

## Scott Pilgrim vs. the multimodal mash-up: Film as participatory narrative

Chambers, A.C.; Skains, R.L.

### Participations: Journal of Audience Reception Studies

Published: 01/05/2015

Peer reviewed version

[Cyswllt i'r cyhoeddiad / Link to publication](#)

*Dyfyniad o'r fersiwn a gyhoeddwyd / Citation for published version (APA):*

Chambers, A. C., & Skains, R. L. (2015). Scott Pilgrim vs. the multimodal mash-up: Film as participatory narrative. *Participations: Journal of Audience Reception Studies*, 12(1), 102-116.

#### **Hawliau Cyffredinol / General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

#### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

## Scott Pilgrim vs. the Multimodal Mash-up: Film as Participatory Narrative

Amy C. Chambers  
*University of Manchester*

R. Lyle Skains  
*Bangor University, Wales*

**Abstract:** This paper examines *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World* (Wright, 2010) as a multimodal text, exploring the ways in which the film's appropriation of aesthetic, semiotic, and narrative tropes from graphic novels and early graphic videogames invites the audience to participate in the narrative, even while it is delivered through the physically passive, deinteractivating medium of film. Intertextual references to the popular culture of the Gen X era (1980s/90s) abound, evoking emotional responses from a generation that formed, in part, around 8-bit videogames and comics. The graphic images trigger a participatory engagement through the parallels to the highly interactive medium of videogames, and again forms a nostalgic connection with the audience. In combining media genres and communicating through these references to more participatory media, the film's alternate Toronto becomes more than a secondary world; it becomes a virtual world created in part by the audience's cognitive participation.

**Keywords:** participatory narrative, media convergence, appropriation, cultural remediation, audience response, cult film, secondary world, virtual world

### Introduction

*Scott Pilgrim vs. The World* (Wright, 2010) is an adaptation of Bryan Lee O'Malley's six-volume graphic novel series that envisions the quest of the titular character and his relationship with Ramona Flowers (and her seven evil-exes).<sup>i</sup> The film retains the style and intertextually chaotic diegesis of the original text, weaving other media into the very 'fabric' of the film and its simultaneous and subsequent multi-platform adaptations (Lizardi, 2012:6). In order for Scott (Michael Cera) to defeat his enemies and progress, he must utilise his own understanding of and immersion within those worlds, and his knowledge of the 'rules' of videogame and comic book (virtual) realities. This paper examines how the multiply layered aesthetic of the film invites the audience, particularly those who came of age in the '80s and '90s, to go beyond mere pleasurable enjoyment of the film, and into an active participation in constructing the film's meaning and storyworld.

The intertextuality and aesthetic artificiality of *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* creates Michael Saler's 'virtual world' (2012). The world of the film, set in Toronto, is clearly marked as fictional as it not only incorporates video game aesthetics but also takes on a game structure, normalising the rules associated within a gaming virtual reality (e.g., gaining a second life, dead enemies exploding into coins, characters levitating). The texts Saler identifies as creating an imaginary world have a ludic quality with hidden elements and references that need to be accessed through repeat reading/viewing, and engagement with a wider community. Saler notes that texts have become virtual 'through social media that permits [audiences] to inhabit them communally for a prolonged period' (Quoted in Jenkins, 2013:n.p.). A film's secondary world status can be enhanced and extended through online engagement between fans and, more frequently, the creators who can directly communicate with fans through Twitter, YouTube, and personal and guest blogs. The 'emergence of technologically mediated virtuality' has allowed for storyworlds, both new (e.g. *Harry Potter*) and classic (e.g., *Lord of the Rings*), to be expanded and explored in greater depth by both authors and audiences (Saler, 2012:21).<sup>ii</sup>

Saler is essentially looking at the creation of communal imaginary worlds that expand across various media platforms. He is concerned with how and why a writer constructs a coherent imaginary world and how audiences can be seen to immerse themselves within this fictional universe. Saler (2012:14) concludes that contemporary audiences engage their 'ironic imagination' (emphasis original) in order to 'embrace alternative worlds and to experience alternative truths.' Audience members know that these worlds are fictional but enthusiastically choose to immerse themselves; pleasure can be gained from having an encyclopedic knowledge of particular imagined worlds (a full understanding of the text as intended by the creators), and an active, deliberate, and ironic rejection of observed reality in favour of a fantastic fiction. *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* engages the audience's *ironic*

*imagination* in its multiplicity of experiential meaning, and thus becomes participatory in nature, both in the cognitive and transmedial senses.

The *Scott Pilgrim* franchise is a transmedia narrative that explores and expands beyond the confines of a single text, as its secondary world (an alternative version of contemporary Toronto) is crafted through graphic novel, film, animation, and mobile app, embracing the unique characteristics of each.<sup>iii</sup> This paper examines the film adaptation in particular, as ‘different sets of generic conventions... intermingle, constituting a profoundly intertextual diegesis’ (Collins, 1993: 248, 249). While Mark J.P. Wolf refers to film as a ‘deinteractivating’ medium (2012), the multiple media, modes, and worlds presented *Scott Pilgrim* create a secondary world rich with *potential* for audience engagement, multiple viewings, and ongoing discourse. As a result, its world-building relies on the audience being able to accept the videogame and comic book conventions and aesthetics that constitute Scott’s world. Full participation in the narrative requires knowledge of these particular worlds, and new ‘levels’ of the film can be accessed with improved appreciation of the film’s plethora of intertextual references.

The film achieves audience participation through the secondary world-building techniques that it employs; the intertextual and cross-media references pull the audience from a passive immersion in the film’s plot to the pleasurable engagement involved in sussing meaning from the various structures and media shaping the storyworld. This secondary world actively courts geek subculture, which is particularly likely to take pleasure from engagement and participation within a text, and to extend that pleasure through multiple viewings. Geek culture is defined by the active nature of its participants, as J. A. Arthur remarks: ‘to be a geek is to be engaged, to be enthralled in a topic, and then to act on that engagement’ (2008:61). Arthur also highlights the importance of the Internet for providing geeks with a ‘place of interaction’ to debate the finer points of selected cultural ephemera. In particular,

through its use of '80s and '90s references (8-bit video game graphics, sound tracks popular in sitcoms of these decades, the skateboarding and action movie culture that arose in the '80s and '90s, etc.), the film is predominantly appealing to the generation of viewers who came of age in those decades, Generation X.

This textual analysis of *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* and its transmedia extensions is based upon Wolfgang Iser's 1978 notion of an 'implied reader'; the 'audience' discussed in this paper is one that is implied by the construction and style of the text itself, and inferred from readings of online fan interactions. Iser's notion of the 'implied reader' eradicates reader agency, instead locating meaning in the text itself, through the textual construction of its implied, ideal reader. The reader and text are merged to allow for analysis of an ideal reader who is culturally versed, and who recognises the intertexts incorporated by the text's creator. This theorised 'reader-in-the-text' (ibid.:59) is created by the author (in this case, graphic novel creator Bryan O'Malley and director/screenwriter Edgar Wright), who incorporates references and devices that are appropriate to and appeal to their intended audience. As the following sections discuss, *Scott Pilgrim*'s virtual world is thus created from the film's aesthetic of artificiality that defines it as an alternative Toronto, and the audience's participation in stitching together the multimedia scraps and intertextual patches into a rich and textured experiential world (cf. Wolf, 2012: 25).

### **Invitation to Play: The Secondary World of *Scott Pilgrim***

*Scott Pilgrim*, both in graphic and cinematic forms, crafts a storyworld that exists beyond the mere conveyance of character and plot. The Toronto of *Scott Pilgrim* is a subcreation (Wolf 2012; cf. Tolkien 1947) that rollerskates through icy streets and desert dreamlands, a secondary world (Saler 2012) in which characters are their own videogame avatars leveling up in life and romance. The filmic storyworld is not created in text alone, via

dialogue and description, but through the multimodal interplay of live action, graphic effects and music, and inter- and intra-textual references that create experiential meaning and presence for the engaged and participating audience.

*Scott Pilgrim*'s storyworld is multimodal, as it utilizes 'several semiotic modes in the design' (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2001:20). Marie-Laure Ryan notes that different media have differing narrative strengths and weaknesses (2006). Film, as a primarily visual medium, easily conveys spatial elements, as well as multimodal layering through the verbal text (dialogue), diegetic and non-diegetic sound (effects, music), and movement (diegetic, camera, editing). In addition, many films make use of visual overlays, such as the comic book and game references that occur throughout *Scott Pilgrim*, for example the cartoon-image "SMACK" that appears during the first fight scene, and the 1-up animations that appear around Scott as though he were an in-game avatar earning an extra life. As J.L. Lemke notes, 'meanings in multimedia are not fixed and additive (the word meaning plus the picture meaning), but multiplicative' (1998:312); while *Scott Pilgrim*'s narrative is accessible without the higher cognitive activity required to fully read into and take meaning from this collage of multiplicative modes, its many layers of meaning and references contribute to a virtual world in which audience members with sufficient experience, knowledge – and perhaps desire for multiple viewings – can play.

This sense of play is heightened by the effect of provenance of which both the original graphic novel and the film make use. Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen define provenance as signs that are imported from one context into another, 'in order to signify the ideas and values associated with that other context by those who do the importing' (2001:23). *Scott Pilgrim* incorporates a range of popular culture references, many of which are taken directly from the intertextually engorged source comic books; these subculture-specific references are incorporated with other, perhaps more accessible, intertextual references for

the wider – perhaps less pop culturally aware – audience. This active engagement in experiential meaning-making is a realization of Stuart Hall’s active audience participation ‘decoding’ model (1980). For example, the film briefly transitions into the style of a sitcom specifically referencing the musical cues, laughter track, applause, and fixed camera style of *Seinfeld* (1989-1998), an enormously popular sitcom that helped define a cultural era for Generation X. When Scott kisses Ramona for the first time a non-diegetic ‘awwww’ of an unseen audience is heard; this continues as a bridge into the following scene where a jubilant Scott relays the events to his roommate Wallace to applause and comically-timed musical cues. These sound effects are not diegetic, and are certainly not evidence of the film being ‘shot before a live studio audience,’ as many sitcoms stated in their opening credits; rather, these non-diegetic sounds are clear references to the cultural touchstones formed by these popular television shows of the ‘80s and ‘90s. *Scott Pilgrim* also makes reference to cult films such as *The Big Lebowski* (Cohen, 1998) when evil-ex Roxy Richter (Mae Whitman) informs a reluctant-to-fight-a-girl Scott that he must defeat her himself, noting that ‘this is a league game’.

These metaphorical expressions of a popular ‘geek’ subculture through the multiple modes permit the audience to create experiential meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001:77). Individual audience members’ experiences span a complex range, clearly, so the multiplicity of references allows for many possible interpretations of the text. The audience becomes engrossed and invested in the interplay of these interpretations, and the multimodal, cross-referential Toronto of *Scott Pilgrim* becomes a ‘real’, or fully realized, place, which Wolf notes is crucial to the creation of a secondary world (2012:25).

With the secondary world thus taking shape, the audience’s cognitive presence in the text and communal activity surrounding the text takes *Scott Pilgrim*’s secondary world one step further into a virtual world (Saler 2012). Matthew Lombard and Theresa Ditton define

two aspects of audience presence within a work: *telepresence*, wherein the audience is ‘transported’ to the storyworld being communicated through its medium; and *teleoperation*, wherein the audience acts remotely in a mediated environment (as in game play) (2006). Familiarity with the medium and the mediated experience increases the audience’s presence within the text; the mechanics of the medium do not draw the reader out of the mediated experience (ibid.). The more acquainted the audience is with the various pop, geek, and gamer subcultures that have provenance in *Scott Pilgrim*’s storyworld, the more presence they have within it. This is primarily a telepresence, as the bulk of the audience’s engagement in the storyworld is cognitive, but given that the extended transmedial storyworld also encompasses games and apps, as well as online communities such as Tumblr, teleoperation comes into play for the most highly present participants.

*Scott Pilgrim* uses all of these devices – multimodality, experiential meaning, provenance, and presence – to subcreate a secondary world that invites the audience to actively engage in cognitive story construction. The more knowledgeable the audience, the more highly engaged they will be by the film’s layered experience of storyworld, which, as we will explore in the next section, leads to a participatory level of engagement and pleasure gained from repeat viewings and post-textual discourse that shapes the secondary world into a virtual world.

### **Entering a Virtual World: Audience Participation in *Scott Pilgrim***

The term ‘participation’ when referring to texts can refer to quite a broad range of both cognitive and physical activities on the audience’s part. In gaming, fan fiction, and some forms of theatre, for example, the player/writer/audience is active and conscious in their participatory role; without active audience participation, these texts could not function. The question becomes murkier when referring to passive or ‘deinteractivating’ (Wolf 2012) media

such as books or film, where the narrative continues regardless of the audience's level of participation. We must therefore further refine the definition of participation as it occurs on a cognitive level, rather than relying solely on the physical participation of clearly defined interactive forms of narrative.

Jane Yellowlees Douglas and Andrew Hargadon carried out one of the few cognitive studies related to the types of pleasure audiences receive from both interactive and non-interactive texts (2000; Hargadon, 2004). They define a continuum of pleasurable responses to texts from immersion to engagement. On the immersion end is the experience of losing oneself in the text, 'making us temporarily oblivious of the world around us' (Douglas & Hargadon, 2000:155). Immersion occurs most frequently in texts that offer familiar schemas that do not challenge the audience's pre-formulated understanding of genre, form, or narrative. Focus is then placed almost entirely upon character and plot, allowing the audience to take pleasure in the story being conveyed, rather than on how it is conveyed.

Engagement, on the other end of Douglas and Hargadon's pleasure principle spectrum (ibid.), occurs in readings of texts wherein the cognitive processes of the mind are engaged *outside the text* in order to navigate it or even participate in it. Puzzles and games certainly fall into this end of the continuum, but so does fiction when it contains cognitively challenging elements. These elements can be narrative puzzles, as presented by *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982), in which visual cues ask the audience whether the main character Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) is human or android (Burt, 2002: 74). They can play with form, as in *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick and Sánchez, 1999), which popularised the found-footage style of horror and action. Lastly, texts can offer cognitive engagement by spreading into intratextual transmedial texts that offer narrative and from several different sources and media (and possibly participation of different types in online forums and games), such as *The Matrix* (Wachowski Bros., 1999) (Jenkins, 2006). Engagement is particularly high when

experienced audiences, who have an advanced level of experience and knowledge of common immersive script elements, encounter challenges in the narrative, form, or transmedial intratexts (Douglas & Hargadon, 2000; Jenkins, 2004). These challenges refresh the narrative, enabling the experienced audience to cognitively participate in the text, rather than easily predicting the structure and outcome.

It is when a text successfully finds a balance point between immersion and engagement that it achieves ‘flow’, which ‘involves extending our skills to cope with challenges, a sense that we are performing both well and effortlessly...hover[ing] on the continuum between immersion and engagement, drawing on the characteristics of both simultaneously’ (Douglas & Hargadon 2000:5). For Douglas and Hargadon, who were primarily examining print texts and hypertext, flow is the sweet-spot for audiences in terms of pleasurable experience in a text. Henry Jenkins, however, pushes audience pleasure one step farther: participation. In participatory texts, the reading, viewing, or playing of the text develops in a dynamic environment in which the audience cognitively participates in the formation of textual meaning and/or actively participates in the production of texts (as with fan fiction, crowdsourced collaborative projects, and transmedial texts) (2006). Note that participatory texts are not necessarily interactive texts or games that require audience input to progress; while interactive texts are certainly participatory, passive texts also become so when their narratives, storyworlds, or forms invite the audience to cognitively contribute to shaping the unfolding story. This is the case with *Scott Pilgrim*, in which the secondary world transitions to the virtual (Saler 2012) through the cognitive interaction of its gamer and geek culture intertextuality, as explored in depth in the following section.

## **‘We Are All Geeks Now’: Nostalgia & Generational ADD**

The quest for entertainment through immersion in secondary worlds has ceased to be exclusively the activity of secondary subcultures; rather, as Saler (2012:3) adroitly remarks, ‘we are all geeks now’. The ‘geeky’ actions of a cultural minority have arguably infiltrated ‘the majority of West’ with many spending time engaging with online communities and exploring the characters and worlds of popular media products across a range of platforms (ibid.). While it is true that *Scott Pilgrim* was a box office failure that did not recoup its high production costs, it did engage an audience beyond the cinema screen that gave the film and its various transmedial incarnations a new life on interactive media platforms.

*Scott Pilgrim* obtained a second life online, with series creator Bryan O’Malley remarking he could track the title on Twitter and Tumblr and ‘see hundreds of people newly discover it in real time’ (O’Malley quoted in Randle, 2012:n.p.). The online engagement with the film is evidenced through Tumblr GIFs, YouTube videos (reviews, clips, mashups), and cosplay costuming tutorials and photographs posted and pinned on Flickr and Pinterest.<sup>iv</sup> As O’Malley surmises, ‘Tumblr culture and the whole reappropriation-without-context thing are a double-edged sword in that they both raise awareness of my work and also kind of devalue it at the same time’ (ibid.). This type of participation fractures the narrative by focusing on particular characters (e.g., dressing as Ramona Flowers) or quotable sections (e.g., ‘bread makes you fat’ GIFs), but interestingly shows the spectrum of participation as defined by Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013:156-258). To participate it is not necessary to be an active creator - to engage may only involve viewing/consuming, and sharing information.

*Scott Pilgrim* speaks to Generation X viewers through its nostalgic representations of 8-bit graphics, sound effects, and 1980s pop culture references communicated through intertextualities, a unique storyworld, and a quotable lexicon (Jenkins, 2006; Eco, 1985). This postmodern text merges older nostalgic popular culture references with contemporary ones

and remediates them into a new generation context. Audience members are invited to ‘trace the image or line of the original text, but also understand the new meaning, whether ironic or sincere’ that is generated within the new film context (Williams 2012:24). Pleasure is gained from being able to identify the plethora of intertextual references that span different media, generations, and subcultures. In this sense the film becomes a participatory narrative that offers viewers the opportunity to engage with the film and its world. It becomes akin to a hypertext – a link to other media, other worlds, and other fans.

*Scott Pilgrim* offers this invitation to participation but it does not require it. The film fuses together a variety of multimedia platforms within and outside of the filmic diegesis. It merges popular culture references (film/game/music/graphic novel) and group-specific in-jokes with a game aesthetic that is not entirely familiar to the wider audience. Encyclopaedic knowledge of all of the intertexts, however, is not required to follow the film narrative and engage with the wider themes and linear narrative points. By tapping into some common tropes that should be recognisable to the majority of the cinema-going audience, it permits ‘those who are not “highly read” in [the film’s] specific popular genres [to] see only the formulaic elements, [while] fans see works which pleurably “violate long familiar conventions and patterns”’ (Jenkins 2004:n.p.). It brings together a series of multimedia platforms which often exist and operate separately, where the ‘touchstones of cinema are giving way to a new era; an era in which the bric-a-brac of our twenty-first century lives can no longer be denied their place’ (Bochenski 2010:n.p.).

The film is arguably intended for a geek subculture that will relish the opportunity to participate through the activity of ‘collecting’ references. Audience members can become what Jenkins terms ‘information hunters and gatherers’ (2003:n.p.), who gain pleasure from the deeper level of participation required to locate references and incorporate them into their viewing experience. It provides fans with the opportunity to ‘show off for one another’

(Baym, 1998:126), parading their own knowledge of different quoted ephemera whilst potentially enhancing other viewers' secondary world experience that may be at a lower echelon of geek subculture expertise. Information can be sought from re/reading, re/watching, and re/playing the referenced texts and from reading posts and comments from other user/audience members.<sup>v</sup>

### **Re-Playability: Intertextuality as Epistemaphilic Gameplay**

Through the multimodal incorporation of provenance discussed previously, *Scott Pilgrim*'s expression of secondary world suggests at least two 'implicit groups of consumers' (Scolari 2009:592): gamers, and the wider audience, giving the film multiple levels that mimic videogame structures. Both sets of viewers participate from 'different cognitive and semiotic positions' (ibid.) with their own knowledge and experience of gaming culture, giving them different levels of understanding. *Scott Pilgrim* thus becomes a 'multilayer text' that allows and encourages replayability (ibid.); increased 'geek' (133t) knowledge provides access to more levels (jokes, narrative, and understanding of the *Scott Pilgrim* storyworld).

From its nostalgic 8-bit *Universal Pictures* logo onwards, *Scott Pilgrim* includes references that place the film within the 'context of a larger story' (Juul 1999:383). Indeed, 'videogames themselves have become quotations of our shared past, referencing their role in a general experience of youth' (Whalen & Taylor, 2008:6), and the game references that abound in *Scott Pilgrim* both play into this nostalgia and suggest that further character information can be obtained from reading/playing other media that form part of the transmedia storyworld Bryan O'Malley created. The *Scott Pilgrim* storyworld is officially spread across comics, film, animation, Twitter, a mobile app, and the videogame that was developed for release in conjunction with the film. Richard J. Allen remarks that the simultaneous creation of different realms of the secondary world means that 'the viewer

could watch the story unfold or *make* it unfold interchangeably' (2013:20). Each media platform acts as an expansion pack for the player/viewer's existing comprehension of the imaginary world changing 'the audience's experience, understanding, and immersion in a story, giving a deeper significance to characters, events, and details' (Wolf, 2012:2).

Like a videogame intro-sequence, the film acts as a one possible entry point to the wider *Scott Pilgrim* storyworld. The audience is introduced to the film's transmedia virtual world through its use of comic and gaming aesthetics: Scott's flashbacks are visualised using comic images, complete with gutters, anime-style imagery, and 8-bit graphics; Scott relieves himself, and the progress is visualised by an overlaid 8-bit image measuring levels of urine (fig. 1); and he later gains a life represented by a '1-up' and Scott's avatar (fig. 2).



**Figure 1:** Scott's urination is accompanied by a pictorial representation.  
**Figure 2:** Scott is rewarded with a life represented by a gaming graphic

Increased participation in gaming, graphic novels, and cult film/television increases understanding and positively rewards viewers on repeat viewings. The world of *Scott Pilgrim* extends beyond the needs of narrative; it has a life beyond the confines of the film as it relies upon audience participation in a number of different 'fandoms' from *Arrested Development* (2003-2013) to *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo, 1986-). As such, it is not only an example of Saler's secondary world, but extended into a virtual world as well. For the uninitiated, as Jenkins points out, the film only offers a 'minimally pleasurable experience', while the 'best-informed and most fully engaged' audience members gain the highest level of participation and pleasure from the virtual world that *Scott Pilgrim* builds (2004:n.p.).

## **Ironic Imagination from the Aesthetic of Artificiality**

*Scott Pilgrim*'s active pursuit of artificiality refuses to let the spectator forget that the film is adapted from a comic, simultaneously imagined in game form, and entwined with an entire subculture. There is 'verisimilitude between the image and its referent' but also between the text and the experiences and knowledge of its target audience (Cohen 2007:16). The graphic images – visual icons (McCloud 1993) or 'symbolia' (Walker 2000) representing action or sound (comics) and score bars (games) – create an aesthetic of artificiality through the parallels to the highly interactive medium of videogames. Edgar Wright intended for *Scott Pilgrim* to be 'a really good videogame film [that was] not based on a videogame' (quoted in Bochenski 2010:46). The visual continuity between the film and the game version of the story, *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World: The Game* (Ubisoft, 2010), merges the two different texts into the same secondary world.

Videogame-to-film adaptations, including the *Tomb Raider* (2001, 2003) and *Resident Evil* (2002, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2012) films, utilise the core adventure narrative and flesh out the characters, but effectively eschew the media's visual composition and reality-bending possibilities. As Matt Bochenski remarks, neither Edgar Wright nor Mark Neveldine<sup>vi</sup> are 'imitating videogames in their films, nor are they using computer to empty their movies of life, they're utilising tools and techniques from both media to inform and enhance their work' (2010:46). They do not adapt from games but rather incorporate the aesthetics, themes, and on occasion the augmented secondary world potential of videogames into their films. The videogame elements do not challenge the characters and narrative; for example, in *Scott Pilgrim* the game elements are part of the secondary world and are not unusual or noteworthy. The proud display of the 'aesthetic of artifice' means that audiences are able to accept this new world without need for explanation (Cohen, 2007:16).<sup>vii</sup>

The 'ironic imagination' as defined within Saler's analysis of secondary worlds concerns the relationship between an individual's imagination and what they are willing to believe or accept (Saler, 2012: 14). For a secondary world to be successful the audience must be able to accept the rules and belief structure of that world and take enjoyment from the storyworld's active departure from reality. Saler suggests that the imaginative spaces offered by secondary worlds allow audiences to reject their own lived experiences and take pleasure from accepting and engaging with artifice. He sees the popularity of secondary worlds such as Tolkien's Middle Earth as evidence of a modern enchantment where audiences are capable of imagining secondary worlds 'as if' they are real whilst simultaneously taking pleasure from the deception itself.

The secondary world of *Scott Pilgrim* bends reality by following videogame logic whilst also retaining many of the rules of the primary world. The highly stylised visual and aural composition of the film relies on the willingness of the individual to accept these new rules and take pleasure from at least partially rejecting their own understanding of real-world Toronto. This is further advanced by the film's 'furiously, hyperactively unreal' artificial aesthetic that draws together popular references and appreciation of its primary audience that is 'shaped, guided and reborn' in and by technology (Bochenski, 2010:n.p.).

## **Conclusion**

*Scott Pilgrim vs. The World* appropriates aesthetic, semiotic, and narrative tropes from graphic novels and early graphic videogames both within and outside of the filmic diegesis. In doing so, the film ambitiously attempts to combine into one text various elements of participatory culture (as defined by Jenkins, 1992): games, comics, films, and obscure intertextual and pop culture references.

*Scott Pilgrim* is a multimodal text, inviting audience participation in its secondary world through utilisation of a high level of provenance in its intertextual references, which draws upon the audience member's knowledge of these references to increase his/her presence in the storyworld and engage him/her in creating meaning from them. Intertextual references to the popular culture of the Gen X era (1980s/90s) abound, from the music to the representation of 8-bit graphics, to band names, evoking emotional responses from a generation that formed, in part, around early graphic videogames and comics. The aesthetic of artificiality created through transmedia references to various media and storyworlds engages the audience's ironic imagination. The secondary world thus becomes virtual as the geek/gamer subculture immerses itself repeatedly in the multitude of media and meaning layered in the film, cognitively participating in storyworld creation, and actively participating in its transmedia narrative.

---

<sup>i</sup> The League of Evil Exes (Matthew Patel [Satya Bhabha], Lucas Lee [Chris Evans], Todd Ingram [Brandon Routh], Roxy Richter [Mae Whitman], the Katayanagi twins [Keita Saito & Shota Saito], and Gideon 'G-Man' Graves [Jason Schwartzman]) are the series' main antagonists. They are an association of Ramona's (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) exes that Scott must fight (and defeat) in order to keep dating her.

<sup>ii</sup> Both the *Harry Potter* and *Lord of Rings* imaginary worlds have been expanded virtually. The world of *Harry Potter* (as described in the book series, 1997-2007) can be explored through *Pottermore* ([www.pottermore.com](http://www.pottermore.com)) that allows individuals to 'experience the Harry Potter series like never before' with the author, J.K. Rowling, providing new information that can be actively unlocked by the player/reader. *Lord of the Rings* has been adapted into a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) called *The Lord of the Rings: Online* ([www.lotro.com](http://www.lotro.com)). In *LOTR:O* players control their own character avatar that can explore the game world (J.R.R. Tolkien's middle-earth as described in *The Hobbit*, and *Lord of the Rings* series, 1954-55) by interacting with other players, fixed non-player characters, and completing combat and storyline adventures to gain levels of experience. These imaginary worlds are recognisable to those who have read/viewed them via the original novels or film adaptations, and players participate in these imaginary worlds according to their existing rules and beliefs. See Tanya Krzywinska, Esther MacCallum-Stewart and Justin Parsler (eds.), *Ringbearers: The Lord of the Rings Online as Intertextual Narrative*, Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2011.

<sup>iii</sup> For example, the HarperCollins iOS/Android edition of the comic – *Scott Pilgrim's Precious Little App* (2010) – purposely makes use of the distinctive aspects of the medium with vibrations, sound, and required physical movement of the device creating 'an original reading experience' that allows the player/reader to 'discover the dozens of hidden secrets of Scott's universe' (n.p.).

<sup>iv</sup> For an indication of the type of real and virtual world participation see Felon, Betty, 'How to Make a Ramona Flowers Halloween Costume', *Comics Alliance* [online], 25 October, 2010. URL: <<http://comicsalliance.com/ramona-flowers-costume-cosplay/>> [visited: 27/03/2014]; Tumblr. Find and Follow Posts Tagged #ScottPilgrim. URL: <<http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/scott-pilgrim>> [visited: 27/03/2014].

<sup>v</sup> For example: James Hunt, 'The Hidden Treasures of *Scott Pilgrim Vs The World*,' *Den of Geek* (online), 20 December, 2010. URL: <<http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/16805/the-hidden-treasures-of-scott-pilgrim-vs-the-world>> [visited 29/03/2014].

<sup>vi</sup> Co-director (with Brian Taylor) of *Crank* (2006), *Crank: High Voltage* (2009), and *Gamer* (2009).

---

<sup>vii</sup> Edgar Wright remarked that in test screenings the audience were entirely capable of accepting the film's game-like structure and style, noting that 'they totally [got] it. They [didn't] really need points or extra lives or things explaining' (Bochenski, 2010:47).

## References

- Allen, Richard J., 'Beginning, Middle, End of an Era: Has Technology Trumped Aristotle?' *Journal of Film and Video*, 65:1/2, Spring/Summer 2013, 9-22.
- Arthur, J. A., 'Digital Subculture: A Geek Meaning of Style', *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 33:58, 2008, 58-70.
- Baym, Nancy, 1998. 'Talking about Soaps: Communication Practices in a Computer-Mediated and Culture', In: Harris, Cheryl, and Alison Alexander, eds, *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture, and Identity*. New York: Hampton Press, 1998, 111-129
- Bochenski, Matt, 'Generation Game [interview with Edgar Wright and Mark Neveldine]', *Little White Lies*, 30, July/August 2010, 44-48.
- Bochenski, Matt, 'Scott Pilgrim vs. the World Review', *Little White Lies* [online], 27 August 2010, URL: <<http://www.littlewhitelies.co.uk/theatrical-reviews/scott-pilgrim-vs-the-world-12060>> [visited: 15/03/2014].
- Burt, Jonathan, *Animals in Film*, London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2002.
- Cohen, Michael, 'Dick Tracy: In Pursuit of a Comic Book Aesthetic,' In: Gordon, Ian, Mark Jancovich, and Matthew P. McAllister, eds. *Film and Comic Books*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007, 13-36.
- Collins, Jim, 'Genericity in the Nineties,' In: Collins, Jim, Hilary Radner, and Ava Preacher Collins, eds. *Film Theory Goes to the Movies: Cultural Analysis of Contemporary Film*. London: Routledge, 1993, 243-263.
- Douglas, Jane Yellowlees and Hargadon, Andrew, 'The Pleasure Principle: Immersion, Engagement, Flow', *HYPertext '00 Proceedings of the eleventh ACM on Hypertext and hypermedia*, San Antonio, TX: ACM, 2000, 153-160.
- Eco, Umberto, 'Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage', *Sub Stance*, 14:2 (47), 1985, 3-12.
- Hall, Stuart, *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*. New York: Unwin Hyman, 1980.
- Hargadon, Andrew, 'The Pleasures of Immersion and Interaction', *electronic book review*

[online], 4 Nov 2004, URL:  
<<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/firstperson/avecplaisir>> [visited: 12/05/2012].

Iser, Wolfgang, *The Implied Reader*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978.

Iser, Wolfgang, *Prospecting: From the Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989.

Jenkins, Henry, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Jenkins, Henry, 'Transmedia Storytelling: Moving Characters From Books to Films to Video Games Can Make Them Stronger and More Compelling,' *MIT Technology Review* [online], 15 January, 2003. URL: <<http://www.technologyreview.com/biotech/13052/>> [visited: 17/03/2014].

Jenkins, Henry, 'Henry Jenkins Responds [Riposte to: Hargadon, A., 2004. The Pleasures of Immersion and Interaction]', *electronic book review* [online], 4 November, 2004. URL: <<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/firstperson/popularity>> [visited: 15/03/2014].

Jenkins, Henry, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*, New York: New York University Press, 2006.

Jenkins, Henry, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, New York: New York University Press, 2013.

Jenkins, Henry, "'From Imaginary to Virtual Worlds": An Interview with Historian Michael Saler (Part Three)', *Confessions of an Aca-Fan* [online], 16 December, 2013. URL: <<http://henryjenkins.org/2013/12/from-imaginary-to-virtual-worlds-an-interview-with-historian-michael-saler-part-three.html>> [visited: 13/03/2014].

Kress, Gunther and Van Leeuwen, Theo, *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*, London: Hodder Education, 2001.

Krzywinska, Tanya, MacCallum-Stewart, Esther, and Parsler, Justin (eds.), *Ringbearers: The Lord of the Rings Online as Intertextual Narrative*, Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2011.

Lemke, J. L., 'Metamedia Literacy: Transforming Meanings and Media', in David Reinking (ed), *Handbook of Literacy and Technology: Transformations in a Post-typographic World*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers, 1998, 283-302.

Lombard, Matthew and Ditton, Theresa, (1997) 'At the Heart of It All: The Concept of Presence', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* [online], 3(2), September 1997, URL: <<http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/j.1083-6101.1997.tb00072.x>> [visited: 20/03/2012].

McCloud, Scott, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

Randle, Chris, 'Beyond the Many Lives of Scott Pilgrim [An Interview with Comic Artist Bryan Lee O'Maley]', *Hazlitt* [online]. 23 August, 2012. URL: <<http://www.randomhouse.ca/hazlitt/feature/beyond-many-lives-scott-pilgrim>> [visited: 27/03/2014].

Ryan, Marie-Laure, *Avatars of Story*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Saler, Michael, *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Scolari, Carlos Alberto, 'Transmedia Storytelling: Implicit Consumers, Narrative Worlds, and Branding in Contemporary Media Production', *International Journal of Communication*, 3, 2009, 586-606.

Tolkien, J.R.R., 'On Fairy-Stories', in C.S. Lewis (ed), *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947, 38-89.

Walker, Mort, *The Lexicon of Comicana*. Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2000.

Whalen, Zach, and Laurie. N. Taylor, 'Playing the Past: An Introduction. In: Whalen, Zach, and Laurie. N. Taylor, eds. *Playing the Past: History and Nostalgia in Video Games*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008, 1-19.

Williams, Bronwyn T., 'The World on Your Screen: New Media, Remix, and the Politics of Cross-Cultural Contact', in Bronwyn T. Williams and Amy A. Zenger (eds), *New Media Literacies and Participatory Culture Across Boundaries*, New York: Routledge, 2012, 17-32.

Wolf, Mark J.P. *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

## Ephemeral References

*Arrested Development*, Hurwitz, Mitchell (Creator), 68 episodes, 4 seasons, Fox (2003-2006) and Netflix (2013), USA, 2003-2013.

*The Big Lebowski*, Coen, Joel and Coen, Ethan (Dirs.), Polygram and Working Title, USA, 1988.

*Blade Runner*, Scott, Ridley (Dir.), Warner Bros, USA, 1982.

*The Blair Witch Project*, Myrick, Daniel, and Sánchez, Eduardo (Dirs.), Haxan Films, USA, 1999.

*Crank*, Nevelandine, Mark, and Brian Taylor (Dirs.), Lakeshore Entertainment, Lions Gate Films, and Radical Media, USA, 2006.

*Crank: High Voltage*, Nevelandine, Mark, and Brian Taylor (Dirs.), Lakeshore Entertainment, Lionsgate, and Radical Media, USA, 2009.

Felon, Betty, 'How to Make a Ramona Flowers Halloween Costume', *Comics Alliance* [online], 25 October, 2010. URL: <<http://comicsalliance.com/ramona-flowers-costume-cosplay/>> [visited: 27/03/2014].

*Gamer*, Nevelandine, Mark, and Brian Taylor (Dirs.), Lionsgate and Lakeshore Entertainment, USA, 2009.

*Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, West, Simon (Dir.), Paramount Pictures, USA, 2001.

*Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life*, Jan De Bont (Dir.), Paramount Pictures, USA, 2003.

*The Legend of Zelda*, Miyamoto, Shigeru, and Tezuka, Takashi (Creators), Nintendo, 1986-.

*The Matrix*, The Wachowski Bros. (Dirs.), Warner Bros., USA, 1999.

*Lord of the Rings: Online (LOTR:O)*. URL: <<http://www.lotro.com/en>> [visited: 24/07/2014].

O'Malley, Brian (writer and artist), *Scott Pilgrim's Precious Little Life* (Volume 1), Portland, OR: Oni Press, 18 August, 2004.

O'Malley, Brian (writer and artist), *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (Volume 2), Portland, OR: Oni Press, 15 June, 2005.

O'Malley, Brian (writer and artist), *Scott Pilgrim and the Infinite Sadness* (Volume 3), Portland, OR: Oni Press, 24 May, 2006.

O'Malley, Brian (writer and artist), *Scott Pilgrim Gets It Together* (Volume 4), Portland, OR: Oni Press, 14 November, 2007.

O'Malley, Brian (writer and artist), *Scott Pilgrim vs. the Universe* (Volume 5), Portland, OR: Oni Press, 4 February, 2009.

O'Malley, Brian (writer and artist), *Scott Pilgrim's Finest Hour* (Volume 6), Portland, OR: Oni Press, 20 July 2010.

*Pottermore*. URL: <<https://www.pottermore.com/>> [visited: 24/07/2014].

*Resident Evil*, Mikami, Shinji (Creator), Capcom, USA, 1996-.

*Resident Evil*, Anderson, Paul W.S. (Dir.), Constantin Film Productions, USA, 2002.

*Resident Evil: Apocalypse*, Witt, Alexander (Dir.), Constantin Film Productions, USA, 2004.

*Resident Evil: Extinction*, Mulcahy, Russell (Dir.), Resident Evil Productions and Constantin Film Productions, USA, 2007.

*Resident Evil: Afterlife*, Anderson, Paul W.S. (Dir.), Constantin Film Productions, USA, 2010.

*Resident Evil: Retribution*, Anderson, Paul W.S. (Dir.), Constantin Film Productions, USA, 2012.

Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone*, London: Bloomsbury, 1997.

Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets*, London: Bloomsbury, 1998.

Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban*, London: Bloomsbury, 1999.

Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*, London: Bloomsbury, 2000.

Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and The Order of the Phoenix*, London: Bloomsbury, 2003.

Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and The Half-Blood Prince*, London: Bloomsbury, 2005.

Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows*, London: Bloomsbury, 2007.

*Scott Pilgrim vs. The Animation*, Titmouse Inc., USA, 2010.

*Scott Pilgrim vs. The World: The Game*, Ubisoft Montreal, Canada, 2010.

*Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*, Wright, Edgar (Dir.), Universal, USA, 2010.

*Scott Pilgrim's Precious Little App*, (2010), HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., and Robot Media SL.  
URL: <<http://www.scottpilgrimtheapp.com/>> [visited: 24/03/2014].

*Seinfeld*, David, Larry and Seinfeld, Jerry (Creators), 180 episodes, 9 seasons, NBC, USA, 1989-1998.

Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Hobbit*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, (1937) 2012.

Tolkien, J.R.R., *Lord of the Rings*, Boston: Mariner Books, (1954-55) 2005.

*Tomb Raider*, Core Design (Creators), Core Design, UK and Crystal Dynamics, USA, 1996-.

*Tumblr*. Find and Follow Posts Tagged #ScottPilgrim. URL:  
<<http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/scott-pilgrim>> [visited: 27/03/2014].