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Contrasting Affordances of The Godfather Across Two Mediums

The Godfather exists in three very different mediums. In the novel form, written by Mario

Puzo, in the filmic form, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, and in the video game form, developed by

EA. The focus of this paper will be the contrasting uses of each of the mediums composed of moving

images, the film and the video game, to tell the narrative of *The Godfather*. It should be noted that the

story that is told in the video game appears to be mainly adapted from the film. The video game

version even goes as far as to use many likeness from actors in the films and utilizes actual recordings

from the actors for the voices of the characters in the game.

Francis Ford Coppola's movie is known for its re-adaption of the gangster genre of film from

early Hollywood film. Coppola utilized his knowledge of the French New Wave to create striking

compositions and completely re-invent a classic genre stylistically and narratively. For the telling of

such a complex narrative as *The Godfather* with a major reliance on the personality of characters

Coppola casted a group of great character actors. The movie puts great focus on the expressions of the

characters as each event leads each character toward death or a great sense of loyalty for the family.

By focusing on the characters with a lot of close-up shots and shots of the main characters as active

family members (the film starts at the Godfather's daughter's wedding), Coppola is able to convey a

great amount of information to the viewer about the intents and personalities of the characters.

This display of raw emotion also helps to pull the audience into the film. Another great choice

is to focus on the character Michael Corleone (played by Al Pacino). By focusing on Michael's rise to

the title of Don of the family, Coppola is able to fully immerse the viewer in the lives of the characters

because Michael is representative of the audience themselves. Michael starts out an outsider, just out

of the army, just like the audience feels new to this world of family mixed with the underlying crime

syndicate. As events in the narrative unfold that force Michael to take a stand with his family and

eventually take over the family as a cool, collected Don, the viewer follows right along and by identifying with Michael he/she himself/herself becomes sympathetic with the violence that has to be accomplished.

The game adaption loses a lot of these interpersonal relations related to Michael, but it also gains in other ways. The game is less of an adaption and more of an expounding of the material present in the film. In the game, the player begins by creating an Italian American avatar that he or she will take through the narrative present in the movie. The game is an open-world game, akin to the GTA franchise, except it throws the player with his/her avatar into New York in the 1950s. Within this open world the player must extort business to activate narrative events which appear on the in-game map and can then be activated at any time by going to that location.

The narrative events are generally presented as cut scenes, where major and minor characters from the movie interact with the player created avatar to tell him what he should be doing next. Many of the narrative events are recreations of the scenes from the movie, but most exist side-by-side with events that happen in the film. For instance, the famous horse head scene in the movie occurs just after the family's consigliere (or lawyer and adviser of the Don) Tom fails to talk a movie producer into helping a friend of the family. In the movie the horse head just appears in the man's bed and the audience knows that the Corleone family was responsible and committed the act in order to force the man to agree to their terms.

In the game, the meeting between Tom and the producer is shown as a cut scene, but instead of replicating the film, it is shown from the avatar's perspective who is standing out near the car and over hears the discussion through a window. In the cut scene just prior to this one, Tom had said he would give a sign if anything goes wrong, and so now the player sees Tom in the cut scene give the sign. The player then has to sneak with an NPC past the house guards, into the barn to retrieve the horse head, then into the house with the horse head, and finally deliver the horse head to the bed of the producer.

Although some cut scenes do replicate parts of scenes from the movie, they are mainly told

from the perspective of the avatar, which gives the player the feeling that the events from the film are going on at the same time as the player is accomplishing his/her current objectives. This expounding of the movie's narrative is interesting in that it takes very good advantage of the interactive medium's encyclopedic abilities. The game simultaneously references, many times through direct appropriation, the events of the film while, also, telling the story of the player's protagonist as he progresses from a young boy into the ultimate possibility of being the Don of the family.

The game basically sets the progress of the player as the primary narrative while having the world and narrative of the movie as a secondary narrative that is tied to the primary. Nearly all of the major events from the movie occur in the game, but each is told from a different perspective than Michael's, which is the major focus of the film. This change of perspective allows for the game makers to exceptional expand the narrative from the film because in the film Michael goes to Italy after killing a police chief. Because the player is set up as a different character than Michael, during Michael's trip to Italy, the player must progresses in the family by following a completely different story arch that is particular to the player created avatar.

The story arch of the avatar is mainly told through cut scenes, dialog that occurs between the characters during missions, and by the actions that the player commits which may cause gang wars and all sorts of other mayhem depending on how the player interacts with the police and other families in the game world. The game is very much like Jenkins' description of Star Wars games. Rather than boringly rehash the tale told in the movie, the game shows enough of that story to keep players in tune with the chronology of the game, while progressing them through a more personal narrative that exists simultaneously and overlaps with *The Godfather* movie. The game creates a world, like a theme park ride, for the player to play in. The world references known things about the world while having story events that are open whenever the player chooses to attempt them.

By doing this the game attempts to give players a spacial narrative created by the openness of the world, an embedded narrative mainly told through cut scenes that is completely scripted by the

game directors and references events from the movies, and a somewhat emergent narrative because the player is constantly trying to take over business, warehouses, etc. encountering all sorts of people he or she must talk to and bargain with. All of these narratives serve to immerse the player. By allowing players the ability to start gang wars by not being careful enough to not attack one gang too many times too quickly, the game also creates a sense of agency. The player's actions matter, they may start a gang war, end up with cops chasing them, or kill shop owners that would've kicked back money for the family by being to violent rather than bargaining oriented.

So while the game loses the immersive element created in the film by discovering "the family" as Michael does, the game introduces a whole new level of immersion in the world of *The Godfather* and "the family" by placing the player into an Italian American who must earn his way into the Corleone family and then rise within their ranks. So in a way, just like Michael, the player is introduced into the family, but without the desire to live an ordinary life, as Michael's character so longs, the narrative told in the game loses the feeling of duty to one's family a viewer of the movie gets by identifying with Michael. In the end, both forms accomplish very different goals, using the same premises with the film achieving a much greater emotional depth than the game. The game does throw the player into the world of the movie and allows for the fantasy of interacting with the characters from the movie face-to-face.