Comparative Look at Spectator Identification in Films and Video Games

by
Taylor Reiner

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(Honors Scholar)

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Jon Lewis

Often, characters of entertainment works, such as movies, books, or video games, display traits that people find relatable. In certain cases, a spectator of a work will develop such a strong psychological bond with a character that they identify with them. Identification with fictional characters is usually a subconscious act where the viewer or reader will empathize and project themselves onto a character in the film or book they are experiencing. Although this sense of identification is universal in entertainment mediums, films and video games have distinct ways that they cultivate this identification phenomenon.

This thesis examined a variety of identification catalysts, suppressors, and theories in efforts to create a comprehensive comparative look at identification between the two mediums. With technological, interactive, and format differences, these mediums differ greatly in their effectiveness at fostering identification in the spectator. Although video games are similar to film, their interactivity pushes new boundaries of identification that film does not. Alternatively, film's character leniency allows for a range of identification possibilities that video games do not.

Key Words: identification, spectator, character, film, game

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<u>Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Computer Science </u>project of Taylor Reiner presented on March 2, 2016.

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

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Introduction

Although subtle, identification is a cornerstone of the relationship between people and media. This subliminal instinct to identifying with a character in a story is often impactful to the spectator's reception, engrossment, and involvement with a narrative work. Studies show that a person's enjoyment of a film or video game greatly increases when they can relate to one of the characters on-screen (Hefner, Klimmt, Vorderer). In recent times, a lack of identification is often a critique of a work, seen in many movie and game reviews (Appleton, Mead). Evan Gottlieb, Oregon State University Associate Professor, notes how "[t]he complaint that 'I just couldn't identify with the hero/heroine' … enters the college classroom fairly often" whenever students describe the shortcomings of assigned readings (Gottlieb). There has even been a noticeable upswing in more identifiable qualities in recent times, possibly due to modern admiration of relatable characters (Onion). While unrelatable characters may not be a valid criticism, this recent trend showcases the importance of identification.

When a spectator sees themselves in a character, they are known to root for and invest in that character more. Filmmakers and video game developers use this to manipulate their audience into certain moods or mindsets. Developers often make the player control the protagonist as a way to increase their identification, and subsequent investment, with the main character. Alfred Hitchcock talked about using "casual" identification in *Psycho* to make the audience identify with Norman Bates: "When [Bates] is looking at the car sinking in the pond... the public are thinking, 'I hope it goes all the way down!' It's a natural instinct" (Truffaut). In this way, identification becomes a powerful tool for creators to cultivate an experience.

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While identification is such an integral part of all media, this thesis will restrict the conversation to a comparative look at identification within the mediums of film and video games. Specifically, the thesis will break down identification into succinct components to isolate how this process works for both mediums. The thesis will build this comparison through the application of various theories, with the hope to better explore the interrelation between film and games.

Identification Theory

The theory behind identification was first developed by Sigmund Freud, in 1897, to partly explain the Oedipus complex, with the son identifying as his father (Freud). Over time, many theorists have generalized the idea, like Professor Gary Woodward who describes identification as "the umbrella term for the sensation of shared experience" (Woodward). When specifically applied to media, identification theory is about the spectator believing that they are sharing the "thoughts, feelings, and situations of a media character, experiencing the character's happenings from the character's perspective, and … merging with or being that character" when watching them on-screen (Cheetham, Hanggi, Jancke). Projection also plays a key role in media identification, where the spectator believes they see certain attributes in the character, often ones that they identify with (MS).

As previously mentioned, identification can be broken down into different forms. Woodward describes the three main categories of identification as: "ideological ('I agree'), demographic ('We are both women'), [and] shared circumstances ('Both of us grew up on farms')." Although there are other types of identification, these three are perhaps the most encompassing as they account for all

shared behaviours, appearances, actions, or anything spectators recognize as their own. In addition to these forms, the thesis will touch on the idea of distance and identification, technology's effect on identification, and spectators identifying through camera perspective.

Identification Theory in Film

Unlike psychology-based (or even media-based) identification theory, film identification theory builds off of the musings of Jacques Lacan. Although "Lacan never theorized about film" itself, his work guided many early film theorists and their thoughts on identification in film (McGowan). These theorists found Lacan's work much more flexible than Freud's in translating it to film; in fact, during the 1980s, "Lacanian theory was regarded as the only modern and ideologically correct form of psychoanalysis and Freud was treated … as the inventor of a crude prototype" (Webster).

Lacan's main influential writing was his mirror essay. In it, Lacan posits that humans' "first sense of self-identity" happens when they are infants "looking in a mirror and relating to their bodies" (McGowan). This mirroring experience is crucial to Lacan's theory as it acts as a perfect metaphor for the "stage in the child's development when the child anticipates a mastery of the body that she/he lacks in reality" (McGowan). The child sees their three-dimensional, "fragmented" body as a coherent whole through the two-dimensional mirror image (McGowan). This initial misreading of their body sparks the illusion of mastery for the child. Even though the mirror simply reflects an image of what the child is actually doing, "the mirroring experience deceives insofar as it presents … the wholeness of the body … in a way

that it is not experienced" (McGowan). The child, the subject, now will be influenced throughout their "entire mental development" by their assumptive and misguided first identification of themselves (Lacan).

Lacan's essay was a crucial stepping stone for the early film theorists because it gave them a psychological link between the visual illusion of film to the "process through which subjects enter into ideology" (McGowan). Much like the mirror, the film screen produces flat images in which spectators can see themselves. Philosopher Louis Althusser called this process the "ideological interpolation of the subject" (McGowan). As a transposition and evolution of Lacan's work, Althusser's theory describes the process as "individuals misrecognizing themselves as subjects by taking up a socially given identity," and then assuming this identity (McGowan). Althusser believed the subject existed within the scheme of various ideologies that constructed the subject's identity. Althusser's work bridged the gap between the mirror stage and the cinema with its emphasis on the ideological aspects of these misrecognitions and their subjective identification.

Other investigations into film identification found both illusion and structure as important components of identification. Film theorists, such as Cristian Metz, Todd McGowan, and Jean-Louis Baudry, cite cinema structure itself as cultivating this illusion. Metz believed that when a spectator is watching a film, the imaginary nature of the "cinematic experience allows [them] to overcome … the sense of lack" that they feel in the real world (McGowan). "Like the dream," McGowan adds, "film lures the subject into accepting the illusion that it offers." McGowan sees film as the closest a medium has ever come to placing its subject, the viewer, in the same position as the dreamer's "position in the dream." Aided by the dream state, the

spectator can "accept the experience as it presents itself" (McGowan). With cinema helping them "escape the sense of real … that characterizes life outside the cinema," the spectator can easily position themselves in the film's world, as the imaginary cinema fosters this positioning (McGowan).

The notion of illusion also applies to the illusion of mastery by the spectator. In a dream, "the subject does not direct the narrative movement but [rather] follows where the narrative leads" (McGowan). The dreamer's absence of agency parallels that of the film viewer's, who truly lacks mastery over the film image. However, the structure of the cinema lends itself to giving a sense of mastery back to the viewer. In terms of visual mastery, Metz believed the cinema apparatus sets up the spectator as "absent from the screen as perceived, but … [still] 'all-present' as perceiver" (McGowan). Baudry commented on the spectator's illusion of complete knowledge and mastery by noticing the uncanny resemblance of the cinematic experience to that of Plato's cave. As a near perfect "mise-en-scène of Plato's cave," the movie theatre layout, with the "projector, darkened hall, [and] screen," reconstructs the cave and "leads spectators into self-deception" (McGowan). This mastery of what they see is important because, just like the child, the spectator is still building their identification off of the misrecognition of self.

"[A]s a machine for the perpetuation of ideology," the cinema structure can be seen as the literal recreation of the mirroring experience (McGowan). The spectator (the child) believes they have a certain mastery over the cinematic experience (their body). The spectator's mastery is derived not only "based on [their] position … relative to the events on the screen" (in the mirror), but also due to cinema's structure and dreamlike nature (McGowan). When the spectator sees aspects of themselves in

the character on-screen (their own reflection), they misrecognize themselves as that character and identify as them.

Identification Theory in Games

On the surface, video game identification theory is quite similar to film identification theory. Although it is a shallow definition, video games as interactive movies is a valid way to see the similarities between their respective identification theories, as interaction is the main difference between the two mediums. Because of these similarities, video game identification theory builds off of its film counterpart and shares many of the same components, such as the mirroring experience and misrecognition. There are subtle differences within these components (to be explored later), but the heart of film identification is there.

Since interactivity is the central leap to video game identification, the characters in games that a player identifies with can be split into two categories. These categories both differ from film in terms of interactivity, yet differ from each other in terms of the player's expected level of agency and projection. The first category is the "specific character" in a narrative known as the playable character (Hefner, Klimmt, Vorderer). This character is equivalent to a film character in that they have their own personality, background, and identity. The main difference here is that the spectator plays as them and controls their actions at specific moments throughout the game. The other category is the player character. In this case, the player is essentially playing themselves in a game, taking on a "role represented in the game world" (Hefner, Klimmt, Vorderer). In this category, the player is expected to have more interaction as the character, more agency, and ultimately project

themselves more onto their character.

As with a movie character, the playable character's own traits and voice exist without the involvement of the player. Because of this, the same identification process as film is present here, with the player in the spectator's subject position. However, now the player controls the actions of the character, with the ability to dictate how the character acts. This interactivity lets the player make the character inherently more identifiable to them as the character now behaves closer to what the player feels and identifies with.

Ironically, the ability to control a character can cause a drop in identification. When games give the player authority over a character, the player feels a sense of mastery. This is one of the subtle differences between the film and video game mirroring experience; the player does have some amount of mastery over that two-dimensional image that they see in front of them. Yet, they do not have full mastery. If the game does not allow a player to perform a certain action, the player loses that sense of control. The player is hit with a sense of "I wouldn't do that" and disconnects with the character (Portnow). This happens all too often, however, as video games can only be programmed to be able to do so much.

The reverse is also true. When the actions performed by the game character, while controlled by the player, are incongruent with the personality, temperament, or actions of the game character when the player is not in control, that character feels schizophrenic and unrelatable. This type of inconsistent character can be seen in *Grand Theft Auto 4* with Niko. When in control, players are able to make Niko drive cars off cliffs or shoot guns in the air wildly. However, when the game controls Niko in a cutscene, he becomes a serious character. The player now has trouble identifying

with what is essentially two separate characters.

Some game developers saw identification pitfalls such as these and took the path of the aforementioned player character to remedy this. The player character approach involves abstracting out certain aspects of a character so as to leave a "blank slate" for the player to project themselves upon (Portnow). To create this blank slate, developers implement a variety of techniques, like the amnesia plot point. Instead of giving the player a character with a background and an established personality, the player begins as a character who suffers from amnesia. This makes the character "an empty vessel, [to be] molded by the player" (Portnow). Now, the player only needs to identify with the character's actions, something they already control.

One of the earliest techniques is the silent protagonist. Not unlike the viewer character in *Dora the Explorer*, the silent protagonist is talked to, yet does not respond. This is meant to allow the player to see the character their way, without any dialogue coming from the character that may contradict that vision. With its questionable effectiveness, the silent protagonist method fell to the wayside in favor of players selecting from myriad dialogue options whenever their character needed to respond (Gile). The idea of customized dialogue is used to give the player a character they can not only control, but also voice.

Beyond the voice, physical customization is integral to the player character. As seen in Woodward's demographic identification, spectators identify strongly with those who look like they do. In games, player customization allows the spectator to modify their player character to the finest detail. Now, with customization, the player is playing a character who speaks like they do, looks like they do, and acts like they do. In this way, the video game transforms the spectator from the "all-perceiving" to

the all-controlling.

Identification Through Horror

With a foundation of basic film and video game identification theory defined, an exploration to genre identification can yield new comparisons between the mediums. The specific genre of horror is useful as identification is key to horror. When the audience identifies with the characters being chased, the horror film is able to better share that sense of fear and terror. Because of this, "the best horror protagonists are average and everyday people like Laurie Strode in *Halloween* [or] Harry Mason in *Silent Hill*," people the audience can relate to (Portnow).

However, this is not the only reason why audiences identify with the horror protagonist. Film and video games both steer the audience member toward identifying with the protagonist through their structure. In horror video games, the spectator starts the game as the protagonist and plays the whole game as them. The game limits the player to the protagonist's perspective in order to foster identification instantly. Surprisingly effective, the method forces the player to voluntarily perform the actions needed to move through the horror world. Now, the player is the one investigating the dark house or a nearby scream. This instills dread and fear into the player, narratively the same emotions that the protagonist is feeling.

Carol Clover talks about how horror films do this in her book *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*. Clover posits that horror films, especially slashers, "structurally 'forced'" all genders in the audience "to identify with the resourceful young female [protagonist] (the Final Girl) who survives the serial attacker and usually ends the threat" (Totaro). This structural eventuality is seen in *Halloween*, where every

character besides the Final Girl is either insane, incompetent, or killed. This leaves only Laurie, the Final Girl protagonist, for the spectator to identify with.

Although Clover's gender-fluid identification argument is important, the process of arriving at the identification with the Final Girl is the key notion for the thesis. This natural process shows an important quality of the horror film structure: its organic nature. The spectator is lead to identify with Laurie through exploring every other character. Clover even mentions that, assuming "point of view = identification," we begin "linked" and sharing the perspective of the killer, yet naturally "[o]ur closeness to him wanes as our closeness to the Final Girl waxes." Ultimately, the spectator naturally bypasses identifying with other characters to identifying with the horror protagonist through "a shift underwritten by story line as well as camera position" (Clover).

While both mediums yield protagonist identification, the comparison here is stark. Horror video games revolve around this idea of forced identification, making the player be the protagonist. This way, the spectator must opt-out if they do not identify with the protagonist. In horror films, the spectator opts-in to identifying with the Final Girl rather than being stuck with them. This structure is much more subtle and fluid, as the spectator now arrives instead of starts as the Final Girl. More succinctly, video games make the spectator identify *as* the protagonist, while films make the spectator identify *with* the protagonist.

Demographic Identification Through Horror

In his book *Shocking Representation*, Adam Lowenstein discusses the ability of horror films to tackle national social conflicts such as Hiroshima and World War II.

A relevant takeaway from the book is just how well horror films can represent

national tragedy. A nation's citizens identify with the characters in the films through

both their national identity and the shared trauma stemming from a national tragedy.

Lowenstein uses the example of *Deathdream*, a movie filled with "horrific images,

sounds, and narrative," to "embody issues that characterize the historical trauma of

the Vietnam War." Americans familiar with the horrors of Vietnam can relate to the

characters in *Deathdream*, just by sharing such a similarly traumatic experience.

Lowenstein captures this phenomenon perfectly: "... mantras for our time could well

include 'I am traumatized, therefore I am,' along with its corollary, 'You are

traumatized, therefore you are.' With historical trauma, … personal identity extends to

the realm of national identity."

Video games attempt to do this as well. A prime example is seen in the *Halo*

games. In the first *Halo* game, released before 9/11, the player fights alien horrors on

foreign planets. After the events of September 11th, "the next two games in the series

… featured attacks on Earth" by foreign aliens (Totten). These attacks include the

player defending once-safe homelands and discovering his own people ravaged by a

mysterious threat. With parallels to 9/11, these games attempt to evoke a sense of

national pride in the American player, hoping they identify with this shared national

trauma.

However, while they do capture a sense of nationalism, horror video games

are inherently too personal to evoke national identification. Often, these games

become more about the player, the individual, as they are the one experiencing the

horror. This is not to say that a group of characters in a game cannot feel a unified

sense of national identity. Rather, games by nature are more individualistic than films

and inherently put an overbearing spotlight on the individual player. With demographic identification being a shared experience, it is hard to share the experience with a character when you are meant to drive the experience forward as them. Almost perfectly, video games swap Lowenstein's statement and pare-down attempts at national identity to mere personal identity.

Distance on Identification

Both psychologically and literally, there is a distance between the spectator and the screen. Through identification, the spectator attempts to close this psychological distance and "experience the film world as though they were inside it" (Young). Some theorists argue the key to identification "is rejection of this separation" (Woodward). For film, McGowan believes the reason for the distance is inherent in the medium itself. He points out the spectator's passivity in the film experience as a cause for the distance. Unlike plays or books, which involve their audience, he finds "the cinema … predicated on the distance that the viewing situation tends to create between the spectators and what they see on the screen."

In McGowan's view, to truly close the distance, a film needs to acknowledge and "implicate the spectator," thus bringing the viewer into the work. Spectator acknowledgment is seen in the films of David Lynch or Jean-Luc Godard, where the movie is aware of the viewer and constantly reminding them "that he/she is watching a film" (McGowan, *The Impossible David Lynch*). Conversely, McGowan finds identification yields an "imaginary proximity" and that, ironically, this proximity actually "can't do anything about the distance that exists between the spectator and the screen." In terms of closing distance, this thesis will look at McGowan's idea of

both "imaginary" and true proximity.

According to McGowan, one of the causes of identification faux-proximity is the aforementioned imaginary cinema experience of darkened theatre and fantasy images, tricking the viewer to feel closer. Another is the "reality effect" (McGowan, *The Impossible David Lynch*). Although "spectators relegate cinema to the status of [a fantasy] escape, they also accept the reality of what they see in the cinema" (McGowan, *The Impossible David Lynch*). This reality effect lessens the perceived distance because it gives viewers "a kind of enhanced, X-ray vision that allows them to feel that they can penetrate the veil of superficial appearances and see the hidden structure of reality itself," bringing them closer to the "real" events on the screen (McGowan, *The Impossible David Lynch*). Even with realistic visuals, video games cannot foster the reality effect; the player's control of the game narrative counteracts any perceivable reality.

With interactivity, video games fundamentally close distance with both of McGowan's types of proximity by needing the spectator to drive the narrative forward. Through play, the video game acknowledges the spectator vicariously through the character. Professor Christoph Klimmt calls the "user-character relationship" in video games "monadic," meaning "an imaginative process that puts the media user into the situation of the character." Klimmt suggests that the distance is closed through simulating "the circumstances of being a media character" for the player. When playing a game, the spectator "[does] not perceive the game character as a social entity distinct from themselves, but [rather] a merging of their own self and the game protagonist" (Hefner, Klimmt, Vorderer). This way, the player never feels a sense of distance.

However, distance is not always the bane of identification. Distance and conscious identification, where the spectator knows they are identifying with a character, can lead to wishful identification and idealization. Another type of identification discussed by Woodward, wishful identification stems "from the desire to idolize or be like someone else." Woodward saw this phenomenon in the "record-setting audience" of Titanic, where "almost half of its young women viewers [came] back for a second or third" viewing, wishfully identifying with "the love-struck couple and the high-visibility stars who played them." Acknowledging their distance from the characters on the screen, these spectators knew they were not a part of the couple, yet desired to be.

The key to wishful identification is a hopeful "transformation" in circumstances (Woodward). Woodward believes the spectator identifies with some aspect of a character before this transformation, then imagines what they would do "if placed in the same circumstances" as the media character finds themselves in. In the Titanic example, the young women possibly identified with Rose demographically and/or with a shared experience of dating someone like Jack. Then, after the extreme romantic transformation of Rose's relationship with Jack, they also wishfully identified with Rose.

At the root of many power fantasies, wishful identification in video games is often even more extreme. Just like film, games can allow the players to assume roles they identify with that quickly progress into the realm of completely unrelatable, while still retaining identification. However, as simulations, video games can often blur the initial identification process to make someone identify with the extreme immediately.

James Bond in film is an incredibly courageous, able, and attractive character. As a concoction of 50's-era ideal male stereotypes, Bond is likely a bit hard to identify with for the average man. However, studies found that when spectators play as Bond in a video game, they are able to identify with him much more (Hefner, Klimmt, Vorderer). The relation here is through interactivity, specifically the shooting gameplay. Whenever the player is able to aptly dispose of enemies as Bond, their identification with him strengthens (Hefner, Klimmt, Vorderer). There is a link between pulling the trigger of the game controller and the character Bond pulling the trigger of his gun. Wishful identification is at work here. The player knows they are not shooting real bad guys. However, if they are quite skilled at shooting in the game, perhaps this identifiable trait would transform into being as good at shooting as Bond is in his world.

The studies also show that interactivity might not be the only condition "sufficient … for identification" (Hefner, Klimmt, Vorderer). The character being identified with must "offer some appeal to the player" (_9). Again, wishful identification is driven by the desire of applying the spectator's skills to a fantasy conclusion. When a player wishfully identifies with the rocker playing *Freebird* in *Guitar Hero*, they are noticing the distance in skill between playing their abilities on a simplified guitar controller and the rocker's on a real guitar, yet hoping the skill translates.

Ideological Identification

Although a character's looks, behavioural traits, and actions help with identification, spectators identifying ideologically with an idea or a belief can

overcome demographics, language, and time. Because of this, ideological identification is one of the strongest ways a spectator can relate; in fact, Lacanian film theorists preferred early cinema, before sound and colour, as they believed its spectacle and fantasy harboured strong identification through ideology. Fantasy in this case is not the genre, but rather "the depiction of a magical world in which the limitations of our physical universe no longer hold" (McGowan).

A good example of both "the cinema of fantasy" and timeless ideological identification is Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times* (McGowan). The example is of a scene where Chaplin is working on an assembly line, trying to keep up with the incredible speed of the machines. After hopelessly trying to tighten nuts with as many wrenches as he can hold, Chaplin jumps onto "the conveyor belt in an effort to keep up with the passing parts" (McGowan). Eventually, the belt sucks him into the main machinery in the factory. Chaplin's body now "winds its way through this machinery, following the path meant for the manufactured objects, not the human body" (McGowan). The fantasy here is that Chaplin was swallowed by the machinery, yet walked away from the certainly fatal incident. Through this fantasy, physical theatre, and misc-en-scene, Chaplin demonstrates "the violence of the mechanization process" and the "excess in the process of industrial production" (McGowan). This message would not be as potent if fantasy and spectacle did not exaggerate and reinforce its meaning. A spectator can see this fantastical display and ideologically identify with Chaplin's determinism and commitment spirit, even without shared circumstance.

Like cartoons, video games excel at the idea of fantasy. With worlds defined by imagination and selective physics, video games can create moments exactly like Chaplin's with great ease. Not only are these fantastical moments possible, but video

games even allow players to act in a fantastical manner. With this ability, a player can impart the character they play with not only behaviours that they identify with, but also ideologies.

Technology on Identification

In media, advances in technology are usually in efforts to bring more realism to the screen. With the invention of sound and color, films became more like real life. With steering wheel and guitar controllers, video games moved toward a more realistic input method. While some technological advances began as initial dips in realism, like CGI or green screen, these techniques proved to promote realism eventually with their evolution. For identification, realism makes a work more like a mirror, helping the spectator see their own life, "recognize the familiar in a new setting," and identify more with the screen image (Woodward).

Since the medium grew out of technology, video games are driven by tech advancement. As mentioned before, a specific area of games' technological improvement has been their advanced methods of input with new forms of controllers. Items such as the Wii Remote and the Move controller allow players to swing and stab the controller in the real world and have their media character mimic the exact movement in-game. One-to-one controller movements allow the player to "connect more with their character," as both the player and the character are going through the same motions (Ham). New technology peripherals, like the Oculus Rift virtual reality goggles to full-sized motorcycle replicas for racing games, all give the player realistic controls to help them physically identify with their on-screen character.

While many spectators identify more with the increase in technological realism, some find this boosted realism disingenuous. A prominent figure of this group is Jean Baudrillard, who believes "cinema has been on a downward trajectory over the past century from fantastic and mythical, to realistic and hyperrealistic" (Coulter). Baudrillard blames technology as the reason for film's apparent downfall toward the hyperreal image. Rather than representing the real, Baudrillard sees modern film technologies as "burying [the real image] under layer upon layer of images" (Coulter). Baudrillard calls this phenomenon the "technical programming of the image" (Coulter).

For Baudrillard, the harm here is the loss of the real in favour of the simulation. He believed there was a time when the spectator of a film identified with the real, but now our collective "obsession for realism" developed the simulated image (Coulter). And while many people are identifying more thanks to technology's previously-mentioned improvements, Baudrillard posits that this identification is counterfeit—an identification with a simulation rather than the real.

Since video games are fundamentally rooted in simulation, Baudrillard would reject any identification with a video game character. Baudrillard sees simulation as "a recreation, a copy without the original." This perspective is remarkably true when it comes to games. Game developers recreate characters, models, behaviours, and emotions for the games they make. When striving to make the real human traits, developers usually make copies of humans using models and textures that can only come so close to the real thing. The end product is not human but rather the mechanical simulation of a human. Sometimes spectators, the same ones who embrace technology's realism, are even turned off by the unnerving human simulation

on display. This is called the uncanny valley and it occurs whenever something comes close to being a lifelike human, yet falls short just slightly due to some minor unnatural aspect. The uncanny valley is the visible, more literal effect analogous to what Baudrillard believes identifying with video game characters involves.

Identification Through Perspective

As the spectator's lens into the world, the camera has a great impact on subject identification. This viewport controls what the spectator can and cannot see. McGowan expands on the latter aspect by describing how "[w]hen watching a film, we are constantly reminded of what we cannot see, what the film cannot show us." According to Woodward, a medium's point of view has "two dimensions: narrative and visual." Through framing and shot choice, the camera manipulates our perspective to push a specific "narrative" point of view, trying to foster "alignment identification" (Woodward).

Video games are far more limiting than movies with narrative point of view. Since the player needs to see their character in order to control them, the camera must always include that character, either on-screen or through the character's eyes in first person. The camera's constant character perspective forces that character onto the spectator. And while it is true that some games switch who the playable character is in certain scenes, the forced perspective is simply moved to another character and the problem persists.

On the other hand, film is more liberal with its perspective. Granted, a movie can focus only on a certain character and never deviate. Yet, film is not required to do this by the format of its medium. Furthermore, even if a certain character, say Calvin,

must be the focus, a film can look at Calvin from another character's perspective. It can show other characters talking about Calvin when he is gone. This is all possible without a forced Calvin perspective.

However, the other dimension of point of view, visual, is more strict in film. To highlight the differences between visual and narrative point of view, Woodward imagines a scene "that involves a character returning to her home" and finding it ransacked. If the scene is shot from behind the character as she discovers the house, then "we see the disheveled home as she does," identifying with her horror (Woodward). However, if the visual point of view changes and the camera is placed inside the house watching the character discover the mess, "we see the scene unfold as a separate observer," identifying less with the character (Woodward). The strict nature comes from the set placement of the camera without the spectator's say in the matter. Alternatively, video games give the player the control of the camera. In third-person games, the player can position the camera anywhere in the scene. This means the previous disheveled home example, if in a video game, would allow the player to identify with the homeowner's perspective only if they so desire.

When watching a play or a real life event, we have the freedom to look around and see any aspect of the scene we desire. While a viewer can look around the film's frame and see different parts of a given shot, movies restrict the audience's gaze to a predetermined visual range, the view of the "separate observer" (Woodward). In first-person games, the player is allowed to look anywhere they want. This ability feels more natural as a spectator and helps the player identify more with the character.

Discussion and Conclusion

Identification is crucial. For those who craft media experiences, identification is a means to empower your point. Woodward believes identification is "how messages gain saliency, by building on the energy of another person's experiences." For those who enjoy films and video games, identification is a persuasive part of character interaction. This versatility is why it matters to break down a medium's use of identification and better understand it.

A noticeable trend throughout all of the different comparisons between film and video games was the notion of interactivity. It appears this one aspect has a radical effect on how seemingly similar mediums build identification. Interactivity also tends to be the reason why video game identification is much more solitary. Unlike film, multiple people cannot simultaneously interact with a video game narrative in the same way. However, film's ideal interaction is as an audience in the cinema. This leads film to be foster far less solitary identification by nature.

Looking at which medium was better at which type of identification, you can tell the difference in how the two pay attention to their spectator. Video games tend to cater to the player more with demographic identification usually being constructed by the player. On the other hand, films act as organic happenings that go on before the voyeuristic audience's eyes, letting the viewer discover their demographic identification.

Perhaps the most surprising result was how few identification similarities there were between the mediums. The main similarity was ideological identification through fantasy, and this was primarily due to both mediums' impressive diversity. It turns out that a majority of the film identification experience differs from that of a

video game. Looking back, it seems the initial definition of video games as "interactive movies" was not just shallow, but actually incorrect with regards to identification.

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