famous game character Pyramid Head. For James in *Silent Hill 2*, the recurring enemy of the executioner symbolizes the fact that he has killed his beloved wife and consequently repressed the memory of his actions. For Rose, however, the executioner pursuing her has no personal meaning, so he is charged with features of decay, such as slimy, rotting cockroaches on his body, which occur here for the first time in the franchise (the games take over this element later), since Pyramid Head represents a Christian conception of hell and its demonic minions. Unlike in the underlying game, this Christian-connoted model of world results in the church acting as the central location in the first film, since the cult's twisted faith here forms the central normative transgression. Thus, the spatial boundary between the church and *Silent Hill* does not act as a semantic boundary. Rather, the cult emerges as the real evil throughout the film and is finally sanctioned in an act of escalating violence.

At the same time, the cinematic world is charged by the tragic history of the protagonists; a dysfunctional family model frames the terrible events. Rose drives with Sharon to the town without informing her husband about the plan. Since the family has not previously been intact, it is also not possible to reinstall the family idyll in the course of the film; hence the search of the husband for his wife and daughter remains unsuccessful. This is especially evident at the end of the film, which connects the tragic family history with the Christian model of world and includes a significant departure from the games. Rose manages to rescue her daughter from *Silent Hill*, but when she returns home she realizes that she and her daughter are still located in an intermediate world, since her husband is not able to interact with them. While *Silent Hill* is a mainly psychological manifestation in the games, it is conceived as a kind of limbo in the film, from where there is no escape, especially when the leading characters suffer for deviation from norms such as the middle-class American family model. The morality propagated in traditional American horror movies, which punishes those that transgress against the bourgeois moral code, seems to be responsible for this additional punishing of the characters.

Consequently, the intermedial staging of the cinematic franchise moves further and further away from the mechanisms of the video game series in the second movie. References to the games are situated on a metaphorical level. For instance, all characters in this part wear masks, either directly, or in a symbolic sense, that can be understood as a reference to the game-specific dichotomy between player and avatar:¹⁵ the monsters are faceless or turn out to be shape changers. A friend of Heather turns out to be a traitor and a member of the twisted cult, while the cult itself does not show its true face. Ordinary cult members wear gas masks and their leader reveals

¹⁵ This is also confirmed by the fact that Sharon is controlled by several instances all the time. Her father tries to dominate her, while the darkness (the demonic power behind the events in *Silent Hill*) uses Sharon—or, rather, Sharon's separated dark side, Allessa—literally as an avatar on earth.

herself as a demon at the end of the movie, transforming into a horrible monster. The main protagonists Heather and Harry are also not what they seem: they carry the names of characters from *Silent Hill 3* (2003) as disguise, so that the cult cannot find them. In reality, they are identical with Christopher DaSilva and his daughter Sharon from the first film.

Sharon is therefore created as an ambivalent figure. In one of the first scenes, her father gives her the outfit of Heather in *Silent Hill 3* as a birthday present, a situation that foreshadows the subsequent events for the informed viewers. Sharon's story ends when she is able to defend herself like Heather in the games. Thus, her implicit task is to merge with her embodied character, which exists as a differentiated person only in the extradiegetic reality—i.e., the storyworld—formed by the *Silent Hill* games. Sharon is designed as a character that in principle is independent from her virtual role model, since she originates from the first movie. However, the games form an intertextual level of comparison and constitute an implicit goal for her journey, providing it with meaning.

In summary, the narratives of the films differ significantly from that of the games due to media-related actualizations and transformations into cinematic conventions. They include intermedial references to the medium of video games, in the form of a combination of a simulation of video game structures on a narrative level with massive intertextual references to the original storyworlds (either similar settings or parallels in the constellation of characters, etc.).¹⁶ The intertextual level also specifies the configuration of the intermedial references (to determine concretely, for example, which items—map, flashlight, etc.—Sharon carries in her inventory), condenses the plot, and injects additional meaning for connoisseurs of the games. In this way, the movies constitute themselves as independent in relation to the video games, on the basis of intermedial references, while intertextuality ensures narrative coherence.

3. From Movies to Games

The transfer processes do not run in one direction only: both game series have been deeply transformed by borrowing from the cinematic adaptations. Beginning with the fifth part, *Silent Hill. Homecoming* (2008), the *Silent Hill* series has experienced some obvious visual changes as well as some less obvious narrative and ludic adaptations to the cinematic storyworld. These have characterized the *Silent Hill* game world ever since. The visual changes are most evident: the visual changes of the world in *Silent Hill. Homecoming* have been taken over directly from the *Silent Hill* movie, for instance. The same applies for major parts of the world design and the visual appearance of the enemies in the subsequent games.

¹⁶ Cf. also FEHRLE 2015; THOSS 2014 on *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (2010).

It is worth taking a closer look at these narrative and ludic changes. Particularly interesting in this respect is *Silent Hill. Downpour*, where the narrative changes relate to the open-world structure of the game. In the course of events, the prisoner Murphy experiences his personal hell in Silent Hill, comparable to James Sunderland in part two. The main character suffers from his complicity in the attack on a friendly guard during his time in jail and the town permanently confronts him with this guilt. But this is not psychologically suppressed, like in *Silent Hill 2*. Murphy knows his guilt, his story is only narrated in fragments through flashbacks. Furthermore, the exact events are not fixed, but related to the actions of the players at the end of the game: Depending on whether they kill or spare another character, the following cutscene shows whether Murphy has attacked or spared his friend in the past. Thus, the end of the game changes. Either Murphy goes free or he is executed. In this way, a moral model of guilt and punishment is implemented in the gaming process. Not for nothing are negative characters visualized in the game as representations of the Boogeyman, who punishes children for evil deeds. It is not the repression or acceptance of a past crime that are the dominant narrative topics here; rather, the represented world is dominated by a form of divine justice, which seeks to sanction norm violations and is linked with the Christian-connoted world model of the movie franchise.

These narrative modifications led to a ludic alignment with the action genre. Attempts to run and hide formed an important part of the first games, as this was in harmony with the theme of repression. With the disappearance of this narrative level and the focus on retribution, the game mechanics changed. Even comparing the cover designs used for *Silent Hill. Homecoming* with those of the first four games makes clear that part five focuses more on the conflict with monstrous creatures than on psychological horror. While the covers of *Silent Hill* part one to four tended to accentuate the acting characters or the mysterious setting, some design variants of part five are based on a presentation of the horrific opponents, partly including the weapon arm of the protagonist as a prefiguration of the upcoming fight.

This is also reflected in the characterization of the main figure: since protagonist Alex passed through military combat training, the gameplay is much more action-driven than that of its predecessors. And while the intrigues of the secret cult constitute a central mythological background of the entire game series, the members of the cult act as physical opponents in the movies, which must be combated by force. This also forms a central gameplay element of *Silent Hill. Homecoming*, in which Alex combats the members with the force of arms.

Part six, *Silent Hill. Downpour*, also tries to stimulate innovation with the integration of foreign genre elements: the game is based on an open-world mechanic which involves dozens of voluntary sidequests besides the main missions. Such gameplay adjustments continued to the point that the *Silent Hill* brand served only as a narrative context for the mobile adaption *Silent Hill. Book of Memories* (2012) for the handheld PlayStation Vita. The

game itself works as a gameplay clone of the hack and slay *Diablo* (1996), and has nothing in common with the original game mechanics of the series. Consequently, this change of the game genre was not accepted by fans and critics—the production received devastating reviews all around the world.

In relation to the *Resident Evil* series, changes can be stated on a slightly different level. In this case, the games adapt to the character focus and the global setting from the movies, and this also culminates in modifications on the level of game mechanics:

1.) The first *Resident Evil* movie is created relatively episodically, but the episodes are held together by the overarching story of the outbreak of the T-virus and questions about the memory loss of the main character, Alice. This development culminates in the fourth installment of the cinematic series, in which relevant story elements are settled exclusively at the beginning and end of the film: appearances of the antagonist Wesker (Shawn Roberts) connect the two parts, the middle episode in the prison is self-sufficient. *Resident Evil. Retribution* is episodic anyway, due to the level structure. The games are therefore increasingly episodically structured. *Resident Evil 6* divides the story into four campaigns, which describe the same events from different perspectives and can be played individually. This is accompanied by a general sub-dominance of the narrative level. All four campaigns include several McGuffins; the actions of the protagonists are motivated simply by the fact that they have to keep track of a special person in every case. Fittingly, it works as a personal and non-scenario centered narration. The structure of the represented dystopia contains no more secrets, thus focusing the soap opera-like character constellations.

2.) The movie franchise ceased to be limited to the events in Raccoon City since the third part in 2007. Since *Resident Evil 5* (2009) the game series has also been designed as a global narrative. *Resident Evil 6* in particular includes more varied and spectacular locations than ever before. A plot summary would also fit into a James Bond scenario. A review describes this point as follows:

Alone in the Leon campaign which was promoted as »classic«, the hero [...] is not only almost killed by a military aircraft and followed by dozens of cars in an explosion cloud, he also survives a plane crash, car accidents, as well as a train wreck and flies with a helicopter through a complete high-rise building. (HERDE 2012: n.pag., translation M.H.)

Because of this global focus, well-known and public locations (such as Shanghai in part six) are staged as flashpoints from the outbreak, and the atmosphere gets more and more apocalyptic. Likewise, the films are strictly steering toward a global apocalypse, which is already made clear by the title of the second part, *Resident Evil. Apocalypse* (2004). The first game parts, however, were restricted to enclosed scenarios, where a non-infected outside was always imaginable.

3.) The subdominance of the narrative level, the dissolution of the enigmatic character of the represented world, and the apocalyptic setting, led to

the point were puzzles became a rarity in the game series.¹⁷ Instead, the films' tendency toward action overkill was translated into suitable game mechanics. The Las Plagas virus, originating in *Resident Evil 4*, created intelligent weapon-using zombies and initiated a development that transformed the *Resident Evil* series into a narrative scenario that is able to adapt to any kind of action mechanic, such as a team shooter scenario. Consequently, the shoot-outs in part six provide a third-person cover shooter gameplay, as in the *Gears of War* series.

4. Dysfunctional Convergences

The *Resident Evil* movies established some kind of theme park version of the franchise, as described by Aarseth in relation to the Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game *World of Warcraft* (2004–), whose players are »moving from one attraction to the next while forgetting or ignoring everything about the fictional world of the same name« (AARSETH 2008: 119). They implemented an arcade game-like staging, by building on level structures, etc., which the games never had in this way. At the same time, however, the game series modernized toward a more action-oriented approach, whereby the films worked as exemplary models. The result was an increasing convergence between games and movies, just as in the case of the *Silent Hill* franchise.

But what exactly were the incompatible processes regarding the transmedial storytelling? Storyworld writer Jörg Ihle distinguishes between six elements, that each storyworld includes: ›concept‹, ›conflict‹, ›character‹, ›setting‹, ›rules‹ and ›genre‹ (cf. IHLE 2014). But in relation to games, this elements can refer both to the ludic and the narrative level. Following this, the *Resident Evil* game series includes narrative changes relating to ›character‹ and ›setting‹, but what has changed here to a larger extent are the related ludic ›rules‹ and thus also the ›genre‹ of the game, not the narrative genre of the storyworld, which remains a horror scenario.

The narrative changes in the *Silent Hill* game series, by contrast, have taken place on the levels of ›concept‹ and ›conflict‹. While the central conflicts in the earlier parts were settled on a personal level (me vs. myself), the conflict in *Silent Hill. Downpour* becomes ethical-moral (good vs. evil). However, the essential effect on the narrative coherence of the represented world is also based on a corresponding transformation of the ludic components: some game elements, such as the integration of free decision rules and the open-world genre, which are related to the newly integrated moral conflict on the

¹⁷ A few puzzle settings are still included in part six—e.g., in the cathedral section, where mirrors or statues must be placed in the correct positions. This is typical for the series—except that the solution is directly determined, because there is only one way of doing this.

narrative level, do not match the original concept of the storyworld, with its guilty protagonists and uncompromising consequences.

This is precisely why the series were better able to cope with the change from games to movies than with the change from movies to games. In the first phase, the movies simulated features of games on a narrative level. They worked as intermedial adaptations of games *per se*. To do this, however, they had to move away from the narrative models developed in the games. Thus, transmedial storytelling requires a foreign media reference, but only in order to accentuate the specific value of the media involved.¹⁸ At the same time, the movies ensured narrative coherence by referring to storyworld elements of the original *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* games. In this way, the films can be regarded as transmedial because they retain their medial independence with a merely intertextual approach to storyworld elements of the games.

The games, in contrast, were more adaptive, because they simulated narrative elements of the films on a ludic level as well. They can therefore be regarded as full intermedial adaptations of the films. However, this resulted in a radical break with the storyworld elements of the original games: when the game series absorbed the scenarios, which were adapted for the movies, some storyworld specifics got lost. Consequently, the more recent parts were perceived by users as different storyworlds, which remained only in an intertextual relationship to their virtual predecessors.

In both cases, it is again worth citing David Herman, who describes the storyworld reception as a model-building process:

Narrative understanding requires determining how the actions and events recounted relate to what might have happened in the past, what could be happening (alternatively) in the present, and what may yet happen as a result of what already has come about. (HERMAN 2002: 14)

This seems to apply also and in particular to ludic specifics of video games, because when they get lost, the related storyworlds lose their own identity. The production company Capcom noted as a result that it wants to perform a return to the roots of the game series for *Resident Evil* part seven (cf. WÖBBEKING 2013); the same seems to apply for the next part of *Silent Hill* (cf. KROSTA 2014).

5. Epilogue. Functional Franchises

Finally, it should be noted that the concepts of intermediality and intertextuality can be used for a description of the processes in successful transmedial franchises. One telling example of this is the *Lego* game series. The users

¹⁸ The *Walking Dead* games series also accentuates its interactive qualities in the context of an intermedial reference to serial TV conventions (»previously on« sequences at the beginning of a new episode, cliffhanger structures, etc.).

experience stories related to different cinematic franchises (e.g., *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, etc.)—just with *Lego* figures as main characters. The crucial question in this context seems to be: should the represented world be described as a part of, for instance, the *Star Wars* universe, the *Lego* universe, or as a hybrid form? And if it is a hybrid form, then which universe can be determined as the dominant one? If we take the rules of the layer of the *ludic* world as the basis of our considerations, the answer is simple, since these rules correspond not to those of video games, located in the *Star Wars* universe, but to the overall rules of the *Lego* franchise: the characters are not able to die, puzzles need to be solved by constructing objects with *Lego* bricks, etc. In this respect, we are dealing with a game world belonging to the *Lego* universe, with intertextual references to storyworld elements of the *Lego* franchise on a ludic level, including intermedial references to the *Star Wars* movies as a background against which the games mark themselves as independent. Additional intertextual references to storyworld elements of the *Star Wars* universe on a narrative level ensure the narrative coherence of this hybrid *Lego Star Wars* franchise.

Interestingly, this reading also corresponds with *The LEGO Movie* (2014). It includes significant intermedial references to the *Lego* video games: ludic mechanisms involving building objects out of *Lego* bricks are cited in several sequences. Overall, however, movies and games are marked as functioning independently from each other. While the games involve an ironic retelling of the plots of their cinematic models, *The LEGO Movie* tells a separate story, which lends plausibility to the integration of the different *Lego* video game franchises in one *Lego* universe. The protagonists of the film reach several new places (or, rather, storyworlds) within the *Lego* universe, in which intertextual references to different franchises are located. The world of the film is thus created as a superior world from which the offshoots derive.¹⁹

This relationship between the movie and the games in the *Lego* universe represents a paradigmatic transmedial franchise, because of the general independence of the productions involved in different media, which is demonstrated on the basis of intermedial references. At the same time, all the games follow the ludic rules of the *Lego* universe in an intertextual sense. Hence no logical break is provoked within the game worlds, as in the examples of *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*.

And while the success of the *Lego* universe does not break down, there are some developments from the independent games sector, such as *Outlast* (2013), that seem to aspire to the rank of the old survival horror genre kings *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*. Also of interest in this regard is *The Evil Within* (2014) by creative director Shinji Mikami, the creator of the *Resident Evil* series, which references the original narrative and ludic world rules of both game series on an intertextual level, to contrast the actual situation of

¹⁹ As the last minutes of the film demonstrate, this superior world is in turn subordinated to the real world. This way, the heterogeneous, intertextual mix of the film is classified as a product of the imagination of a playing child and thus also made plausible.

the survival horror genre. The game includes numerous allusions to the first parts of *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*: the cutscene to the first zombie encounter, for example, corresponds to the analogue sequence in *Resident Evil 1*, the gameplay is very similar to that of *Resident Evil 4*. In addition, the game switches to a mental hospital in an intermediate world between the chapters, reminiscent of the psychological background and the metaphorical visual language of the first parts of *Silent Hill*. At the same time, the visual presentation of *The Evil Within* includes noticeable black bars at the top and the bottom of the screen—again, an intermedial reference serves as a background, against which the media independence of the product is emphasized. In this case, this means that *The Evil Within* distances itself from the current cinematically inspired standard of survival horror, for which the last parts of *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* are paradigmatic, by simulating an aesthetic proximity to the older parts of the two series. Thus, the core of both series now appears to move into other franchises and seems to become the basis of the local world rules. Perhaps the reason for this is simple: some worlds fail.

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