

Zombies, Phallic Monsters, and Rocket Launchers:
An Examination of Gender Representations and Simulations in the
Resident Evil Series

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Abstract

Capcom's *Resident Evil* series (1996-present) is the second longest running horror video game series, following Konami's *Castlevania* (1986-present). The series has, from its beginning, offered a choice of gendered protagonists with associated unique narrative and gameplay experiences, to say nothing of the gendered nature of the series antagonists. In this dissertation, I examine how gender dynamics, norms, expectations, and subversions are depicted and represented across the games in the *Resident Evil* series. I use an approach which embraces presentation (the ways characters are depicted in audio/visual terms), narrative (what roles characters play in the stories), and gameplay aspects (what the player is tasked with in the games, and how they are expected to succeed) of the main games in the *Resident Evil* series.

Using key texts on the ontology of video games, gender/sexuality in the horror genre, and intersectionality/international feminism, I examine the whole of the *Resident Evil* series, as well as the guides and making-of materials, spin-offs, offshoots, and contemporary reviews. How the choice of male versus female protagonist choice is delineated, paired with the ways in which characters, male, female, and otherwise, are portrayed in relation to one another is the larger focus of this dissertation. I have engaged in a close textual analysis of *Resident Evil*, *Resident Evil 2*, *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, *Resident Evil Code: Veronica*, *Resident Evil 4*, *Resident Evil 5*, *Resident Evil 6*, and *Resident Evil VII: BioHazard*. I also engage in light content analysis comparing the games discussed, examining changes to gameplay and presentation approach over time. The games are further contextualized by comparison to contemporaries in the survival horror genre which have either impacted or been impacted by *Resident Evil*. Moreover, as my examination encompasses over twenty years' worth of games, both within and outside Capcom's franchise, there is a larger discussion in play about the approach to gender across the history of the video game industry and video game studies. As a complex historiographical examination, there is no one conclusion, but the vacillation between empowerment and misogyny across time, games, and genres is highlighted through this dissertation.

Dedicated to all of the people mentioned in the acknowledgements and those who weren't. I couldn't have done this without all of you, and it seems unfair to just dedicate this to only one person.

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Introduction:

Evil Gets Its Residency

Breathless, Jill Valentine has narrowly escaped being chased by a pack of ferocious dogs (or dog-like creatures) through the forests of the Arklay Mountains outside Raccoon City. She and her fellow S.T.A.R.S. Alpha team members have already lost one of their comrades to these beasts, but she and the rest of her team have managed to take refuge in a nearby secluded mansion. Standing in the enormous landing of the estate, Jill/the player hears gunshots – not nearly far enough off for comfort. Albert Wesker, the leader of Alpha Team, sends Jill/the player to investigate, with Barry Burton insisting on tagging along. Pursuing the sound, Jill/the player and Barry find themselves in a massive dining hall with an unlit fireplace at the far end of the hall, a door off to the side of the cold hearth. Moving toward the fireplace and door, Jill/the player and Barry discover a clue to the source of the gunshot – a pool of blood in front of the unlit mantle. “What is it?” Jill exclaims, as a non-interactive sequence plays out. Barry responds with “...Blood. Jill, see if you can find any other clues; I’ll be examining this. Hope this is not Chris’ blood...”

Control is then returned to the player, with her/their investigation leading to a white-walled hallway with wood flooring; an unsettling wet squishing is continuously emanating from around the corner at the far end of the hall, drawing Jill’s/the player’s attention. Moving toward the sound despite her/their better instincts, Jill/the player rounds the corner to find a small sitting room with a settee. On the floor in front of the settee are two figures on a small carpet: one lying prone, the other hunched over it. As control is taken away from the player once again, the camera pans in on the hunched-over figure and the mystery of the noise is revealed – it is the sound of

chewing on meat; more specifically, chewing on human meat. As blood from what is now clearly identifiable as a dead body drips onto the carpet, a quick cut shows a half-eaten human head drop untethered to the gore-drenched rug. Cutting to the hunched figure's head, it slowly turns to face Jill/the camera. Flesh rotting, mouth covered in blood, and eyes clouded over with the fog of death, the zombie sets its gaze on Jill. Seeing its next meal, the moving corpse rises and lunges after Jill/the player, prompting a split-second decision on the part of the player – stand and fight, or run back to Barry.¹

Establishing Survival Horror (and the Sony PlayStation)

This reveal of the first zombie in *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996) accomplished much in the space of fourteen seconds. First, more than any of the game experience that preceded it, it established the tone *Resident Evil* was attempting to achieve - one of shocking violence, intense claustrophobia, and panicked isolation. Despite the best efforts of the laughably bad voice acting and dialogue that preceded it, this scene told the player that the threats were not the silly children's Halloween decoration monsters of games like *Haunted House* (Atari, 1981), *Castlevania* (Konami, 1987), or LJN's very loose and awkwardly family-friendly video game adaptations of '80s slasher movies such as *Friday the 13th* (LJN, 1989) and *Nightmare on Elm Street* (LJN, 1990)².

This scene also demonstrated what the new, more powerful Sony PlayStation hardware could produce. This was a reveal in the most literal sense – the gameplay of walking down the hall toward the sitting room, all of which was done in ostensible 3D with cinematic camera

¹ This account was created from a combination of my playthrough and the Turkish Bullet Resident Evil Let's Play video found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moW4wLIZnHk>

² It is true that the characters of Jason Voorhees and Freddy Krueger did appear in their respective games, but the majority of the enemies the player encounters are things like snakes, bats, skeletons, witches, jack o' lanterns, and the like. This lack of consistency with the source material is emblematic of LJN's licensed video game output during the Nintendo Entertainment System period in the 1980s and early 1990s.

angles³, suddenly interrupted by the loss of control (as it is played out as a non-interactive video) and shock of this scene, followed by the return of agency to the player who is now thrust directly into dealing with the zombie threat. The cut-scene⁴ at the core of this reveal was rendered in a way that prior video game consoles, such as the Super Nintendo Entertainment System or the Sega Genesis, simply were not capable of producing and could not hope to match.

Not only was this zombie reveal something new and shocking, but it was also a line in the sand – an indication of the direction toward which video game experiences were moving. It was, as GameTrailers phrased it, “an introduction the industry would not soon forget”⁵. Nor would players or scholars be able to forget it, either. As Stephen Cadwell recounts in his article, Opening Doors: Art-Horror and Agency: “[l]ike many fans of the game, I had been enthralled and excited by many tense moments throughout the series but nothing equalled that first encounter, the first moment where the zombie turned its bug eye to me and I flailed around the corridor trying to escape”⁶.

The impact of this introduction, the tone that it set, and the game experience it presaged, led *Resident Evil* to move 2.7 million units during its initial release on the Sony PlayStation⁷. This number does not include subsequent releases on other platforms such as the Sega Saturn (Capcom, 1997) and PC (Capcom, 1997), re-releases on the PlayStation such as *Resident Evil*:

³ The 3D is arguable because, while the character models are all rendered in polygons in real-time by the system’s hardware, the environments are pre-rendered static images with ‘paths’ for character interaction mapped out in code after the fact.

⁴ This term is common vernacular for non-interactive video sequences in video games which further the plot but are separate from gameplay.

⁵ GameTrailers staff. The Resident Evil Retrospective – Part I. *GameTrailers.com* (2009) (archived on YouTube). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3zL0iThWW8> (accessed on May 19, 2017).

⁶ Cadwell, Stephen. Opening Doors: Art Horror and Agency. *Unraveling Resident Evil: Essays on the Complex Universe of the Games and Films*. Ed. Nadine Farghaly. Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2014. Pg. 45

⁷ The Resident Evil Retrospective – Part I.

Director's Cut (Capcom, 1997)⁸, or remakes such as the complete reimagining released for the Nintendo Gamecube (Capcom, 2002)⁹. The success of the game established it as the premier horror video game at the time: *GamePro* dubbed it, perhaps prematurely, the best Sony PlayStation game of all time in 1997¹⁰, and *Electronic Gaming Monthly* placed it at 90 in their “Top 100 Best Games Ever” article in 2002¹¹. *Resident Evil*, as a result of this reception, has grown into a franchise synonymous with the horror genre in video games with a legacy spanning over twenty years across video games, films, comics, toys, and other media.

Examining Survival Horror - Scope

It is this legacy which makes the *Resident Evil* series an ideal candidate for my examination. This dissertation engages with the issue of gender in horror video games via both audio/visual representation (the ways in which the characters are presented to the player, as well as how these characters are engaging with each other) and interactive gameplay (what the player is tasked with/expected to do/allowed to do in order to succeed in the game) across the series’ twenty-plus year history. The longevity of the series offers a window into the changing perceptions of gender present in the video game industry from 1996 to the current day (as of this writing) provided by one of the premier companies of said industry – Capcom. As such, the focus of this dissertation is not so much a simple ‘yes/no’ answer in terms of questions such as ‘is there gender disparity present’, ‘is the series sexist’, or anything so reductive in nature.

⁸ Which sold surprisingly well, despite the so-called “director’s cut” being nothing of the sort. See: [A Cut Above the Rest: Scenes from Resident Evil: Director's Cut Get Left on the Cutting Room Floor](#). *Electronic Gaming Monthly* Vol. 101 (December, 1997), Pg. 26.

⁹ Itself given a high-definition remastered re-release on the Sony PlayStation 4 and Xbox One in 2015.

¹⁰ *GamePro* staff. [Top 10 PlayStation Games of All Time](#). *GamePro*, 9, 1 (January, 1997), Pg. 76.

¹¹ *Electronic Gaming Monthly* staff. [100 Best Games Ever](#). *Electronic Gaming Monthly* Vol. 150 (January, 2002), Pg. 127.

Indeed, because of shifts in perception and presentation across entries, console eras, countries, and cultural norms, offering such an answer would be all but impossible.

Instead, each main game in the series is being considered individually, in the context of its contemporaries at the time of its release, as well as its place in the series overall. An in-depth examination of every game in the series, off-shoot, spin-off, or remake/remaster is outside of the purview of this work, simply due to space considerations. However, these games are still addressed where possible, in order to properly lend context and perspective to the larger discussions in play.

While I do use fan community resources in the process of this examination, I am not focusing on fan reaction or reception in this dissertation, except where relevant to the development of the games. My focus is rather the ways in which the developers and Capcom, as a company, position these games and the characters within the contexts mentioned above. This will be done via the games, official strategy guides endorsed by the company, official merchandise (where applicable), and other official media pertaining to the game series directly¹². Published critical reviews of the games at the times of their release *are* considered, however, as they are embedded in the notion of professionalism and guiding voices within the games industry. This is not to say that fan reception is not important, merely that it falls outside the scope of this project.

I have chosen to look at horror video games, specifically, as there is a rich history of the ways in which horror texts address topics regarding gender and sexuality which would otherwise

¹² Said media *does not* include the Paul W.S. Anderson film series, as it very quickly established itself as wholly separate from the game series in terms of scope and content. Instead, what is being referred to is media such as the official novelizations, comic books, computer-generated movies, and so on which tie directly into the games.

be considered taboo – just not as it pertains to horror video games. Specifically, I will be using the long and storied history of discussion in film studies of the topic of gender, particularly in the horror film. This topic has been the focus of multiple foundational film studies texts which have proven useful for my examination within this volume. That there is crossover between the film studies and video game studies disciplines elides to the shared nature of screen-based media in general, and broader digital media in particular – a topic covered in depth in my first chapter, as discussed below.

Organizing the Item Box – Methodology

To this end, a textual analysis approach has been taken here, in regard to the series. In this way, the approach used shares more in common with Diane Carr’s method for looking at another major horror video game franchise entry: *Dead Space* (EA, 2008)¹³. In examining *Dead Space*, Carr played through the game three times - once for pleasure, once taking notes and screenshots, and one more focusing on specific levels of the game¹⁴. These playthroughs were then scrutinized with video game studies and critical disability studies theories, in order to arrive at conclusions about the game.

The games in the *Resident Evil* series are therefore looked at with similar methods. Unlike Carr’s approach to examining *Dead Space*, however, I have eliminated some of the steps she deemed necessary. I am already familiar with the majority of the games in the series, having already played them; therefore, Carr’s first step of playing through for the initial experience is not required, and can be bypassed. There are exceptions for obscure entries in the series, such as *Resident Evil: Survivor* (Capcom, 2000) or *Resident Evil Gaiden* (Capcom, 2001). In sum, the

¹³ Carr, Diane. *Ability, Disability, and Dead Space*, in *Game Studies* 14, 2 (2014), under “Archive”, <http://gamestudies.org/1402/articles/carr> (Accessed on 21 April, 2015).

¹⁴ *Ibid*

games will be examined through a combination of personal playthroughs with notes live tweeted on Twitter, Let's Play videos found on YouTube, and material officially sanctioned by Capcom (i.e. strategy guides, press releases, the series' website, and so on). Just as Carr takes a critical disability approach to her textual analysis, so will a critical feminist perspective be applied to the *Resident Evil* series.

What this critical feminist lens entails is twofold. First, the games are examined using feminist texts from both the video game studies and film studies canons, as mentioned above, as well as more general feminist discourses. Second, in terms of approaching this work from a feminist methodology, as contended by Sandra Harding, I cannot divorce myself from my analysis¹⁵. Moreover, my position of privilege must be acknowledged in order to proceed. It must be noted that I am a heterosexual, Caucasian, cis-gendered male, age 18 to 45, and that my identity cannot be completely divorced from my observations and play experiences. As such, there is no pretense to so-called 'objectivity', a fallacy indicated by Maynard and Purvis as well as Smart in their writings¹⁶, and there are comments and observations from my personal playthroughs acknowledged and discussed in these examinations.

Finally, there can be no textual analysis without a text to analyze, and within video game studies, that notion requires more clarification than it would in other media studies fields. The reason for this ambiguity is the interactivity at the core of the video game experience. On the surface, it might seem obvious to simply refer to each game as a text and leave it at that.

¹⁵ Harding, Sandra. *Is There a Feminist Method?*. *Feminism and Methodology*. Ed. Sandra Harding. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. Pg. 8-10.

¹⁶ See: Maynard, Mary and June Purvis. *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*. London: Taylor and Francis, 1994; Smart, Carol. *Shifting Horizons: Reflections on Qualitative Research*, *Feminist Theory* 10 (2009), 295-308.

However, as Galloway articulates in his book, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, games can only be completed through the player's input¹⁷.

As I argued in 2012, any game experience is a synthesis of gameplay and narrative¹⁸. Gameplay informs narrative, and, in turn, narrative informs gameplay in a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship. This symbiosis idea can also be applied to the reasoning for using genre studies in film as a jumping-off point for examining the horror genre in video games. The fact of the matter is that, for all of the differences between video games and film, they are both screen-based media. As such, there are commonalities between the two, which allows for a shared frame of reference.

This is a notion that Lev Manovich recognized in his foundational text from 2001, *The Language of New Media*¹⁹. In that text, he takes as his framework not a piece of software, but Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, a Soviet constructivist film from 1929. Manovich does this because Vertov was exploring the language of both the film-viewing experience and the film-making experience – something to which Manovich clearly saw parallels in looking at digital media²⁰. This idea, tied to the fact that, for better or worse, video game design has often borrowed liberally from film, makes this common ground useful in examining these experiences. Because of this, Manovich's concepts play an important role in my examination of the nature of the static camera in 1996's *Resident Evil* in my first chapter.

Wesker's Report – Literature Review

¹⁷ Galloway, Alexander. *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, pg. 2.

¹⁸ Alton, Chris. Cinematic Gaming: A Discussion of the Perceived Divide between Cinema Representation and Ludic Action in Video Games. Presented at CGSA 2012, May 29, 2012.

¹⁹ Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001.

²⁰ See his prologue to the book, which explicitly maps certain key quotes from the text to stills from Vertov's film.

The topic of gender in video games is one that has widely been broached in both academic circles and the wider media and has been a point of contention as far back as the Cassell and Jenkins anthology, *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat* in 1998²¹. So, too, has the topic of horror in video games, with full texts devoted to the subject, such as Perron's anthology, *The Horror Video Game*²², and even a full volume dedicated to the *Resident Evil* series, specifically: *Unraveling Resident Evil*, edited by Nadine Farghaly²³. There has been little intersection between the two, however – a significant gap in discourse, considering the earlier-mentioned way in which horror texts are able to broach topics otherwise considered too sensitive to be addressed directly. The following is a brief introduction/overview of some of the key texts on the subject. For the sake of expediency, this overview is being kept brief to avoid redundancy, as there is a significant amount of time spent examining further key texts in the chapters themselves

In regard to horror games as a genre, much of the academic discourse has been on the phenomenology of the player's experience of fear, not a discussion of the in-game characters themselves. Tanya Krzywinska's key early examination of the horror game from 2002 highlights this approach. Her analysis focuses on the formal gameplay aspects of the genre and how they compare to formal techniques of the horror film genre in terms of how the audience member experiences fear²⁴. Her approach seems to have strongly impacted the direction of horror video game scholarship going forward.

²¹ Cassell, Justine and Henry Jenkins. *Chess for Girls? Feminism and Computer Games*. *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games*. Ed. Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998.

²² *The Horror Video Game*. Ed. Bernard Perron. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2009.

²³ *Unraveling Resident Evil: Essays on the Complex Universe of the Games and Films*. Ed. Nadine Farghaly. Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2014.

²⁴ Krzywinska, Tanya. *Hands-on Horror*, in *Spectator* Vol. 22, No. 2 (2002), pg. 12-23.

Krzywinska's influence can be seen in multiple texts across a broad time period. Carl Thierren's attempt at offering a history of the horror video game is largely focused on formal gameplay elements and how they have evolved over time²⁵. While Thierren's article attempts to be multi-faceted (as the title indicates) and comprehensive, such a task would be daunting for a book, let alone a single entry in an anthology. Bernard Perron's discussion of the survival horror genre foregrounds the player's sensory experience and affect within the horror milieu; the text/narrative of the games themselves, and the characters' experiences, are seen as secondary to that of the player's²⁶. William Cheng's examination of the audio cues in the *Silent Hill* series looks at the ways in which those same sounds affect the player's recognition and assimilation of real-world ambient noise²⁷. This, instead of examining the diagetical dimension to the game's sounds and what they mean to the in-game characters and locations.

Speaking more narrowly, much of the examination around the *Resident Evil* series itself follows these same trends. This emphasis is in evidence, for example, in the previously mentioned anthology, *Unraveling Resident Evil*. While several of the essays in the compilation do address gender in the horror genre, they are entirely focused on the *Resident Evil* films and the Milla Jovovich character's journey across entries, leaving the games off as separate to the film series²⁸. The entries in the book which are devoted to the games focus, as with those already

²⁵ Thierren, Carl. Games of Fear: A Multi-Faceted Historical Account of the Horror Genre in Video Games. *The Horror Video Game*. Ed. Bernard Perron. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2009.

²⁶ Perron, Bernard. The Survival Horror: The Extended Body Genre. *The Horror Video Game*. Ed. Bernard Perron. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2009.

²⁷ Cheng, William. *Sound Play: Video Games and the Musical Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

²⁸ See: Aiken, Suzan E. The Strong, Silent Type: Alice's Use of Rhetorical Silence as Feminist Strategy; Stone, James. "My name is Alice and I remember everything!" Surviving Sexual Abuse in the Resident Evil Films; Priest, Hannah. Through the Looking Glass: Interrogating the "Alice-ness" of Alice; Larsen, Kristine. Thank You for Making Me Human Again: Alice and the Teaching of Scientific Ethics; Collins, Margo. "I barely feel human anymore": Project Alice and the Posthuman in the Films.

discussed, on the player's experience of fear and the general way in which the games build a general atmosphere for the player.

Tanya Carinae Pell Jones discusses the shift in origin of the zombie-as-monster from traditional voodoo beliefs, through to George A. Romero's films, and culminating with the *Resident Evil* series²⁹. Stephen Cadwell uses Noel Carroll's concept of art-horror to compare the first game in the series with the first movie in the series, as a way of explaining why the game is a more satisfying experience despite much worse acting and dialogue³⁰. Broc Holmquest examines the feedback loop inherent in long-running video game franchises between producers, critics, and consumers in the production of new products/texts³¹. These essays seem to follow in the tradition of Richard J. Hand's article on *Resident Evil*, Proliferating Horrors, from the 2004 book *Horror Film: Creating and Marketing Fear*³². In that chapter, Hand is more interested in tracing survival horror and the *Resident Evil* series' lineage and examining how the games spawned a film series than he is in examining the games themselves in detail. Jenny Platz's contribution to the anthology, The Woman in the Red Dress, avoids falling into this mould. Platz offers a direct examination of the recurring character of Ada Wong via the framework of the film noir femme fatale³³, albeit in a hyper-focused way which ignores any aspect of the games which would contradict or conflict with her assertions.

²⁹ Jones, From Necromancy to the Necrotrophic.

³⁰ Cadwell, Opening Doors.

³¹ Holmquest, Broc. Survival Horror, Metaculture, and the Fluidity of Video Game Genres. *Unraveling Resident Evil: Essays on the Complex Universe of the Games and Films*. Ed. Nadine Farghaly. Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2014.

³² Hand, Richard J. Proliferating Horrors: Survival Horror and the Resident Evil Series. *Horror Film: Creating and Marketing Fear*. Ed. Steffan Hantke. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004.

³³ Platz, Jenny. The Woman in the Red Dress: Sexuality, Femmes Fatale, the Gaze, and Ada Wong. *Unraveling Resident Evil: Essays on the Complex Universe of the Games and Films*. Ed. Nadine Farghaly. Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2014.

To a degree, it is understandable that much of the focus of discussion surrounding horror video games would be about the player's experience. Fear is one of the earliest emotions video games learned how to evoke, arising from the ever-increasing difficulty and accompanying pressure in arcade games as far back as *Space Invaders* (Taito, 1978)³⁴. With its driving beat, akin to an increasing heartbeat, its constant tension regarding the titular invaders' proximity to their goal, and the player's frantic, never-ending fight against waves of alien hordes, fear in video games has been present and gone hand-in-hand with excitement since near the beginning of the medium.

It would not be entirely fair to say that examinations of horror and examinations of gender do not intersect whatsoever, though. In many of the discussions of the horror video game, the characters, player controlled or otherwise, do receive mention and gender does enter the discussion. When discussed, however, the topic is only briefly touched upon, and not always in the most flattering of terms. Laurie Taylor, in her discussion of the gothic roots of the survival horror genre, recognizes the potential of the choice games like *Resident Evil* offer, stating:

The additional playable characters required few additional technical resources [...] However, it required changes to the narrative. Those narrative changes included the use of multiple characters, normally a man and a woman who are presented as equally strong for gameplay and as visually equivalent, a rarity in gaming and other media.³⁵

³⁴ *Space Invaders*, specifically, heightened this tension with a soundtrack designed to emulate the rhythm of the human heart (see: Snider, Mike. Interview: 'Space Invaders' Creator Tomohiro Nishikado. *USA Today.com*, May 6, 2009. <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/gamehunters/post/2009/05/66479041/1#.WahQ2ciGPIU>) – a sound which increases in rapidity with the increasing closeness of the titular invaders to the player's avatar.

³⁵ Taylor, Laurie N. *Gothic Bloodlines in Survival Horror Gaming*. *The Horror Video Game*. Ed. Bernard Perron. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2009. Pg. 54

In this configuration, Taylor argues, survival horror mirrors the gothic in its subversive offering of empowered female characters³⁶. Taylor only devotes one paragraph out of a twelve-page chapter to this examination, though – hardly a thorough engagement with the topic.

Perron’s comments during his analysis of survival horror games, when he does discuss characters within the genre, are significantly less complimentary. He states in his chapter, The Survival Horror: The Extended Body Genre, that “[f]rail young women such as *Fatal Frame*’s Miku, *Clock Tower 3*’s Alyssa or *Rule of Rose*’s (Punchline, 2006) Jennifer lead to situations playing on their inherent vulnerability”³⁷. While attributing this perception to Chris Pruett’s statement that this method is an easy way to elicit fear³⁸, Perron does not dispel or even address the inherent misogyny of this concept or expectation.

This view in Perron’s article is, to an extent, countered in Matthew Weise’s examination of *Clock Tower*’s (Human Entertainment, 1996) main character, Jennifer, whom he discusses explicitly under the lens of Clover’s final girl framework³⁹. Weise does not, however, address the fact that *Resident Evil* and *Resident Evil 2* (Capcom, 1998) both have potential final girl figures in Jill Valentine and Claire Redfield, respectively, in his subsequent examination of those games. Instead, he looks at the games as so-called ‘zombie simulations’, focusing specifically on the behaviours of the zombies themselves, despite examining them in juxtaposition to the aforementioned Jennifer in *Clock Tower*⁴⁰.

While gender is not widely addressed in relation to horror video games, it is most certainly widely addressed in relation to video games in general. Perhaps the most famous

³⁶ *Ibid*

³⁷ Perron, The Survival Horror, pg. 134.

³⁸ *Ibid*

³⁹ Weise, Matthew. The Rules of Horror: Procedural Adaptation in *Clock Tower*, *Resident Evil*, and *Dead Rising*. *The Horror Video Game*. Ed. Bernard Perron. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2009. Pg. 243-248.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pg. 252.

example of this discourse is Feminist Frequency's *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games* YouTube series⁴¹. In this series of videos, Anita Sarkeesian, Feminist Frequency's founder, attempts to address the various issues surrounding the misogyny and sexism present in the video game industry throughout its history and into the present day. These topics range from women being used as prizes⁴², to the concept of the femme fatale⁴³, to female characters being relegated to sidekick/escort missions⁴⁴. While these videos are designed more to offer an introduction to these concerns for laypeople, as indicated during her interview at ReFig 2015⁴⁵, they are still a high-profile, high-visibility critique of gender representation in video games which bring in several feminist and gender studies concepts and texts..

Helen W. Kennedy's foundational article, Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or CyberBimbo, published in 2002⁴⁶ examines the ways in which *Tomb Raider* heroine Lara Croft can be both catering to, and working against, the Male Gaze at the same time. In her discussion, Kennedy examines the nature of Lara Croft as avatar, both in terms of the male gaze (which she fully admits the character has been explicitly designed for), and the potential for gender-queering in the dynamic of male player and female avatar. Kennedy's article is so important to the discourse that it received a response twelve years after the fact by Esther MacCallum-Stewart, in her article "Take That, Bitches!": Refiguring Lara Croft in Feminist Game Narratives⁴⁷. MacCallum-

⁴¹ Which can be found at <https://feministfrequency.com/series/tropes-vs-women-in-video-games/>

⁴² Feminist Frequency staff. "Women as Reward". *FeministFrequency.com*, 2015.

<https://feministfrequency.com/video/women-as-reward/> (accessed Jul. 27, 2017)

⁴³ Feminist Frequency Staff. "Sinister Seductress". *FeministFrequency.com*, 2016.

<https://feministfrequency.com/video/sinister-seductress/> (accessed Jul. 27, 2017)

⁴⁴ Feminist Frequency Staff. "The Lady Sidekick". *FeministFrequency.com*, 2017.

<https://feministfrequency.com/video/the-lady-sidekick/> (accessed Jul. 27, 2017)

⁴⁵ Sarkeesian, Anita, in interview with Dr. Jennifer Jenson at ReFig, 2015. Bell Lightbox, Toronto.

⁴⁶ Kennedy, Helen W. Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or CyberBimbo? On the Limits of Textual Analysis, in *Game Studies* 2, 2 (2002), under "Archive", <http://www.gamestudies.org/0202/kennedy/> (Accessed on 21 April, 2015).

⁴⁷ MacCallum-Stewart, Esther. "Take That, Bitches!": Refiguring Lara Croft in Feminist Game Narratives, in *Game Studies* 14, 2 (2014), under "Archive", <http://gamestudies.org/1402/articles/maccallumstewart> (Accessed on 21 April, 2015).

Stewart uses the context of the 2012 *Tomb Raider* reboot⁴⁸ to re-visit Kennedy's discussion, taking into account player-created paratexts. In discussing these paratexts, however, MacCallum-Stewart does not take into account the same concerns over appropriation/the male gaze that Kennedy does. In not addressing the male gaze in her article, MacCallum-Stewart overlooks the problematic discourse which can arise from the fan-generated paratexts she is interested in, such as the infamous 'Nude Raider' site and patch for the original game series⁴⁹

More broadly, despite a profound lack of self-awareness, Egenfeldt Nelson, Heide Smith, and Pajares Tosca raise a necessary point in their foundational text, *Understanding Video Games*. In their discussion of gender in video games, they criticize the majority of critics regarding gender representation in gaming texts, while only naming Tracy Dietz's 1995 study and Urbina Ramirez et al's content analysis of video game cover art explicitly⁵⁰. Egenfeldt Nelson, Heide Smith, and Pajares Tosca's complaint is that these critics only focus on appearance, without taking the interactive nature of video games into account. As they state: "[v]ideo games are not analyzed as such but rather seen as representational media *only*, and this can be very problematic in a cultural form that is so much more than representation"⁵¹. They argue that female game characters like Lara Croft and *The Longest Journey*'s April Ryan are more than just their appearances, because of the abilities they display by way of being video game avatars.

Umbrella Chronicles – Chapter Outlines

⁴⁸ *Tomb Raider*. Square-Enix, 2012. Multiplatform.

⁴⁹ See: Bobdunga. "Lara Croft: The Nude Raider Scandal – Bobdunga". *Youtube.com*. Jan. 15, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ILmEOXGkTc> (Accessed Feb. 10, 2020).

⁵⁰ Egenfeldt Nielsen, Simon, Jonas Heide Smith, and Susana Pajares Tosca. *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2007, pg. 162-163.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, pg. 163.

Chapter one begins where the series begins: with an examination of the original *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996). Given the fundamental shift in the experience offered by the presentation of the game, as discussed above, an examination of not just the game experience, but the very ontological nature of the virtual camera and digital media is necessary. Bringing in theories by Lev Manovich⁵² and Alexander Galloway⁵³, I contend that the cinematic camera angle presentation of the game is fetishistic in nature as there is no camera to provide such angles. Given this fetishism, I then focus on the gendered nature of the experience via Laura Mulvey's concept that the camera's view constitutes a Freudian male gaze⁵⁴. This notion is problematized by the ability on the part of the player to choose between the male and female protagonists of the game. This problem leads to a discussion on the nature of the male gaze in this milieu in terms of interactivity, and the player's experience as each of these playable characters. This discussion is then filtered through a contemporary cultural perspective, looking at Yayoi Aoki's discussion of women and patriarchy in Japan circa 1997⁵⁵ juxtaposed with Gerald Voorhees' examination of modern 'dadification' of video games⁵⁶.

My second chapter, focusing on *Resident Evil 2* (Capcom, 1998), builds off the notions offered in the previous discussion about the interactive male gaze. Here, however, a new wrinkle is added, in the form of Barbara Creed's concept of the monstrous feminine⁵⁷. As Creed argues that monsters in horror are typically feminized, depicting a threat against the patriarchal symbolic order, I argue that *Resident Evil 2* presents an inversion of this notion – a monstrous

⁵² Manovich, *The Language of New Cinema*

⁵³ Galloway, Alexander. *The Interface Effect*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012.

⁵⁴ Mulvey, Laura. *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. *Screen* Vol. 16, Issue 3 (Oct. 1975), pg. 6-18.

⁵⁵ Aoki, Yayoi. *Feminism and Imperialism*. *Broken Silence: Voices of Japanese Feminism*. Ed. Sandra Buckley. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

⁵⁶ Voorhees, Gerald. "Will We Be Dutiful Daughters?: Symbolic Identification and the Law of the Father in "Daddified" Games". Presented at CGSA, 2017, June 1, 2017.

⁵⁷ Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London. Routledge, 1993.

masculine. I contend that this is done via gameplay, as well as the phallic nature of many of the monsters present in the game. Again, the nature of the experience playing as both the male and female protagonists shapes the ways in which the game's experience is gendered, subverting the traditional dynamics of the monstrous feminine. This idea is problematized, though, by Capcom's efforts to make the male character the default, in both packaging and marketing materials.

Chapter three, examining *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* (Capcom, 1999), continues the discussion of subverting patriarchal norms. Using Carol J. Clover's concept of the 'final girl' in 1980s slasher films⁵⁸, I discuss the shift in the appearance of the main playable character in contrast to that of her appearance in the original game. I show that the shift to a more sexualized outfit is actually a subversion of the typical 'final girl' template as offered by Clover, especially juxtaposed with the Nemesis' overtly phallic masculine design. This design, pulling from hentai conventions as discussed by Susan Napier⁵⁹, presents as not just masculine in nature, but impotently masculine. This dynamic is not without its problems which are difficult to reconcile, similar to those acknowledged in Helen Kennedy's examination of Lara Croft⁶⁰. All of this is taking place in dialogue with an examination of, and comparison to, *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*' biggest rival of that year: *Silent Hill* (Konami, 1999).

The fourth chapter is a break with the thread of the prior three, as it does not examine a numbered entry in the series. Instead, it focuses on *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* (Capcom, 2000). As discussed in the chapter, the reason for this break is because *Code: Veronica* was

⁵⁸ Clover, Carol J. *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

⁵⁹ Napier, Susan. *Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke*. New York: Palgrave, 2001

⁶⁰ Kennedy, Helen W. [Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or CyberBimbo? On the Limits of Textual Analysis](http://www.gamestudies.org/0202/kennedy/), in *Game Studies* 2, 2 (2002), under "Archive", <http://www.gamestudies.org/0202/kennedy/>

originally intended to be the proper third entry in the series, carrying the overall plot of the series forward and making its examination a necessary step. In contrast with chapters two and three, I look at how *Code: Veronica* embraces Creed's monstrous feminine in the form of both of the game's main antagonists, the Ashford twins. I also look at the mirrored dynamic between these twins and the siblings who act as the playable characters for the game, Chris and Claire Redfield (from *Resident Evil* and *Resident Evil 2*, respectively).

Chapter five returns to the notion of the interactive male gaze with an examination of *Resident Evil 4* (Capcom, 2005). This return is necessary due to the game's shift from static cinematic camera angles to an over-the-shoulder perspective. This shift, along with a heightened focus on action over horror and extended gameplay periods where the player is tasked with protecting a female companion, requires a return to Mulvey's theory as well as a discussion of the gendered nature of the 'escort mission' game mechanic (explained in depth in that chapter). Returning to Mulvey's discussion highlights the ways in which the series increasingly embraces patriarchal norms, starting with *Code: Veronica*.

This embrace is problematized even further with the introduction of issues of ethnicity and the presence of racism, intended or otherwise, in *Resident Evil 5* (Capcom, 2009), examined in the sixth chapter. Here, the notion of the male gaze is intertwined with Crenshaw's foundational discussion of intersectionality⁶¹ to show the problems inherent in not including diversity of perspective in the design process and the impacts had on the finished product. The final chapter contrasts *Resident Evil 6* (Capcom, 2012) and *Resident Evil VII: BioHazard* (Capcom, 2017), and the action versus horror genre shift this contrast entails. The juxtaposition

⁶¹ Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics". *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1, 8 (1989), pg. 139-167.

of these two games shows the difference in approach towards patriarchy and feminism in the action and horror film genres highlighted by Ryan and Kellner⁶² and Wood⁶³, respectively. At the same time, it also serves to address the same dynamic in game genres between first person shooters and so-called ‘walking simulators’.

Entering the World of Survival Horror

That gender in the horror video game is a topic which needs to be addressed is strongly suggested by the film studies texts which do so with the horror film. That such an address has not yet occurred is a gap which will hopefully be bridged here, even if only a little. Video games as popular culture texts have held considerable social capital worldwide for the past 40 years. As such, examinations of the gender dynamics at play in both audio/visual representation and gameplay in a popular genre such as horror are a necessary part of the wider discourse on popular culture, gender, genre, and media. It is now time to open the door, enter the mansion, and, in the words of *Resident Evil* itself, enter the world of Survival Horror.

⁶² Kellner, Douglas, and Michael Ryan. *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

⁶³ Wood, Robin. *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Chapter 1

Virtual Pleasure and Narrative Video Games:

Resident Evil (1996) and the Male Gaze

Jill Valentine has just found a shotgun. Navigating the labyrinthine hallways and rooms of the mansion in which she has been trapped, you, playing as Jill, have come to a small sitting room where you have found a shotgun hanging from a wall sconce. This is not an insignificant acquisition, as it dramatically increases the firepower with which Jill, and thereby you, can confront the evils taking residence in the premises. There is reason for concern, however: when you/Jill took the gun from the sconce, the hooks upon which it sat raised as if acting as a counterweight for some unseen device.

Nothing in the room seems to have changed as a result, however, so you/Jill exit to the connecting room between this one and the larger hallway. The room is marble-tiled, except for the ceiling, which is notably a solid piece of granite. Upon entering the connecting room, the camera angle changes, offering a worm's-eye view of Jill and her surroundings with a focus on the ceiling. There is an audible, ominous click while the camera is focused on the granite slab. Accompanying the noise, the ceiling starts to move, slowly grinding against the walls and threatening to crush Jill beneath its weight. As the camera angle shifts to focus on Jill, you/Jill rush to the door to the hallway, only to discover that it is locked. You/Jill run back and try the door you just came through – it has locked, as well.

You/Jill are trapped in this room, unable to do anything other than walk around and wait for the granite to crush Jill. The camera angle only serves to intensify this anxiety: despite being close to Jill, it makes her look small and vulnerable under the inexorable press of the ceiling's

descent. Jill then asks “Hey, what’s going on?” as control is taken away from the player and a cut-scene begins. The game then cuts to an overhead shot of Barry on the other side of the door, banging on it and asking, “Jill? Is that you, Jill? What happened?” As the camera returns to the previous angle on Jill, and the ceiling continues its measured downward press, Jill cries, “Barry? Help me, please! The door won’t open!” “Stay away from the door, Jill! I’m going to kick this door down!” Barry exclaims. The door explodes inward, driven by Barry’s boot. “Hurry! This way!” Barry calls, waving, as if you/Jill needed to be told. Jill runs through the doorway as the camera switches to the now familiar loading screen of a door on a black background, which fades to black as there is a loud crashing noise.

The camera fades in on a medium shot of Jill and Barry standing in the outside hallway. The doorway to the marble room is in the background, blocked by a solid block of granite, showing exactly how much weight was bearing down on Jill just a moment before. “Oh, Barry”, Jill exhales breathlessly. “That was too close! You were almost a Jill sandwich”, Barry responds. “You’re right. Barry, thanks for saving my life”, Jill replies, followed by her questioning Barry’s presence when he said he was going to investigate the dining room. Barry provides a non-committal answer, before strongly suggesting that they both get back to searching for Chris and Wesker, both of whom are still missing. He then runs off, leaving Jill alone again, as the player once more takes control⁶⁴.

A Matter of Perspective

This scene from the original *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996) has gained a certain level of notoriety, particularly for the cringe-worthy ‘Jill sandwich’ line - something Capcom has

⁶⁴ This account was created from a combination of my playthrough and the Let’s Talk Resident Evil Let’s Play video found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaXCNd9HBVU>

embraced in recent years⁶⁵. Terrible dialogue aside, this portion of the game, encompassing both active gameplay and non-interactive cut-scene, is key to understanding the fundamental difference in experience embedded in the choice to play as either Jill Valentine or Chris Redfield. In order to discuss this difference, however, it is important to first examine the core impact the game's visual presentation has on its basic gameplay.

Resident Evil presents its characters and environments in a way which was relatively unique for the period of its release, facilitated by the hardware of the PlayStation platform. With prior generations of hardware, such as the Nintendo Entertainment System, Super Nintendo Entertainment System, or Sega Genesis, the notion of a 'camera' was not actively considered. Certainly, the perspective from which a game was presented was important, but it was a matter of just that – perspective. More specifically, it was a matter of a static perspective for the purposes of gameplay, rather than thinking in terms of camera placement/shot arrangement.

Games for these earlier hardware platforms are largely categorized in one of four ways: a side-scrolling, left-to-right perspective (e.g. *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo, 1985)); an overhead, top-down perspective (e.g. *Final Fantasy* (Square, 1987)); a ¾ view pseudo-3D perspective (e.g. *Sonic 3D Blast* (Sega, 1995)); or a behind-the-avatar head-on perspective⁶⁶. In this way, video games to that point largely offered an experience akin to a George Melies film – worlds of

⁶⁵ See the Jill's Sandwiches kiosk in the mall food court in *Dead Rising* (Capcom, 2006), and Claire's reference of the line to Barry's daughter in *Resident Evil Revelations 2* (Capcom, 2015, viewable here: <https://youtu.be/1ZQj-ZhWvYk>), for example.

⁶⁶ This perspective was relatively unique at that time, and was largely reserved for specific genres, such as sports games like *John Madden Football* (Electronic Arts, 1990) or *Punch-Out!!* (Nintendo, 1987)*, racing games, such as *Rad Racer* (Square, 1987), or shooters such as *Space Harrier* (Sega, 1989) or, most notably for this discussion, *Star Fox* (Nintendo, 1993).

*PLEASE NOTE (trigger warning: sexual assault): Despite talking about the original 1987 release of the game, I am using the later title change of *Punch-Out!!* due to the circumstances surrounding Nintendo's decision to break ties with Mike Tyson, followed by his sexual assault trial, conviction, and prison term (See: Shipp, E.R. "Tyson Gets 6-Year Prison Term For Rape Conviction In Indiana". *The New York Times*, March 27, 1992, pg. B12. Under "Sports": <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/27/sports/tyson-gets-6-year-prison-term-for-rape-conviction-in-indiana.html?pagewanted=all>)

imagination, presented as though taking place on a theatre stage within the screen⁶⁷.

Scenes/levels may change, but the perspective through which gameplay is viewed did not.

An illustrative example of this concept is present in the horror game genre, in one of *Resident Evil*'s contemporaries. *Clock Tower* (Human Entertainment, 1996) for the Sony PlayStation is oft cited in academic discussions of the genre⁶⁸, while offering a significantly different experience from games like *Resident Evil*. Despite the game's environments being modeled entirely in 3D polygons, something not even *Resident Evil* offered at the time, the visual presentation is entirely side-on, or so-called 2.5D (meaning mainly left-to-right movement is possible, but in a 3D presented environment). Each room acts as a self-enclosed proscenium on a black background, with minimal panning inside individual rooms to show more of the environment when necessary (as is the case with long hallways, for example). This perspective presents a simple canvas for the point-and-click nature of the gameplay, punctuated by the fast-paced sections where the protagonist⁶⁹ is chased by Scissorman, the game's monster. It can be argued that this presentation is a hold-over from the Japan-only Super Nintendo/Super Famicom precursor⁷⁰. Even if that is the case, it only highlights the presence and underlying nature of this pseudo-theatrical presentation, as, much like with Melies' films, the potential for a more cinematic experience is present but is constrained by traditional expectations from an earlier form.

⁶⁷ For example, Melies' most famous film, *Le Voyage Dans La Lune* (A Trip to the Moon), which can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrdVdKlxUk>

⁶⁸ See: Perron, *The Survival Horror*; Weise, *The Rules of Horror*; Therrien, *Games of Fear*; Taylor, *Gothic Bloodlines*, and so on.

⁶⁹ I am making the distinction between 'protagonist' and 'player-character' here, because the player does not directly control the character. Instead the player interface is always represented as a cursor on-screen, the inputs to which the protagonist character reacts.

⁷⁰ *Clock Tower*. Human Entertainment, 1995. Super Famicom. Fan Translation by Aeon Genesis, 2001.

This notion of the virtual proscenium was challenged in 1992, with Interplay's *Alone in the Dark*. In that game, each room was presented, not over the shoulder of the game's avatar, or from a pseudo-3D perspective, but from a series of strategically chosen camera angles. This shift in presentation was possible due to the fact that the game used polygons, allowing for a more realistic 3D experience than the hand-drawn sprites which were the stock-in-trade for the consoles of the time. As such, the result provided a gameplay experience that was decidedly cinematic, without falling into the trap of FMV games⁷¹.

Four years later, Capcom's *Resident Evil* (1996) would refine this presentation on Sony's then-new PlayStation console. The game, at its core, offered the player a survival scenario in which, playing as either Chris or Jill, members of a special police unit, they fight their way through a zombie-infested mansion. The player had to manage limited inventory, solve various puzzles, and face a slew of genetically-engineered monsters created by the Umbrella pharmaceutical company as bio-weapons (hence the game's Japanese title – *BioHazard*). The mansion was revealed to be a secret laboratory for the development of these weapons, including a virus which transformed people into zombies, a giant snake, and a giant spider. Players also had to face a traitor within their own ranks – Captain Albert Wesker, secretly working for both Umbrella and himself. Wesker would unleash Umbrella's ultimate bio-weapon, Tyrant, for the player to fight at the end of the game. Players were not as alone as they were in *Alone in the Dark*, however: Chris navigates the mansion with the team medic, Rebecca Chambers, while Jill teams up with Barry Burton, the S.T.A.R.S. weapons expert.

⁷¹ FMV, which is short for 'full-motion video', games were games which offered either a series of video clips that the player interacted with at certain junctures, much like a *Choose Your Own Adventure* book, or alternating gameplay and video segments. The most famous, and infamous, examples of this type of game are *Dragon's Lair* (Cinematronics, 1983), *Star Wars: Rebel Assault* (Lucasarts, 1992), and *Night Trap* (Digital Pictures, 1992).

Not only would *Resident Evil* eschew *Alone in the Dark*'s hand-drawn environments for more realistic pre-rendered computer-generated ones, but this use of camera placement would be used to stronger effect as an additional tool for instilling fear. While *Alone in the Dark* offered camera angles which still showed a relatively broad view of the playing area for each room⁷², *Resident Evil* would often include camera angles counter-intuitive to gameplay. This was done to heighten tension, as, while the player may get a medium close-up on the character they are controlling or a decidedly atmospheric angle on a room or hallway, that same camera angle would obscure any threats present in the area. This presentation also unintentionally made the game more difficult, since the player could not see or properly aim at the monsters attacking them in these situations. This positioning led the *GameTrailers* staff to state that “although it took intelligent advantage of *Alone in the Dark*'s security-cam cinema style, some found the lack of visibility and third-person control disconcerting, and not in the way [Shinji] Mikami [the game's director] intended”⁷³.

Camera Absentia

This perception/bias of perspective over camera is still present within academia, as evidenced by Egenfeldt Nielsen, Pajares Tosca, and Heide Smith's discussion on representation, perspective, and other visual game aesthetics in *Understanding Video Games*⁷⁴. Their book, which carries the subtitle “The Essential Introduction”, was published more than a decade after the release of *Alone in the Dark*, *Resident Evil*, their respective sequels, and the myriad copycat games that followed *Resident Evil*'s success. Despite this, the authors' discussion is still dictated not in terms of camera, but of perspective and 2D (sprite-based) versus 3D (polygonal)

⁷² As verified via Let's Play video of the game found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQsP9Ke1_v8

⁷³ *GameTrailers* staff. *The Resident Evil Retrospective – Part I*.

⁷⁴ *Understanding Video Games*, pg. 104-120

representation. The authors, in their examination, do acknowledge that games can switch between third- and first-person perspectives⁷⁵. They do not, however, mention player-controlled third-person cameras which allow the player to determine what part of the game world is shown on screen, such as in *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell* (Ubisoft, 2002) or *Mass Effect* (BioWare, 2007). In fact, the word 'camera' is not once mentioned in their examination. This lack of discussion illustrates that the idea of 'camera' is potentially one which may not be given much thought in relation to moment-to-moment gameplay.

The lack of discussion surrounding the idea of the in-game camera rather than gameplay perspective, despite the existence of games like *Alone in the Dark* and *Resident Evil*, is actually forgivable and, moreover, understandable. This is so because, as with almost everything else in these virtual worlds, *there is no actual camera to speak of*. The idea of the camera is a virtual and ontological construct, much like the idea of the space through which the player moves, the objects and characters they interact with, or the character they inhabit. Lev Manovich, in *The Language of New Media*, directly speaks to this idea. One of the facets of digital media he focuses on is the way in which the techniques of cinema are applied to virtual spaces and worlds in his examination of digital interfaces, especially in video games⁷⁶.

The problem with Manovich's discussion is that, because of the screen-based nature of digital media, he takes this adopted ontology as a given. Manovich only briefly discusses how the concept of the mobile camera serves as a mode for enabling the conception of digital information as existing within 3D, navigable space⁷⁷. He quickly moves on to discussing the implementation of this emulation and extension across various platforms (animation software⁷⁸,

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, pg. 107

⁷⁶ Manovich, *Language of New Media*, pg. 83

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 79-80

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, pg. 80

virtual reality⁷⁹, and, as mentioned, video games), rather than the simulated nature of it. In other words, he is more interested in *how* this concept is translated over to digital media, rather than *why* this conflation between digital media and cinema exists.

Alexander Galloway's book, *The Interface Effect*, tackles this issue of the virtual ontology inherent in digital presentation head-on⁸⁰. Where Manovich is concerned with the ways in which new media incorporate cinema's presentation and techniques, Galloway is concerned with the ways in which the appropriation of other forms masks the ways in which data is presented and, by extension, withheld. Galloway articulates his position in relation to Chun's essay on the nature of computer interfaces, stating:

[O]ne must make a distinction between the "visible," which is typically understood as specific to the faculty of optical sight, and the "visual," which might be understood in broader, more figurative strokes as an epistemic process of cognitive understanding and conceptualization[.]⁸¹

What Galloway is arguing is that there is a difference between what can be seen in the most literal sense at any given time, and the ways in which information and ideas are articulated and interpreted in various forms of presentation. Galloway is making this distinction in the context of engaging with Chun's assertion that all software interfaces are inherently fetishistic, in that they are fetishizing other, older forms of interaction⁸².

Galloway asserts that this fetishization is inherently ideological in nature, stating: "software is not merely a vehicle for ideology; instead, the ideological contradictions of technical transcoding and fetishistic abstraction are enacted and "resolved" within the very form of

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, pg. 82

⁸⁰ Galloway, Alexander. *The Interface Effect*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, pg. 61

⁸² *Ibid*, pg. 60

software itself⁸³. In other words, it is not just the content of the software on offer that is ideologically fraught, but the very ways in which the software expects the user to interact with it that carry embedded ideological dimensions. Interestingly, he does not address the notion of the virtual camera at all in his examination despite discussing the ontology of traditional photography and cinema, as well as directly engaging with Manovich's discourse in *The Language of New Media*, at various points in his book. This notion of the fetishism of the virtual camera as interface is tied to earlier discourses on the fetishism inherent in cinema, itself. Further, this cinematic fetishism carries an embedded ideological dimension to it, as will be discussed presently. As such, it is an important part of an examination of the *Resident Evil* play experience that cannot be dismissed as simply applying old media theories to a new media form.

That the camera angles, and, by extension, the virtual camera, in *Resident Evil* are of utmost importance to the game experience is highlighted by the follow-up release in 1997, one year after *Resident Evil*'s initial release, of *Resident Evil: Director's Cut* (Capcom, 1997). *Resident Evil: Director's Cut* is essentially the same game as the original, but offers new outfits, new camera angles, and rearranged puzzles in the game's mansion. The cinematic presentation of the play experience is, of course, highlighted on the original game's box art, and is briefly mentioned in the contemporary reviews for the game⁸⁴. For *Resident Evil: Director's Cut*, however, the game's box art, Prima's official strategy guide for the game⁸⁵, and the review of the

⁸³ *Ibid*, pg. 61

⁸⁴ See: Air Hendrix and Bruised Lee*. *Resident Evil Review*. *GamePro* No. 91 (Apr. 1996), pg. 62-63; *Electronic Gaming Monthly* staff. *Resident Evil Review*. *Electronic Gaming Monthly* No. 82 (May, 1996), pg. 30.

*PLEASE NOTE: *GamePro* writers did not attach their real names to their articles. Instead, they used pseudonyms, often pun-based, with associated cartoon avatars. Such pseudonyms are cited here and throughout when dealing with *GamePro* reviews.

⁸⁵ James, Anthony. *Resident Evil: Director's Cut – Prima's Official Strategy Guide*. Rocklin: Prima Publishing, 1998. Pg. ii

game in the December, 1997, issue of *GamePro*⁸⁶ all prominently cite the changed camera angles as a selling point for the re-release.

This attention paid to the changed camera angles implies that they made the game a worthwhile purchase, even for those familiar with the original. The *GameTrailers* staff also felt the changed camera angles were noteworthy enough more than a decade later to earn specific mention in their video retrospective on the series in 2009⁸⁷. Because the camera angles, ‘editing’ together of these shots, and the cinematic experience they produce are so clearly important to the game experience as a whole, their use then explicitly invites an examination of *Resident Evil* via Laura Mulvey’s concept of the male gaze in cinema.

The Cinematic Male Gaze versus Interactive Media

Mulvey’s foundational article, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema⁸⁸, expands upon John Berger’s earlier discussion of the difference between representations of men and women in traditional Western art. At the same time, Mulvey narrows the focus of the discussion to the medium of cinema. Berger contends that the dynamic in art is as follows:

[...] [*M*]en act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.⁸⁹ [*Italics in original*]

⁸⁶ Major Mike. *Resident Evil: Director’s Cut Review*. *GamePro* No. 111 (Dec. 1997), pg. 151.

⁸⁷ *GameTrailers* staff. *The Resident Evil Retrospective – Part I*.

⁸⁸ Mulvey, Laura. Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen* Vol. 16, Issue 3 (Oct. 1975), pg. 6-18.

⁸⁹ Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books, 1972. Pg. 47.

Mulvey takes this idea of gendered subject/object relations and finds a Freudian psychoanalytic root for the dynamic⁹⁰. It is important to note, however, that she takes this psychoanalytic approach not because she agrees with Freudian psychoanalysis; instead, as she articulates in her introduction, she sees Freudian psychoanalysis as inherently misogynistic. She is interested in using what she terms the ‘tools of patriarchy’ in order to dismantle that same patriarchy⁹¹.

Taking this framework, Mulvey proceeds to examine the dynamic of the traditional Hollywood narrative cinema form, from the height of the studio system through to Hitchcock. Her examination categorizes the cinematic gaze as twofold – that of scopophilic voyeurism (the pleasure of looking at unaware subjects)⁹², and of a narcissism born of seeing an ideal likeness/reflection on screen⁹³. The first of these two aspects is tied directly to the camera – the camera dictates what the viewer sees, as much as it is, in and of itself, directing a gaze of its own on subjects and events. As such, Mulvey contends that the camera’s gaze is conflated with the Freudian male gaze⁹⁴. By contrast, the second of the two aspects is reconciled within the cinematic experience through the presence of an idealized male protagonist⁹⁵. To take Berger’s notion a step further, these idealized male protagonists are the actors in film narrative; if a female character acts, she is invariably, according to Mulvey, punished for stepping outside the patriarchal order⁹⁶.

Mulvey illustrates these aspects through the dual figures of Sternberg and Hitchcock. Sternberg not only enables the male gaze, but overtly fetishizes the woman-as-image by dissecting her into a series of close-ups of individual body parts. Therefore, the female object of

⁹⁰ Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure*, pg. 11.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, pg. 6-7.

⁹² *Ibid*, pg. 8-9.

⁹³ *Ibid*, pg. 9-10.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, pg. 11.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, pg. 12.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 13.

the gaze is not only made an object, but caters directly to the film viewer by fetishizing the body parts Sternberg chooses to make the focus of the image⁹⁷. Hitchcock, by contrast, offers a similar fetishization, but with an awareness of the insecurities and desires attached to it. This is done by overtly making the camera subjective – tying its view to that of the main protagonist in films like *Vertigo*, *Rear Window*, and *Marnie*. These idealized male protagonists fetishize their female companions at the same time as the camera, highlighting both aspects of the dynamic Mulvey discusses⁹⁸.

The question at this point, then, is one of control. If the cinematic gaze is a male gaze, fetishizing and dissecting female objects and aligning with male actors, how is that condition reconciled with a video game that uses cinematic elements, such as *Resident Evil*? Roger Ebert controversially contended that authorial control is arguably taken away in video games and put in the hands of the player⁹⁹, and in a game like *Resident Evil*, the main actor on screen is potentially either male or female. To be sure, the alignment with the audience member is unquestionably still present, and is, in fact, heightened through direct participation with the text in question. At the same time, if the player decides to play as Jill, the in-text actor is unquestionably female, capable, and is, by first appearances, not punished for her capability as Mulvey argues occurs in Hollywood film. As a result, one is left to wonder if the male gaze, as Mulvey describes it, is called into question in such an experience.

Anita Sarkeesian, in her *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games* series, contends that the male gaze is indeed present in video games, and can be seen in evidence in relation to character animation. In her video, “Body Language & the Male Gaze”, she discusses the difference in

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 13-14.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, pg. 14-15.

⁹⁹ Ebert, Roger. *Games vs. Art: Ebert vs. Barker*. *RogerEbert.com*, July 21, 2007. Under “Roger Ebert’s Journal”, <https://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/games-vs-art-ebert-vs-barker> (accessed Nov. 27, 2017)

simple movement animations between male and female avatars¹⁰⁰. She highlights the difference between body language that asserts power and confidence in male avatars, and movement that projects vulnerability and sexuality in female avatars. She also briefly mentions the ways in which camera angles can highlight and sexualize female avatars, but stays mainly focused on character animations¹⁰¹.

While Sarkeesian makes some strong arguments about the ways in which male and female video game characters are gender coded through movement, a game like *Resident Evil* seems to fall outside of her contention¹⁰². Running animation for player avatars is one of the key animation examples Sarkeesian focuses on in her video as being highly gendered, and she provides several strong examples of this situation in contemporary games¹⁰³. The running animations for both Chris and Jill, however, are near identical. Moreover, the gun aiming and firing stances for both characters are also comparable. These animations are the ones the player will encounter most frequently throughout the game.

Further, their animations when attacked by the various monsters are almost identical, showing them as equally vulnerable to the monsters throughout the game¹⁰⁴. Moreover, moving beyond character animation and returning to Mulvey's discussion, the camera angles through

¹⁰⁰ *Feminist Frequency* Staff. "Body Language & the Male Gaze". *FeministFrequency.com*, 2016. <https://feministfrequency.com/video/body-language-the-male-gaze/> (accessed Nov. 24, 2017)

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Due to the backlash surrounding Sarkeesian's work, and the associated harassment she receives personally and professionally as a result, I feel it important to address the dynamic with which her work is being engaged here. I am, as a heterosexual, Caucasian, cis-gendered male, age 18 to 45, in no way trying to minimize what Sarkeesian does with either *Feminist Frequency* or *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*. Nor am I trying to attack either Sarkeesian's work or Sarkeesian, herself. I am simply attempting to engage with her work, which I feel is important, and use it as a basis for moving forward with my own examination in the hopes of furthering the discussion she has inherited from Mulvey.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁴ These similarities the various animations can be seen in the Let's Play videos for both Chris and Jill on Let's Talk Resident Evil's channel.

which the player views the gameplay experience are the same for both player-characters¹⁰⁵. If a medium close-up serves as the initial camera angle/'establishing shot'¹⁰⁶ of a room for Jill, it remains the exact same camera position/'shot' for Chris.

There are differences in body language between the two which support Sarkeesian's discussion, but they are more subtle than the examples she uses in her video. Further, they may not all be seen by all players. For instance, both Chris and Jill throw their weapons over their shoulders in the same fashion during their idle animations¹⁰⁷. Chris, however, keeps his posture combat-ready (legs apart, shoulders squared); Jill, on the other hand, throws her hip out to the side in a more overt highlighting of her physique. Further to this, Jill's animations when using the various cranks found in the game accentuate her hip movements, while Chris' animation focuses on shoulder movement.

In addition to the animations which are Sarkeesian's focus, the game's manual and promotional materials set forth to emphasize the gendered difference between the two characters. The instruction manual for the game, in describing the two characters, emphasizes Chris' 'tough guy' nature, along with his 'strong mentality and great vitality'¹⁰⁸. Jill's description, on the other hand, bears the warning that '[w]hile she has a great capacity for holding items, her small vitality puts her at an immediate disadvantage'¹⁰⁹. This discrepancy is furthered in the PAL¹¹⁰ edition of

¹⁰⁵ This similarity does not extend to the non-interactive cut-scenes which are interspersed throughout the overall experience of the game, as Chris and Jill have different narrative experiences, as will be addressed presently.

¹⁰⁶ Adapting the language of film for this discussion carries some translation issues. In this case, the idea of a shot is problematized by the fact that the duration of the 'shot' is dictated by the player, for as long as they do not move beyond the designated boundaries of the current frame of the environment. As such, the term 'shot' is placed in quotation marks.

¹⁰⁷ An idle animation is a small piece of character animation which occurs when the player has not made any inputs for a given period of time.

¹⁰⁸ *Resident Evil* instruction manual, pg. 21.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*

¹¹⁰ PAL, or Region 2, is the television resolution format for most of Europe, Southeast Asia, Australia, and the Middle East (as detailed on Adobe's website: http://www.adobe.com/devnet/flash/learning_guide/video/part06.html).

the manual, which includes an extra line in Chris' description, stating that he 'has a great advantage with weapons when surrounded by many enemies'¹¹¹. Additionally, Capcom's official *Resident Evil* strategy guide opens by describing Jill as 'lovely-but-deadly', in contrast to Chris, who is 'tough-as-nails'¹¹². These descriptions of the player characters are so effective at gender-coding the avatars that Tom Bissell, in his book *Extra Lives*, makes the mistake of assuming that Chris is the one with more inventory slots, not Jill, because he is 'brawny'¹¹³.

The Interactive Male Gaze

Focusing on character appearance, even in-game animations, leaves an opening for the criticism articulated by Egenfeldt Nelson, Heide Smith, and Pajares Tosca mentioned in my introduction, in which appearance is secondary to character ability. There is another reason to look at the gameplay structure, however. Egenfeldt Nelson, Heide Smith, and Pajares Tosca approach the issue by arguing that, as in the case of their example, 1999's *The Longest Journey*, the female player-character's sexualized appearance does not factor into the experience, as she is also a strong, capable protagonist¹¹⁴. In contrast to this, if one applies Berger and Mulvey's notion that, in the frame of the male gaze, men act and women obey, this notion can be further highlighted in a medium where interaction – and thus, action - is intrinsic to the experience. It is from this base that the true presence of the male gaze comes into focus in *Resident Evil*.

As mentioned, the scene from *Resident Evil* at the beginning of this chapter is key to understanding the gendered experience of choosing between the two player-characters for the game. Taking into account the male gaze not simply as a cinematic construct, but something that can be embodied in the rules and structure of gameplay, that scene can now be examined in the

¹¹¹ *Resident Evil* instruction manual (PAL), pg. 14.

¹¹² Meston, Zach. *Resident Evil: The Official Strategy Guide*. Dimension Publishing, 1996.

¹¹³ Bissell, Tom. *Extra Lives: Why Video Games Matter*. New York: Random House, 2010. Pg. 28.

¹¹⁴ Egenfeldt Nelson, Heide Smith, and Pajares Tosca, *Understanding Video Games*, pg. 163.

proper context. To be sure, this is not the same interactive male gaze that Helen W. Kennedy¹¹⁵ describes, or Peggy Ahwash articulates¹¹⁶, in relation to *Tomb Raider*'s Lara Croft – that of control of a female avatar as sexualized, fetishized object. Certainly, the argument can be made that there is a conflation between the death/game over sequences for Jill in *Resident Evil* and the fetishized death animations Ahwash highlights in her film. Once again, however, the death animations in *Resident Evil* are the same for both Chris and Jill.

Additionally, Kennedy's concession that play in *Tomb Raider* may encapsulate an interactive furthering of the male gaze, in that Lara Croft is both sexualized and an object over which player control is exerted¹¹⁷ may be applied to *Resident Evil*'s Jill Valentine. The counter to this application, however, is that, unlike Lara Croft, whose appearance Kennedy acknowledges as overtly catering to the male gaze, Jill is wearing the same level of combat fatigues as the rest of the non-zombie/monster characters in the game. In this case, the gender difference in *Resident Evil*'s gameplay is of a different sort¹¹⁸.

First, the assertion made in the *Resident Evil* instruction manual about the two player characters' vitality is not just a comment on them as characters, but on their gameplay characteristics. In my playthroughs of their respective campaigns, I tested how many attacks each player-character can sustain from an average zombie – Chris is able to withstand four attacks before succumbing; Jill is only able to withstand three. In addition, it is noted in the

¹¹⁵ Kennedy, *Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or CyberBimbo?*

¹¹⁶ *She-Puppet*. Dir. Peggy Ahwash. Independent, 2001. (<https://vimeo.com/9197535>)

¹¹⁷ Kennedy, *Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or CyberBimbo?*

¹¹⁸ This argument may be called into question with the Sega Saturn version of the game, which features console-exclusive alternate costumes for the player-characters. Chris' alternate outfit is more of a SWAT team-style costume, with dark colours and a flak jacket emblazoned with the S.T.A.R.S. logo. Jill, on the other hand, gets a variation of her regular outfit, with a shorter, midriff-bearing shirt, lighter colours, and the S.T.A.R.S. logo printed on her shoulder pads. (as illustrated here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6vHE8ZQxJs>)

GamePro strategy guide for the game that Chris recovers more health with each healing item (green herbs, first aid sprays, and so on) than does Jill¹¹⁹

Despite this, *GamePro*¹²⁰, *Computer and Video Games*¹²¹, *GameFan*¹²², and Prima's *Resident Evil: Director's Cut* strategy guide¹²³ all consider Jill's campaign to be the so-called 'easy mode' for the game. All of these sources cite Jill's increased carrying capacity for this being the case. There are a number of other aspects of Jill's campaign which contribute to this perception, as well. For instance, Jill starts her campaign with a handgun and a knife; Chris only has a knife at the beginning. In addition, she receives more first aid sprays – in my playthroughs, she received five, to Chris' three. Further, the guide in *Computer and Video Games* magazine states that Jill encounters fewer enemies during her scenario¹²⁴. The other reason for Jill's campaign being significantly easier is that she has access to more powerful weapons, more quickly.

There are two interconnected reasons why Jill has access to these more powerful weapons, at such an early point in the game. The first is that, as the so-called 'master of unlocking', Jill is able to manually unlock doors, cabinets, and desk drawers that Chris needs to obtain keys in order to access. This difference allowed me, in my playthrough as Jill, to bypass approximately the first twenty minutes of Chris' campaign, where he roamed the mansion in search of an appropriate key for a series of rooms.

Tied to this is the fact that, in one form or another, Jill is given the majority of these weapons by Barry Burton, the non-playable character mentioned in the scene at the beginning of

¹¹⁹ Major Mike, *Resident Evil ProStrategy Guide*. *GamePro* No. 93 (June, 1996). Pg. 88

¹²⁰ Major Mike. *Resident Evil ProStrategy Guide*. Pg. 88.

¹²¹ *Computer and Video Games* staff. *PlayStation Player's Guide: Resident Evil*. *Computer and Video Games*, Issue 177 (August, 1996).

¹²² Takuhi. *Resident Evil Review*. *GameFan* Vol. 4, Issue 3 (March, 1996). Pg. 37

¹²³ James, *Prima's Official Strategy Guide - Resident Evil: Director's Cut*, Pg. 5.

¹²⁴ *Computer and Video Games* staff. *PlayStation Player's Guide: Resident Evil*, pg. FP 10

this chapter. The acid rounds for the grenade launcher; the shotgun; magnum bullets for fighting later monsters; a door code which allows Jill to bypass several Hunters¹²⁵ that Chris had to fight – Barry consistently provides supplies for Jill to progress through the game, supplies not available to Chris at all in his campaign. These two aspects are linked because it is Barry who gives Jill the lockpick, as well. It is an odd interaction, as the ‘master of unlocking’ does not to have the appropriate tools on hand, but the team’s weapons expert does¹²⁶.

Herein lies the importance of the scene with the shotgun as it plays out for the two separate playable characters. In Jill’s scenario, Barry comes to her rescue when she is trapped in the room with the crushing ceiling; the player does not have a choice in the matter - Jill must remain helpless until Barry saves her. By contrast, there is no one to save Chris in this same situation, nor does the game expect him to need rescuing. Instead, Chris is tasked with finding a broken shotgun elsewhere in the mansion, which he swaps for the functional one on the counterweighted hooks. Because of this, as I tested in my playthrough of his campaign, the door back to the sitting room where the shotgun is found remains unlocked, in case Chris has not made the life-saving swap. Chris is able to replace the shotgun until he is ready; Jill’s acquisition of the shotgun is entirely dependent on Barry.

That is not the only aspect of Jill’s campaign that is dependent on Barry, however. At several points, Barry’s presence is pivotal to not just Jill’s survival, but the version of the game’s ending the player sees. Near the beginning of the game, during the zombie encounter described in this book’s introduction, Chris is left to defend himself alone against the monster, using

¹²⁵ Large, lizard-like creatures that move like apes, but have enormous claws. They were the main cause for the majority of my deaths throughout my playthroughs as both Jill and Chris.

¹²⁶ While the official novelization of the game, by S.D. Perry does offer an explanation (Jill lent Barry her lockpicks in order for him to practice using them), the book was written two years after the release of the game, and is not considered part of the official canon. Perry, S.D. *Resident Evil: The Umbrella Conspiracy*. New York: Pocket Books, 1998. Pg. 70-71.

nothing but a knife. In Jill's campaign, since Barry accompanied Jill out of the main foyer and into the adjoining dining room, I was able to run to him for assistance in my playthrough. In doing so, rather than use precious ammunition, I was able to just let Barry eliminate the zombie with his Colt Python – saving Jill in the process for the first time. Additionally, later in the game, as Jill is moving through the hidden caverns underneath the mansion, Barry offers to provide back-up. At this point, if the player says 'yes', Barry will accompany Jill, killing any Hunters encountered with his Magnum, allowing for the player to once again conserve precious resources. If the player says no, then Jill, Barry, and the player are all punished for it.

The pattern of Barry saving Jill repeatedly throughout the game, as well as coming to her aid in the form of either supplies or back-up support has, at this point, been firmly established. There is a price for this support, though, and it must be paid by the player. For each character, there are three different endings, as indicated in Prima's *Resident Evil: Director's Cut* strategy guide¹²⁷. As mentioned, whether the player gets Jill's best ending is dependent on her interactions with Barry. More specifically, there are two points at which Jill must defer to Barry so that the proper conditions for the good ending are met.

The first is after Jill fights the mutant snake boss for the second time. At the beginning of the battle, the snake makes a hole in the floor of the room in which the battle takes place. After defeating the snake, Barry arrives and Jill has the option of going down into the hole to examine it. If she does so (and the player needs to, in order to progress further in the game), she is seemingly stuck in a shaft with a single grave marked by a large tombstone, as Barry drops the rope used to lower Jill into the hole. The game then offers the player a veiled choice: the player can either wait for Barry to go look for more rope, or have Jill examine her surroundings without

¹²⁷ James, *Prima's Official Strategy Guide - Resident Evil: Director's Cut*, Pg. 106

waiting. If Jill does the former, Barry will eventually return without any rope and suggest Jill look for another way out.

If Jill does the latter, she will still find the same way out, but this decision will lead to an alternate series of events. On this path, Wesker (the S.T.A.R.S. captain and spy for Umbrella) kills Barry just before the climactic encounter with Tyrant in the lab, and Jill does not fight Tyrant again on the helipad¹²⁸. While Jill does escape in this ending, the mansion does not explode, and Tyrant survives, wandering into the forest surrounding the mansion. A similar sequence also results if, as mentioned earlier, Jill does not say yes to Barry's offer of support in the caves. In this instance, Barry is killed in the caverns and, once again, Jill does not fight Tyrant a second time on the helipad, allowing Tyrant to survive¹²⁹.

'Daddification' and the Player's Role

This dynamic plays into Gerald Voorhees' notion of the 'daddification' of video games. More specifically, Jill's gameplay dynamics with Barry are indicative of an aspect of this daddification which Voorhees discussed at CGSA 2017 – the idea of the player as dutiful daughter¹³⁰. Voorhees applies Lacan's "Law of the Father" – the ways in which society regulates and maintains power within patriarchal structures – to the dynamic between main protagonists in games such as *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog, 2013), *BioShock Infinite* (2K Games, 2013), and *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt Red, 2015).

He argues that, while these games offer idealized masculine figures in the forms of Joel, Booker DeWitt, and Geralt of Rivia, respectively, players are placed in the role of dutiful daughter via the implicit demand that they play the games in the ways expected of them. Tied to

¹²⁸ *Ibid*

¹²⁹ Major Mike. *Resident Evil ProStrategy Guide*. Pg. 98.

¹³⁰ Voorhees, Gerald. "Will We Be Dutiful Daughters?: Symbolic Identification and the Law of the Father in "Daddified" Games". Presented at CGSA, 2017, June 1, 2017.

this is the explicit figure of the daughter, literal or symbolic, in these games, in the figures of Ellie, Elizabeth, and Ciri. The two, player and daughter, are conflated through the expectation of the reproduction of the social order embedded in the games, despite the player controlling the father figures directly. As Voorhees put it in his presentation, “And so we are being called upon to reproduce the very structures that form our gilded cages. We are being called upon to accept the symbolic mandate: “gitgud.” Play correctly. Play in this prescribed way.”¹³¹

While Voorhees states that the presence of the daughter figure is a recent trend in the video game industry, *Resident Evil* suggests that this trend is older than it seems. In Chris’ scenario, the symbolic daughter figure is clearly present in the form of 18-year-old medic, Rebecca Chambers. She is constantly seeking Chris’ approval, despite being arguably more capable than he is. Chris relies on her to mix the chemical (named V-Jolt) which will weaken the Plant-42 boss, as well as play the section of Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata which will open a secret passage in the mansion necessary for progression in the game. These are tasks that Jill is capable of on her own in her scenario. Despite this, it could also be argued that, because Chris and Rebecca are close in age, the dynamic is less father/daughter and more big brother/little sister – an idea revisited explicitly in later games in the series.

It is Jill and her gameplay relationship with Barry which most explicitly embodies Voorhees’ concept of the player as dutiful daughter. Jill, and therefore the player, is dependent on Barry for weapons, support, rescue, and, ultimately, getting the best ending for the game. In Chris’ scenario, Chris and Rebecca save each other multiple times (Rebecca administers antidote when Chris is poisoned; Chris clears hallways and paths of monsters for Rebecca; and so on).

¹³¹ *Ibid*

At no point in her scenario is Jill (and, by extension, the player) put in a position where she needs to save Barry – he is always the one who comes to her rescue. Further, when Jill waits for Barry to find more rope, it is not in a non-interactive cut-scene – the player can act at any time, but *has to wait in real-time*, as a game mechanic, if they want to get the best ending. In other words, in order to get the best ending, in a medium where the main distinguishing feature is *to act*, the player is tasked with doing nothing. This is not even the only point at which the game places the player in this sort of situation. In the scene described at the beginning of this chapter, the player is actively in control of Jill as the ceiling in the locked room bears down on her. The player can move around and try the doors, but is forced to simply wait until Barry comes to Jill’s rescue. In both cases, Barry is the actor; Jill simply waits for Barry to act.

While it may seem like Mulvey’s male gaze and Voorhees’ dutiful daughter concepts are separate notions, they are actually of a piece. Mulvey argues both that the male gaze is a tool for maintaining the phallogentric order¹³², and that the woman is necessary as other in order for the Law of the Father to function properly¹³³. Voorhees argues similarly in relation to the daddification of games, stating that “To wit, just as an ideology like patriarchy – or capitalism or colonialism – needs people who naively accept the necessity of the ideology; so too does a father need his children. And this is exactly how daddified games work – it’s central to how they work: mainstream games culture has, collectively, demanded the daddification of games”¹³⁴. In essence, Voorhees’ daddification is a variation of the male gaze which, rather than being strictly erotic as argued by Mulvey, takes on a parental, patriarchal dimension.

¹³² Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure*, pg. 6-7

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pg. 13.

¹³⁴ Voorhees, “Will We Be Dutiful Daughters?”

In fact, it can be argued that, in the redemption scenario Mulvey discusses for the female character in film¹³⁵ involves a shift from overt eroticism to the very patriarchal relationship Voorhees discusses – an acceptance of the father figure, and a return to ‘innocence’ as a result. It is the progression from Freud’s focus on sex to Lacan’s focus on a broader phallogentrism. This shift in no way diminishes the sadistic nature of the punishment meted out to the female character – one which has been encapsulated in video games for most of their history, and is present in *Resident Evil*.

In each scenario in the game, the way to get the best ending is to rescue the other, unchosen, player-character. In Jill’s scenario, rescuing Chris leads to him helping Barry hold off monsters, while telling Jill “Ladies first”¹³⁶ during the escape from the self-destruct timer. In Chris’ scenario, Jill rushes up to him and hugs him when he rescues her – a damsel-in-distress whose actions are little different from Princess Peach at the end of a game in the *Super Mario* franchise¹³⁷. In essence, if the player chooses not to play as Jill, she becomes a literal object to be acquired by the player in terms of the game’s system. At first glance, it might seem like the dynamics between rescued Chris and rescued Jill are equal, but, as Anita Sarkeesian points out, these dynamics are tied to broader disparity in gender representation¹³⁸, as already illustrated with the way the game’s manual and official strategy guide frame the characters. In addition, Sarkeesian’s point is highlighted by the fact that, on the character selection screen, Chris is the default option – the player needs to actively select Jill in order to play her scenario. As such, the

¹³⁵ Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure*, pg. 13.

¹³⁶ *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996)

¹³⁷ See Anita Sarkeesian’s three-part video on the subject: <https://feministfrequency.com/video/damsel-in-distress-part-1/> ; <https://feministfrequency.com/video/damsel-in-distress-part-2-tropes-vs-women/> ; <https://feministfrequency.com/video/damsel-in-distress-part-3-tropes-vs-women/>

¹³⁸ *Feminist Frequency* staff. “Damsel in Distress (Part 3). *FeministFrequency.com*, 2013. <https://feministfrequency.com/video/damsel-in-distress-part-3-tropes-vs-women/> (accessed Dec. 12, 2017)

notion of the damsel-in-distress as object carries both the punishment (in the initial abduction) and subsequent objectification Mulvey discusses.

Cultural Context and Family Dynamics

At this point, it is also important to acknowledge another difference between the examples Voorhees cites and *Resident Evil*: the game's country of origin. *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, and *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* are all Western-developed games – American in the case of the first two¹³⁹, and Polish in *The Witcher 3*'s case¹⁴⁰. *Resident Evil*, by contrast, is Japanese developed and published¹⁴¹. This is a necessary distinction to make, in order to avoid falling into the trap articulated by Lidia Puigvert, in her article Dialogic Feminism¹⁴². Puigvert argues that, far too often, Western, university-educated women act as so-called “keepers of the truth”, marginalizing women who do not fall into those categories. As such, it is important to look at the Japanese context embedded in the game, through its creation/production.

In placing the game within a Japanese context, Voorhees' notion of the dutiful daughter comes under a new focus. In order to examine *Resident Evil*'s gender disparity within such a cultural context, a look at the historical roots of that context is necessary. As Yayoi Aoki discusses in her article, Feminism and Imperialism, the idea of deeply coded gender roles in Japan is, contrary to belief, a relatively recent phenomenon originating in the Meiji period of the

¹³⁹ See: <https://www.naughtydog.com/company> and http://corp.sec.state.ma.us/CorpWeb/CorpSearch/CorpSummary.aspx?FEIN=043367865&SEARCH_TYPE=1 (the latter link is necessitated by the closure of Irrational Games, *BioShock Infinite*'s developer, in 2014)

¹⁴⁰ See: <http://en.cdprojektred.com/our-history/>

¹⁴¹ See: Butterworth, Scott. "Resident Evil Creator Shinji Mikami Reflects on the Series' Roots". *Gamespot.com*, under 'Articles', March 22, 2016. <https://www.gamespot.com/articles/resident-evil-creator-shinji-mikami-reflects-on-th/1100-6435918/> (accessed Dec. 9, 2017)

¹⁴² Puigvert, Lidia. Dialogic Feminism: “Other Women’s” Contribution to the Social Transformation of Gender Relations. *Women and Social Transformation*. Ed. Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, Judith Butler, Lidia Puigvert (2003), pg 29-60.

1800s¹⁴³. With the institution of the Meiji Civil Code, previously held attitudes about both how men and women married and how children related to their parents were demonized. As Aoki states, in discussing pre-Meiji Japan:

In the intensely communal rural villages of Japan, contrary to what is generally believed today, the vertical relationship of power between blood parents and children was not particularly close... As adults, almost none married a spouse chosen by their parents. It is said that it was the norm for couples to form within cohorts, and in such cases the support of other young people from one's own generation was more significant than parental approval.¹⁴⁴

Under the Meiji Civil Code, more specifically the 'ie system', the sorts of marriage pairings Aoki refers to were dubbed a so-called 'wild match' and were to be shunned¹⁴⁵.

All of this was done in the name of maintaining the Emperor as an unquestioned patriarchal head of the nation. By extension, the dynamic of the family was restructured to ensure that the patriarchal head of the household held similar power within the home¹⁴⁶. Aoki points out that, along with this shift in power dynamics came a shift in economics – [...] the poverty caused by the downfall of the old samurai families and the impoverishment of the farmers¹⁴⁷. As such, it was held as a virtue for daughters to be not only wholly obedient to their fathers, but also willing to sacrifice themselves to working in spinning mills or, worse, brothels in the name of 'filial piety'¹⁴⁸. Aoki points out that while the intensity of these beliefs and social

¹⁴³ Aoki, Yayoi. *Feminism and Imperialism. Broken Silence: Voices of Japanese Feminism*. Ed. Sandra Buckley. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. Pg. 18-19

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, pg. 21.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pg. 22.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 24.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 25.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, pg. 25-26.

expectations has diminished during the Showa period, the beliefs themselves are still present and viewed now as ‘tradition’¹⁴⁹.

All of this is to say that the dynamics between Jill and Barry, both in terms of narrative and gameplay, carry a distinctly Japanese dimension to them. Jill is not only being a dutiful daughter in Voorhees’ terms when she, and by extension the player, waits patiently for Barry to rescue her/perform some task – she is being an exemplar of a specific form of cultural gender dynamic. This is also the case in the places where Jill is tasked with showing her trust for Barry, such as in the caverns, despite the fact that it is revealed that he is being manipulated by the traitorous Wesker. In other words, to question Barry’s trustworthiness is to call into question both Jill and the player’s filial duty, even to the point of putting Jill’s life at risk.

Patriarchy, Toxic Masculinity, and a Prelude to a Sequel

The attitude toward these gender lines is not as clear-cut as it would seem, however. Throughout the game, as I tested in both scenarios, all of the zombies the player encounters are male. Further to this, the player can find a photograph near the end of the game, showing the main research team for the Umbrella lab – all of them men. While this could simply be read as a misogynistic perception that only men are capable of working in STEM fields, it is also these same men who not only created these monstrosities, but allowed them to escape. This hints at the destructive nature of toxic masculinity, and is a theme that the next game in the series would confront directly.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pg. 28-30.

Chapter 2

The Monstrous Masculine:

Resident Evil 2 (1998) and Toxic Masculinity

“Claire, my stomach. My stomach hurts.”

Sherry Birkin, clutching her stomach, has just uttered these words before collapsing. She is lying on the lone bench in the train engine to which Claire Redfield has brought her. While itself not moving, the engine is on an elevator platform which is currently descending to an underground tunnel/complex. Claire rushes over to her, worriedly saying “Hang in there, Sherry.” She then checks the ten-year-old’s condition and says “Her forehead’s burning up! I’ve got to hurry, before the embryos pupate!”

Suddenly, there is a crashing noise from the roof of the engine, accompanied by an inhuman roar. Claire/the player runs over to the door, ready to investigate, but the security panel issues a warning: “In case of an emergency, the red light will turn on and access from the outside will be prohibited for a limited time”. Despite this ominous caution and left with no other option, Claire/the player goes through the door to confront whatever is threatening herself and Sherry. Stepping outside, Claire immediately hears the door lock behind her – she now has no choice but to face this unknown threat. Running onto the platform proper, she/the player starts looking for what has caused this situation, when a large lead pipe suddenly careens off of the platform’s industrial steel floor right in front of her.

Looking up, Claire sees the source of both the thrown pipe and the current danger: William Birkin, head researcher for Umbrella mutated by his self-inflicted exposure to the G-Virus, is standing threateningly on the roof of the engine. Birkin’s mutation is also the source of

the embryos currently endangering Sherry. As Sherry's mother, Annette, explained, because Sherry is William's daughter, their genetic similarity provides the best host material for the mutant parasites. Standing aghast, Claire watches as Birkin mutates further: his human head receding into his chest; a new, monstrous head emerging in its place; a giant eye opening on his clawed right arm, as three large new talons emerge from his right hand. This new version of Birkin then leaps to the floor of the platform and starts stalking toward Claire.

Despite taking a few swipes with his lethal-looking new claws, Birkin is quickly dispatched by the player/Claire's grenade launcher, loaded with fire rounds. After mutant Birkin collapses spewing blood, Claire/the player runs back to the engine's entrance in order to stay with Sherry for the duration of the platform's descent. As the platform comes to a stop, Claire is kneeling near Sherry, who is still lying prone on the bench. "Sherry..." Claire softly says, as Sherry moans in pain. Claire picks Sherry up and, carrying her to an abandoned office in the newly discovered underground complex, notices that William is conspicuously missing.

Lying Sherry down on the cot conveniently located in the office, Claire starts to leave the room. "Claire?" Sherry asks, coming to after having been collapsed for so long. Claire turns around, responding with "Oh, you're finally awake". "Isn't this..." Sherry asks, realizing that she is wearing Claire's red vest. "That's okay", Claire responds, "you keep it. I'm sure it will keep you safe". "Thank you, Claire", Sherry says as Claire kneels beside the cot in order to be closer to her. "Even though I'm an only child, neither of my parents ever spent much time with me", Sherry confides, "because of their work". Sherry turns her head away, continuing, "I grew up alone". Turning back to Claire, she says "Now that you're with me, I finally have someone to

rely upon”, before starting to cry. Claire comforts her, and tells her to just rest there while she goes to find the antidote to the William-embryos that may soon mean Sherry’s destruction.¹⁵⁰

Resident Evil 2’s Dual Identity

When *Resident Evil 2* (Capcom, 1998) was released in Japan and North America on January 21, 1998, the game offered a host of improvements and changes over its predecessor. While the sequel “[...] didn’t reinvent the original [...]”, as the *GameTrailers* staff put it¹⁵¹, there were still significant differences on all levels. In terms of presentation, the graphics engine was enhanced, allowing for more detailed character models and a larger variety of zombie types – an aspect that will be discussed in more depth presently - as well as other monsters¹⁵². The FMV cut-scenes of the previous game were replaced with computer-generated ones which *GameFan* deemed as on the same level as Pixar releases of the time¹⁵³. The voice acting and dialogue were significantly improved, as well, including the casting of professional voice actors such as Alyson Court as player-character Claire Redfield¹⁵⁴.

The gameplay was also noticeably enhanced for the follow-up. While *Resident Evil 2* maintained the ‘tank controls’ of its predecessor, the inclusion of an optional auto-aim function alleviated some of the issues associated with this control scheme. This function, which caused the player-character to automatically aim at the nearest enemy when the weapon aiming button was pressed¹⁵⁵, not only made wasted ammunition less of a concern but also addressed the criticism from the first game of not being able to aim at enemies which were present and

¹⁵⁰ This account was created from a combination of my playthrough and the Survival Horror Network’s *Resident Evil 2* Claire A/Leon B longplay Let’s Play video found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9O_1nRNhKs

¹⁵¹ *GameTrailers* staff. *The Resident Evil Retrospective – Part II*. *GameTrailers.com* (2009) (archived on YouTube). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4reAxKyOz3Q&t=147s> (Accessed Jan. 17, 2018)

¹⁵² Major Mike. *Resident Evil 2 Preview*. *GamePro* No. 113 (Feb. 1998), pg. 41.

¹⁵³ Hambleton. *Resident Evil 2 Review*. *GameFan* Vol. 6, Issue 2 (January 1998), pg. 48.

¹⁵⁴ Court’s previous work at the time included Marvel’s *X-Men* cartoon (Marvel Productions, 1992-1997), *Babar* (Nelvana, 1989-1991), and the *Beetlejuice* cartoon adaptation (Geffen Film Company/Nelvana, 1989-1991)

¹⁵⁵ Major Mike. *Resident Evil 2 Review*. *GamePro* No. 114 (Mar. 1998), pg. 93.

imminent threats, but ‘off-camera’. Additionally, as player-characters sustained more injuries, the character models reflected this damage, grabbing their waists and, eventually, limping, which slowed character movement¹⁵⁶. This physical reflection of the player’s health, especially the decreased movement speed accompanying the limp, added more palpable tension to scenarios in which the player was confronting the various threats in the game.

The overarching narrative took a dramatic turn, as well. *Resident Evil* focused on a secret bio-weapons laboratory maintained in the wilderness on the outskirts of a Midwestern American city by the pharmaceutical company, Umbrella. *Resident Evil 2* took that secret and turned it into a full-blown conspiracy that encompassed the entire town, through both people in positions of power and literal infrastructure. In terms of authority figures, Raccoon City’s Police Chief, Brian Irons, and Albert Wesker, S.T.A.R.S. captain from the previous game, were the most visible official Raccoon City participants to this conspiracy. Further to this, the city’s sewer system, transit infrastructure, and even the police headquarters building were physically transformed to accommodate Umbrella’s secret labs, experiments, and obtuse puzzle locks. This conspiracy, the actors involved, and the impacts of it, narrative-wise and in terms of gameplay, are key to differentiating the experience of *Resident Evil 2* from its predecessor, and the reason why the scene detailed above is important.

There were aspects of the game experience which did remain largely the same, though. One of the primary examples of this is the choice between player-characters. *Resident Evil 2*, like its forbear, offers the player the option of playing as either a male or female avatar: Leon S. Kennedy, a rookie cop newly arrived in Raccoon City, or Claire Redfield, younger sister of Chris Redfield, the male protagonist from the prior game. Even here, however, significant changes

¹⁵⁶ Major Mike. [*Resident Evil 2* Review](#).

took place. Each character's experience, across two campaigns, was large enough that they were dedicated to a whole CD apiece. In addition, while Leon's motivation for most of his campaign is just 'escape while trying to save as many people as possible', Claire's is more personal. Claire is only in Raccoon City looking for her brother, as Chris has disappeared following the events of the first game.

This personal motivation for Claire was not always the case, however, nor was Claire's very presence in the game. As detailed in *GamePro*'s "Hot E3 Picks" from 1997, the female player-character was originally going to be a university student named Elsa Walker, whose motivation would have been the same as Leon's – escape from the city, working with people along the way¹⁵⁷. This version of the game, referred to by the fanbase as '*Resident Evil 1.5*', was scrapped in favour of a new from-scratch build which featured Claire and her more meaningful attachment to the game's events¹⁵⁸. Noboru Sugimura, scenario writer brought on for the final version of the game, discussed the shift in character motivations that occurred with his involvement in an interview in 1998, stating:

The original Resident Evil was just a survival/escape game. Jill and Chris' motivation was simply to escape the zombie-infested Spencer Mansion, so they weren't given any independent characterization or motivation. That made it hard for us to give them big dramatic arcs. That's why for the sequel we decided to create new characters, with suitable motivations for the dramatic plot, like searching for her brother, or a romance sideplot.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Major Mike. "Resident Evil 2 Preview" in *E3 Unleashed*. *GamePro* No. 106 (Jul. 1997), pg. 41.

¹⁵⁸ *GameTrailers* staff, *The Resident Evil Retrospective – Part II*.

¹⁵⁹ Sugimura, Noboru in interview. *Resident Evil 2 – 1998 Developer Interview with Hideki Kamiya (director) and Noboru Sugimura (writer)*. *The PlayStation*, June, 1998. Trans: Shmuplations.com. <http://shmuplations.com/residentevil2/> (accessed Feb. 9, 2018)

This, along with other important changes to the game's narrative between the initial build and the final released version of the game¹⁶⁰, shifts the nature of the game's major conflicts, casting them in a new light.

Further, with the game's so-called 'zapping system', the two characters had two different campaigns on their respective discs. These campaigns were designed to more significantly intertwine with each other – when beating the 'A' campaign for one character, the player was able to play through the other character's 'B' campaign, which is supposed to take place concurrently with the first character's 'A' campaign. As such, decisions and actions the player made in one character's 'A' campaign impact the events of the second character's 'B' campaign¹⁶¹. The nature of this system made the choice of player-character more than just two alternate timelines, or who would rescue whom at the end of the game, but shows that one character's choices made an impact on the other character.

With this physical structure of the game (i.e. two discs for two characters) and the associated 'zapping system', there was a design choice made with the game's release that highlights an underlying gender bias. As with Chris in the first game, when presenting the two choices for player-character to the player, Leon is offered first. Unlike the first game, this configuration was not simply presented through options in a menu. Instead, Leon's disc is not only the first one in the case, but is also labelled 'Disc 1', physically making Leon the default choice for player-character.

This time around, this design decision was particularly incongruous, however. As detailed in the *GameTrailers* retrospective on the series, and corroborated by BradyGames'

¹⁶⁰ Discussed in Avalanche Reviews' detailed examination of the *Resident Evil 1.5* build leaked to the internet in 2013 (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDuZsJDxmrY>)

¹⁶¹ Hambleton, *Resident Evil 2 Review*, pg. 48; Major Mike, *Resident Evil 2 Preview*, pg. 41; Major Mike, *Resident Evil 2 Review*, pg. 93.

official Capcom-sanctioned *Resident Evil Archives*¹⁶², Claire’s ‘A’ campaign (disc 2) and Leon’s ‘B’ campaign (disc 1) are considered the canonical version of the game. As such, with this packaging/labelling, the default is again implied to be the male player-character, “[...] prompting most to play the non-canon version first, without realising it”¹⁶³, as the *GameTrailers* staff points out.

The high-profile 2019 remake of the game even replicates this configuration. Despite the establishment of the canon discussed above back in 2006 in the *Resident Evil Archives*, *Resident Evil 2* (Capcom, 2019) presents Leon’s campaign as the default when one enters the main menu for the game, mirroring the choice offered in the 1996 original. This design decision may have been fueled, as much of the remake’s design seems to have been, by nostalgia for the original, mimicking the order in which the discs were offered; I cannot definitively answer this one way or the other due to lack of documentation.

The 2019 game’s packaging is another story, however. While the original game’s cover offered a glimpse of one of the undead, the standard 2019 cover art depicts Leon and Claire together, facing down the undead hordes. The deluxe edition cover art, on the other hand, is double-sided so that one can decide whether they want Leon or Claire to be the cover character. While interesting in concept and mirroring the so-called ‘M-Shep vs. FemShep’ debate surrounding BioWare’s *Mass Effect* trilogy (BioWare, 2007-2012), this reversible cover doubles down on the disc/menu options by making Leon the default cover art, complete with copy and errata on the back. The Claire version of the cover is the one concealed on the flip side, and her version does not contain any of the game’s promotional copy, offering instead only a rather

¹⁶² Otomo, Jun. *Resident Evil Archives*. Trans. Zpang America, inc. Indianapolis: BradyGames Publishing, 2006, pg. 41-58.

¹⁶³ *GameTrailers* staff, [The Resident Evil Retrospective – Part II](#).

uninteresting building façade. It is clear that, despite the distance of twenty-one years between the original and its remake, Capcom has maintained an odd gendered stance on the packaging for *Resident Evil 2*.

Resident Evil 1.5, Urban Demographics, and Representation

In addition to this misleading default, there is also an indication of gender bias in the zombies themselves. Unlike the first game, where there were three zombie character models, all presenting as male, there are actually female zombies in *Resident Evil 2*. There are a few issues with these zombies, though. For one, despite there being seven different male zombie character models (those being: 1) a police officer with or without cap, 2) wearing button-up shirt and green slacks, 3) wearing a black t-shirt and jeans, 4) wearing a white t-shirt and jeans but semi-disembowelled, 5) Umbrella scientists, 6) medical orderlies, and 7) naked during my playthrough, and confirmed in the Versus guide for the game¹⁶⁴), there is only one character model for the female ones. This character model is of a fit adult female wearing a spaghetti-strap halter top and revealing cut-off jean shorts with high-top sneakers. Essentially, the design of the female zombie sexualizes the monster, equating ‘female’ with ‘sex object’ in an even more fundamentally disturbing way by literally making these women mindless sexualized bodies.

The other major issue with the presence of these female zombies is, oddly enough, their lack of presence. There is a large discrepancy in the ratio of female to male zombies which appear in the game. While there are a large number of zombies in the game, and even in single rooms, the female character model is only encountered, at most, five times during a character’s

¹⁶⁴ Guess, Gerald, and Mateo Rojas. *The Completely Unauthorized Versus Books Resident Evil 2 Perfect Guide*. Milan, OH: Empire 21 Publishing, 1998, Pg. 9.

‘A’ campaign¹⁶⁵. This disparity is particularly odd when considering the fact that the game takes place not in a secluded mansion run by an evil company (with questionable hiring practices), as with the first game, but in a small city. As indicated by the death toll listed at the end of *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* (Capcom, 2000)¹⁶⁶, the population of Raccoon City at the time of the events of both *Resident Evil 2* and *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* - which take place concurrently - is approximately 100,000.

Once again, these issues surrounding the appearance and frequency of female zombies in the game were not always the case. While not explicitly commented on in the retrospective by Avalanche Reviews, there are multiple scenes/locations where female zombies appear in the *Resident Evil 1.5* build of the game shown in the video¹⁶⁷, and these appearances highlight some key differences. One major distinction is how the character models for these female zombies differ significantly from the models which appear in the final game. Rather than the revealing tank top and short shorts of the final game, the female zombie model in the *1.5* build is wearing what appears to be office casual attire – button-up blouse, knee-length skirt, and flat-heeled shoes. As such, the female zombies in *1.5* are less sexualized and give more of an appearance of being caught off-guard during day-to-day routine.

Further to this, even though the Avalanche Reviews video only shows two sections of the game in which female zombies appear, those two clips demonstrate that the *1.5* build was intended to have a larger proportion of female zombies in the game. Between the two sections shown, there are six female zombies present – in the segment at 9:37, four are present at the

¹⁶⁵ Confirmed using the Survival Horror Network’s *Resident Evil 2* Claire A/Leon B longplay Let’s Play video (SHN Survival Horror Network. “Resident Evil 2 PSone Claire A/ Leon B HD 1080p Lets Play Longplay No Commentary”. *YouTube.com*. Dec. 22, 2014).

¹⁶⁶ This can be seen with the Survival Horror Network’s Let’s Play video for the game (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WajTS0JSvOo>) at 2:32:25.

¹⁶⁷ See Avalanche Reviews, “Resident Evil Retrospective: Part 1.5”, 9:37; 12:22.

same time¹⁶⁸. These two scenes alone contain more female zombies than the entirety of a character's 'A' campaign in the final version of the game. This increased presence indicates that *Resident Evil 2* was originally going to be, if not closer to the actual breakdown of a city's population, at the very least less one-sided in terms of gender representation. The ratio of different character models for male to female zombies, however, appears to have remained constant with only one character model for the female zombies.

Opposing the Male Gaze

Yet, despite the disparities present in the physical game structure, the lone female zombie character model and that model's relative absence, as well as the fact that the game retained the cinematic camera angle presentation of its predecessor, the same conversation about Mulvey's 'male gaze' in the previous chapter does not fully apply to *Resident Evil 2*. The reason for this can be found in Mulvey's follow up article, Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"¹⁶⁹. In this article, Mulvey attempts to address the question of what a female gaze in the cinema might look like. Mulvey's answer is less about the cinematic gaze itself, which she contends is still an inherently masculine point of view. Instead, her answer is more about the potential female audience member/spectator of the gaze, the possibility of a female protagonist within the fiction of a film, and the disruptive possibilities of both¹⁷⁰. She begins by once again highlighting the fact that Freud took the stance that the masculine was the default, and that masculinity equates with activity while femininity equates with passivity¹⁷¹.

¹⁶⁸ Avalanche Reviews, "Resident Evil Retrospective: Part 1.5".

¹⁶⁹ Mulvey, Laura. Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946). *Feminist Film Theory*. Ed. Sue Thornham. New York: New York University Press, 1999.

¹⁷⁰ Mulvey, Afterthoughts, pg. 123,

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, pg. 123-124.

What is different about her discussion here, however, is that she also points out that Freud applied the same notion of libido being masculine, and thereby active, as being inherent to both male and female development. The distinction is then made where the masculine, under patriarchy, embraces the active stance, while the so-called ‘proper’ feminine represses it¹⁷². As such, she claims that: “[i]n this sense Hollywood genre films structured around masculine pleasure, offering an identification with the *active* point of view, allow a woman spectator to rediscover that lost aspect of her sexual identity, the never fully repressed bed-rock of feminine neurosis”¹⁷³. Essentially, Mulvey’s argument is that the female spectator, in aligning herself with the pleasure of the active stance offered by a film’s protagonist, is fundamentally disrupting patriarchal expectations through this preference for activity.

Tied to this is the notion of how to approach this active stance when the protagonist, whom Mulvey characterized in her previous article as an idealized male figure¹⁷⁴, is instead made female. Mulvey’s discussion focuses on the concept of marriage as a normalizing structure, and the disruption inherent when the woman is the one to choose a partner, rather than simply being awarded to the ‘best’ candidate¹⁷⁵. She uses King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* to highlight how the conflict between acceptance of social responsibility, along with integration into the patriarchal order, can be contrasted with a what she terms ‘regressive masculinity’ – a rejection of responsibility in favour of unrestrained desire and freedom¹⁷⁶. It should be noted that ‘regressive masculinity’ as it is used here is not inherently male; it is a reference to the Freudian libido-as-masculine idea mentioned above. In essence, Mulvey uses the term in the same way as

¹⁷² *Ibid*, pg. 124. It should be noted that both Freud and Mulvey leave aside the fact that they are dealing in binaries, taking male and female to be the only possible genders. Mulvey does acknowledge a level of fluidity later in her discussion, however, without explicitly naming it.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*.

¹⁷⁴ Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure*, pg. 12.

¹⁷⁵ Mulvey, *Afterthoughts*, pg. 127.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 127-128.

she uses Freudian psychoanalysis as a whole – a dismantling of patriarchal structures using the tools of that selfsame patriarchy¹⁷⁷. As she points out using *Duel in the Sun*, though, for the female protagonist to reject integration into the patriarchal order leads, as she argued in her original article, to schism and potential destruction¹⁷⁸.

The question at this point is how this discussion applies to *Resident Evil 2*. Aside from the fact that the game provides a female protagonist in the form of Claire, there is no romantic subplot for her, no potential for marriage which is Mulvey's focus, and no overt address of the player's gender during Claire's campaign. The importance of Mulvey's discussion to the game is twofold. First, and most straightforward, while Claire is not forced to choose between marriage and freedom, there is a character who does face that decision – Annette Birkin.

Love in the Time of G-Virus Outbreak – Annette Birkin and the Japanese Matriarch

Figure

While acting in an antagonistic capacity to Claire throughout her campaign, Annette is constantly torn between her ties to William, her increasingly monstrous husband, and her love for and concern over Sherry, her daughter. Annette feels that, with William progressively mutating throughout the game, it is her responsibility to preserve his work by retrieving the last known sample of the G-virus at any costs. To do so, she goes to extreme and violent lengths, repeatedly attacking Claire and holding her at gunpoint. When Annette realizes that Claire has been protecting Sherry throughout the game, her efforts, while no less aggressive, are tempered by her ongoing concern over her daughter. Eventually, Annette does choose Sherry over William, and is killed by the mutated William-monster shortly after. This tempering of aggression does not carry over into Leon's 'B' campaign, though, as she almost succeeds in

¹⁷⁷ Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure*, pg. 6-7

¹⁷⁸ Mulvey, *Afterthoughts*, pg. 128-129.

killing Leon by gunshot wound because she believes that he and Ada Wong are trying to steal the G-virus (which, in Ada's case, is actually proven to be a legitimate concern).

To be sure, Annette is not trying to protect her own accomplishments. She refers to the G-virus and the last remaining sample as 'her husband's G-virus'¹⁷⁹ and her 'husband's legacy'¹⁸⁰. She also says to Claire that the G-virus is "[...] the most significant piece of research my husband has ever left in my hands"¹⁸¹. Moreover, she even tells Ada that "[m]y husband is the man responsible for the creation of the T-virus [the precursor to the G-virus, and the cause of the zombies in the first game]"¹⁸². Annette defers to William in all of this, despite being, as the *Resident Evil Archives* indicates, a fully qualified researcher in her own right¹⁸³.

The self-deprecation and placement of her husband's interests above her own illustrated above cast Annette as a 'good wife' within the patriarchal societal system. More specifically, returning to Yayoi Aoki, Annette is carrying out the role of the dutiful Japanese wife under Meiji/post-Meiji expectations. As Aoki states:

Seen from a female point of view, the "family-emperor" system required not only that a woman devote herself to an overbearing husband but also that she take responsibility for offering aid in accord with his dependent male role. Moreover, she was expected to take responsibility for the countless concerns of the family/household. Despite all this, women were categorized, together with children, as intellectually incompetent and unaccountable under the law. In this way, women were effectively excluded from public life.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹SHN Survival Horror Network. "Resident Evil 2 PSone Claire A/ Leon B", 1:28:48

¹⁸⁰*Ibid*, 3:45:50

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 1:54:38

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 3:15:03

¹⁸³ Otomo, *Resident Evil Archives*, pg. 128

¹⁸⁴ Aoki, *Feminism and Imperialism*, pg. 28

Despite the game being set in an American Midwestern city, Annette fulfills the criteria laid out for the ‘good’ Japanese wife. Her devotion to her husband manifests itself not only in her obsession with retrieving the G-virus sample, but also in her neglect of Sherry in favour of not her work, but his. Her aggression throughout the game is also thus explained. Rather than being contrary to the ‘good wife’ figure, her aggression can be read as taking responsibility for a task which William is incapable of handling himself – “the most significant piece of research my husband has ever left in my hands”.

Moreover, all of this occurs after, according to the *Resident Evil Archives*, she has been minimized as a researcher in her own right. This happened twice: first by serving under Birkin in a diminished researcher capacity/role after their marriage and Sherry’s birth, and then, once research on the G-virus began, being removed as a researcher entirely. As stated in the *Archives*:

Then, after William received permission from Umbrella to begin his new G-Virus project, she [Annette] also was allowed to participate in it. Her role was to be in charge of communications with outside parties from their new underground laboratory in Raccoon City.¹⁸⁵

Thus, the only participation she was *allowed* to have in the research was as outside liaison for William – handling the ‘household’ organization while William focuses on his all-consuming interest. It is only when she steps outside this role, focusing more on her daughter than her husband, that she is punished as argued by Mulvey.

Birkin, Creed, and the Monstrous Symbolic Order

This domination of Annette by William, both before and after his transformation, and his neglect and subsequent violence against Sherry indicate the real monster of *Resident Evil 2*.

¹⁸⁵ Otomo, *Resident Evil Archives*, pg. 128

While a mutated Birkin is the main antagonistic monster in the game, the true antagonist is the toxic masculinity which created the viruses, caused the viral outbreak to begin with, and repeatedly hampers the efforts of all those trapped in the city to escape or even survive. This is the other way in which Mulvey's discussion applies to *Resident Evil 2*. In order to properly discuss this dynamic, it is important to look at Barbara Creed's foundational text, Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine.

As with Mulvey, Creed takes a Freudian approach to her subject – the nature of the horror in horror films. She starts by discussing Freud's stance that the Medusa's head is symbolic of female genitalia, thereby denoting it as a fear of castration¹⁸⁶. She then aligns this stance with Kristeva's discussion of the abject, focusing on how the abject is separate from the subject, but necessary to the definition of it – I am I, because I am not it, so to speak¹⁸⁷. Categorizations of the abject that Creed comes back to repeatedly throughout her article are those of the corpse/death, and various bodily excretions - blood, feces, urine, pus, and vomit – with one notable exception to be discussed below.

Creed aligns Freud's stance with Kristeva's to show how, within patriarchal society, the feminine is categorized as other, and therefore abject. She ties the abject in horror films with the monster/antagonist, stating, much like Robin Wood, that the monster's presence in a film results in “[...] an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability”¹⁸⁸. Therefore, Medusa, as both female genitalia symbolizing the threat of castration and

¹⁸⁶ Creed, Barbara. Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection. *Screen* Volume 27, Issue 1 (Jan. 1986), pg. 44-45

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 45-46

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 49

representative of the mother figure, must be brought low in order to maintain masculine societal structure¹⁸⁹.

Further to this, Creed uses Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Friedkin's *The Exorcist*, and De Palma's *Carrie* to highlight the ways in which the feminine is cast as both other and threatening. In *Psycho*, the maternal figure is a threat both physically and psychologically: Bates, dressed as his mother, kills women, but only because of the assault on his masculine psyche by his mother's refusal to relinquish him to the symbolic (read: patriarchal) order¹⁹⁰. *The Exorcist*, Creed contends, involves a battle between the priest-as-father figure of the symbolic pitted against a girl entering puberty, aligning her and the experiences that come with her with the devil¹⁹¹. Finally, *Carrie* has the titular character manifest monstrous powers with the onset of puberty, much like *The Exorcist*, and she unleashes those powers when she is publicly shamed over menstrual blood¹⁹².

As a result of this dynamic across all of these films, Creed contends the following in relation to Kristeva's concept of the religious defilement rite:

This, I would argue, is also the central ideological project of the popular horror film-purification of the abject through a 'descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct'. In this way, the horror film brings about a confrontation with the abject [...] in order, finally, to eject the abject and re-draw the boundaries between the human and non-human. As a form of modern defilement rite, the horror film works to separate out the

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, pg. 61

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, pg. 50

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, pg. 52

¹⁹² *Ibid*

symbolic order from all that threatens its stability, particularly the mother and all that her universe signifies¹⁹³.

What she is arguing here is that the horror film allows for a confrontation between the symbolic order and the abject, in order to re-establish and re-affirm that self-same order – again, ‘I am I, because I am not it’.

This conflict with the symbolic order is why Creed, and by extension Mulvey, are important to a discussion of *Resident Evil 2*. While *Resident Evil 2* does not conform to the examples discussed above, or Creed’s main example in her article, Ridley Scott’s *Alien*, there is still an attack on the symbolic order taking place. That attack, however, is being conducted by the player, whether playing the game as either Claire or Leon. While Creed discusses how *Alien* highlights the monstrous-feminine at work within a patriarchal society, *Resident Evil 2* makes the patriarchal society itself monstrous. The symbolic order in place is the destructive force aligned against the player, both overtly and via subtext, inverting the relationship Creed outlines. Therefore, the boundary between human and non-human is being redrawn, as Creed argues, but with patriarchal masculinity ejected, not the feminine made monstrous.

The most obvious figure for this is William Birkin, himself. Birkin is, quite literally, the father figure in the game. He is the head of the household, and Sherry’s father. He is also the game’s father figure in the sense that, through his research and his position of authority, he is at fault for both the T-Virus outbreak of the original game and the G-Virus outbreak in *Resident Evil 2*. Tying back to Yayoi’s discussion, while Birkin was the cause for both outbreaks, he is not, at any point, forced to take responsibility – any responsibility for the consequences of these situations gets placed on the shoulders of Annette Birkin and Ada Wong.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, pg. 53

Moreover, Birkin's various mutations highlight the masculine nature of his monstrosity. Creed refers to the eponymous monster in *Alien* as both the archaic mother and the phallic mother: the archaic mother, because all of the death scenes aside from the alien's birth take place in womb-like environments¹⁹⁴, and the phallic mother because of the nature of the alien's phallic tail and proboscis in relation to the vaginal and womb imagery associated with it¹⁹⁵. The opposite can be said to apply to Birkin. Even with his first, relatively human, form, he carries a large phallic pipe as a weapon. In the transformation mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the stand-in (or fetishistic) phallus is discarded for giant talons on his arm, with a bulbous eyeball at its base.

Finally, in his last two forms, his appearance resembles nothing less than a giant phallus and scrotum. In the Claire/Leon 'A' scenario, his head and neck are combined into one long stalk over a giant set of jowls covered in razor sharp mandibles, with four legs for mobility. He is the phallic counter to the toothed vagina Creed discusses¹⁹⁶. Rather than trying to consume, as Creed argues with the toothed vagina, the jowls do not connect to any significant orifice. Instead, as the player is fighting him in this form, he will attempt to grab the player with these scrotal mandibles, chew impotently, and then spit/throw the player character from him.

His final form, which appears in the characters' 'B' scenarios, takes this notion even further, by removing the legs and replacing them with several tentacles. While this final form does get the maw that Creed characterizes as the consuming womb¹⁹⁷, it is minimized compared to the sac-like organism surrounding it, with the same phallic stalk-like head and neck, which Birkin has become. This focus on the phallic aspects of Birkin's final form are emphasized in

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, pg. 65-66

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, pg. 68

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 66

gameplay terms, as well, as Birkin's main attack in this form is to hit and/or grab the player with these tentacles.

All of this does not even take into account the fact that Birkin's main drive in the game is to reproduce. He does so, not through any sort of uterine/ovum-resembling process, as with Creed's discussion of *Alien* – the so-called 'primal scene' of Freudian psychoanalysis¹⁹⁸, but via embryos which he spews from the mouth of his phallus-like head/neck stalk. These embryos tie to the one body fluid that Creed does not discuss in her list of abject excretions – semen. The embryos that William and his offspring excrete resemble giant sperm, except red and brown in colour, which force themselves down the throat of the closest victim. They then gestate within said victim before violently erupting, destroying the host and producing another phallic monster with similar behaviours.

The player is forced to directly confront this aggressively masculine reproduction process via gameplay. When Ben, a reporter who has locked himself in the holding cells of the Raccoon City Police Department, or Chief Irons gets infected in Leon's or Claire's campaign, respectively, the player must then fight Birkin's resultant mutant offspring. This offspring, which resembles Birkin's next-to-final form except without the scrotal sac, constantly generates additional sperm-like embryos which latch onto the player-character. While the player character cannot be implanted with one of these embryos, they do cause damage as soon as they latch on, prompting the player to destroy them before they come within reach.

This is not the only way in which Birkin's mutant reproductive drive affects gameplay, however. As indicated in the scene at the beginning of this chapter, he eventually impregnates his own daughter, Sherry, with one of these embryos. While both Chief Irons and Ben the

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, pg. 56-57

reporter do ‘give birth’ to permutations of Birkin’s spawn, Annette reveals that, because Sherry and William share genetic similarities, the mutant that will result will be superior. Essentially, then, having the phallic monster subsume male hosts does not carry as great an effect as eliminating a female offspring and replacing her with a masculine one - replacing one figure of the symbolic with another does not have the same impact as excoriating a female figure in favour of a new representation of the male imaginary. As such, the player, as Claire, is tasked with preventing this violent transposition by generating an antidote to the embryo/G-virus and administering it to Sherry.

It is interesting to note, then, that the video game press of the time did not address this dynamic, whatsoever. While there is no mention of Sherry at all in the *GameFan* review of the game¹⁹⁹, and the BradyGames *Totally Unauthorized Resident Evil 2 Survival Guide* only mentions the situation in the vaguest of terms²⁰⁰, both the *GamePro* review and *The Completely Unauthorized Versus Books Resident Evil 2 Perfect Guide* comment on Sherry’s presence in the game. Both of these last two sources only discuss the fact that Sherry becomes a playable character, however; neither one mentions her interactions with mutant Birkin. The *GamePro* review states that “[...] one sequence where little Sherry can easily be mauled by dogs goes almost too far”²⁰¹, with the *Versus Books Resident Evil Perfect Guide* calling the same section of the game “[...] one of the most demented video game scenarios ever devised[...]”²⁰². Apparently, having Sherry forcibly impregnated by her death-mutant incest-rape monster father while unconscious is not worth discussing, but having her/the player actively dodging mutant dogs is

¹⁹⁹ Hambleton, *Resident Evil 2 Review*.

²⁰⁰ Cox, Tim. *Totally Unauthorized Resident Evil 2 Survival Guide*. Indianapolis: Brady Publishing, 1998.

²⁰¹ Major Mike, *Resident Evil 2 Review*, pg. 93

²⁰² Guess and Rojas, *Resident Evil 2 Perfect Guide*, pg. 63

unacceptable. It should be noted here that all of these writers are, or present avatars which identify as, male.

Toxic Masculinity versus Gender Identity

Moreover, while Birkin is certainly the most obvious figure/monster associated with the patriarchal symbolic, he is by far not the only one. In either character's 'B' scenario, the Tyrant monster from the first game makes a return, this time as a monolithic juggernaut sent in to retrieve a sample of the G-virus designated Tyrant-103²⁰³, and named Mr. X in promotional material for the game²⁰⁴. It should be clarified that this is not the same Tyrant from the first game; according to the *Resident Evil Archives*, that was model T-002 – the model prior to Mr. X²⁰⁵.

Mr. X's presence highlights the symbolic order, and the battle against it, in the game in a few ways. First and foremost, given his garb (heavy work boots, a thick concealing trenchcoat, and padded gloves) and his mission, he is a monstrous masculine figure explicitly sent to reassert the dominant order. He is there to reclaim the G-virus sample and crush any opposition in his way in as direct a fashion as possible; he and Ada share the same goal, but his methods are exponentially more violent. He does not need guile or coercion when he is in the dominant position in the police station – he just needs to be a blunt instrument.

Second, his clothes and designation erase any ambiguity about the gender of the Tyrant monster which was present in the first game. In both the original PlayStation version of *Resident Evil*, as well as the GameCube remake/HD remaster, the Tyrant remains sexually ambiguous,

²⁰³ See: Guess and Rojas, *Resident Evil 2 Perfect Guide*, pg. 81; Otomo, *Resident Evil Archives*, pg. 158

²⁰⁴ See: Perry, S.D. *Resident Evil: City of the Dead*. New York: Pocket Books, 1999, pg. 128; Video Game Superstars Presents Resident Evil 2 Mr. X Action Figure, Toy Biz, 1998; Resident Evil Mr. X Action Figure, Palisades, 200

²⁰⁵ Otomo, *Resident Evil Archives*, pg. 158.

being referred to as ‘it’ in both cases²⁰⁶ rather than being assigned masculine or feminine pronouns²⁰⁷. With this next iteration in both the game franchise and the Tyrant version, the monster completes the breaking away symbolized in the first game, when it not only emerged from its uterine-like incubation tube, but smashed out of it. The Tyrant firmly becomes part of both the male symbolic and the male power structure enforced by Umbrella, conforming to Creed’s discussion of the primal scene²⁰⁸, except with the acceptance into the symbolic order being the violent act, and Kristeva’s notion of the abjection of the maternal in the mother-child relationship²⁰⁹.

It is important to note that, while there are instances of Creed’s primal scene in *Resident Evil 2*, they are not fully associated with the monstrous-feminine as she demonstrates with *Alien*. Returning to the scene at the beginning of the chapter, the descent of the train to the secret laboratory is very much a womb-like descent, and there is a monstrous-feminine element present – the lab is the womb from which monsters are born. From this perspective, the descent mirrors the entrance into the alien ship Creed examines, in which the return to the womb evokes “[...] the abyss, the monstrous vagina, the origin of all life threatening to re-absorb what it once birthed”²¹⁰.

Despite this, there are characteristics of this descent which go against this stance. This descent is not just a voyage into life-threatening danger; it is the only way for the player to rescue Sherry from the monster gestating inside her. From that context, it is not a monstrous

²⁰⁶ See: TurkishBullet. “Resident Evil (PlayStation) - (Longplay - Jill Valentine)”. *YouTube.com*. Nov. 25, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moW4wLjZnHk> (accessed Feb. 13, 2018); SHN, Survival Horror Network. “Resident Evil HD Remaster PS4/PS3 1080p Real Survival Jill Strategy Guide Longplay”. *YouTube.com*. Dec. 22, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSpb5dnVJOY> (accessed Feb. 13, 2018)

²⁰⁷ While the discussion could be made about gender-neutral pronouns, the fact that the Tyrant is a genetically-engineered bio-weapon makes the use of ‘it’ if not all right, then less unacceptable.

²⁰⁸ Creed, *Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine*, pg. 55.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 49.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 62

womb that the player is entering into, but a life-giving one. Further, since the monstrous creatures present in the lab are primarily the creations of male researchers (with the notable exception of Annette), this disrupts the idea of the lab being a womb-as-monstrous-feminine; instead, the lab becomes the womb *masculinised*. The threat comes not from the womb itself, but from the idea that the masculine influence on it is what transforms it into something dangerous – it is the notion of the patriarchal order making the feminine monstrous writ large.

Opposing the Symbolic Order

This notion is further contextualized, via Mulvey, through the figure of Claire. It is through Claire that the player confronts various patriarchal power structures throughout the game. Of the thirty-five zombies Claire encounters during her initial escape to the police station in her ‘A’ Scenario, close to a third of them (eleven, to be precise) are police officers – all of those male²¹¹. Returning to the discussion of gender representation in the zombies, it is important to note that there is no character model for a female police officer zombie in the game; all of the police in Raccoon City are apparently male. These instantly recognizable male authority figures are cast in opposition to Claire/the player from the outset of the game.

Moreover, the police chief, Brian Irons not only acts as a recurring obstacle/threat to Claire, but is introduced presiding over the dead body of the Mayor’s daughter. It is later revealed that Irons, himself, is responsible for her death; he shot her before she became a zombie, so that he could use his taxidermy skills on her, literally making her into a body for him to possess²¹². On top of all of this, as discussed before, Claire/the player must confront the embodiment of the patriarchal notion of the ‘good wife’ in Annette, a literal father-figure in the mutated Birkin, and his sperm-like/phallic mutant offspring.

²¹¹ See: SHN Survival Horror Network, “Resident Evil 2 PSONe Claire A/Leon B”

²¹² *Ibid*, 50:03

Claire as protagonist consistently upends the patriarchal power structure and symbolic order, as argued by Mulvey, through her sheer presence and refusal to acquiesce. This opposition is heightened in that the player is given an active role in this upending, through the act of gameplay, and that Claire survives and escapes in the end contrary to the emergence of the ‘correct’ femininity Mulvey notes in *Duel in the Sun*²¹³. There are certainly aspects of *Resident Evil 2* which still carry the male gaze – for example, the cut-scene which introduces Claire focuses on her behind as she is sitting on her motorcycle, before panning up to introduce her properly. However, the overarching narrative and the gameplay systems in place combine to offer a counter to the interactive male gaze from the previous game and the female disruption to male power systems and pleasure discussed by Mulvey in her article.

Leon, Ada, and Role Inversion

It would seem, at first glance, that all of this prior discussion simply assumes that the player will proceed with the canonical Claire ‘A’/Leon ‘B’ playthrough of *Resident Evil 2*, ignoring the presence of the Leon ‘A’ scenario, or even Leon’s ‘B’ scenario in the canon configuration. This is not the case, however. The reason for that is because Leon’s interactions within the game place him in the same role as Jill in the previous game: he is not the protagonist of his own scenarios. Just as Barry was the actual protagonist of Jill’s campaign in the original *Resident Evil*, as discussed in the previous chapter, Ada is the protagonist of Leon’s scenarios in *Resident Evil 2*.

In fact, the general narrative arc/gameplay expectations between Jill and Leon are surprisingly similar. Both player-characters are paired with a helper character who guides them through various areas of the game. Each of these helper characters provides additional supplies

²¹³ Mulvey, *Afterthoughts*, pg. 128-129.

for the player-character at multiple points in the playthrough. Both support characters are consistently one step ahead of the player, and are revealed to have betrayed the player-character, both having been working for Umbrella the entire time. Both characters renounce their betrayal at the last moment, saving the player-character to fight their respective Tyrant opponents. The only major differences between Barry and Ada are that Barry's complicity is unwilling, Leon becomes even more reliant on Ada than Jill was on Barry, and Barry survives while Ada seemingly does not²¹⁴.

Ada's apparent death across both of Leon's scenarios causes her to conform to Mulvey's model of transgressive femininity more closely than Claire. Ada is admittedly a more sexualized character, as Jenny Platz points out in her article²¹⁵, yet Ada controls that sexualisation instead of being subject to it – she transforms it from sexualisation into sexuality. Platz argues that Leon objectifies Ada, insisting that he escort her through the police station because of her attraction to her²¹⁶, but that is not the case. While there is a gaze being placed upon Ada during her introduction, it is the camera's, not Leon's²¹⁷. Much like the way in which Claire is introduced still adheres to Mulvey's original theorization of the Male Gaze, Ada is introduced in the same fashion.

To be fair to Platz, though, Leon's motivation is no less patronizingly patriarchal. Leon insists on escorting Ada, like he tried to do with Claire (despite Platz stating otherwise), because he sees it as his responsibility as a police officer – a male figure of authority, much like the zombie cops and Chief Irons – to protect her, something he states multiple times during the

²¹⁴ I say 'seemingly does not' because the character does return for *Resident Evil 4* (Capcom, 2005), and will be discussed further in the chapter on that game.

²¹⁵ Platz, *The Woman in the Red Dress*, pg. 124.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*

²¹⁷ See: SHN Survival Horror Network, "Resident Evil 2 PSOne Claire A/Leon B", 2:45:10 – the viewpoint is clearly too low and too close to be Leon's.

game. That neither Claire nor Ada allows Leon to take charge highlights how ineffectual Leon's position of authority is. The most authoritative action Leon takes across both campaigns is to take a bullet meant for Ada by Annette. Despite his badge, he maintains little control, and is most effective as a human shield; otherwise, he/the player is constantly following and/or chasing after the female characters in the game.

It is when Ada is punished for her transgressive femininity (by Annette in Leon's 'A' scenario and Mr. X in Leon's 'B' scenario), as argued by Mulvey²¹⁸, that Leon must assume the role of opposition to the symbolic order, going on to fight either Birkin's penultimate form or Mr. X's, in Leon's 'A' and 'B' scenarios, respectively. After having been shot, Leon's badge of office - his RPD vest - is obscured, indicating a shift in his position in relation to the symbolic order. It is only after assuming this oppositional stance that Leon asserts more control, fighting Birkin before escaping on the emergency train in his 'A' scenario, or preparing the escape train for departure and fighting Birkin's final form in his 'B' scenario.

Even here, though, Leon is dependent upon the female characters for his survival. In escaping after defeating Birkin in the 'A' scenario, Leon/the player must rely on Claire to prepare the emergency train for departure (as she does in her 'B' scenario). In his 'B' scenario, where it is Leon who is preparing the train, he still relies on a shadowy woman (presumably Ada) to throw him a rocket launcher with which to finally eliminate Mr. X completely²¹⁹. Interestingly, in Claire's 'B' scenario, it is the same shadowy woman (again, presumably Ada)

²¹⁸ Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure*, pg. 12; Mulvey, *Afterthoughts*, pg. 128.

²¹⁹ See: kimvonklysgd. "Resident Evil 2 Leon Scenario A Gameplay Walkthrough HD - PSx/PS3, NO COMMENTARY". *YouTube.com*. Oct. 31, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYe3AZvvnwco> (accessed Feb. 15, 2018).

who throws Claire the rocket launcher²²⁰ – either way, it is the transgressively feminine which finally destroys Mr. X.

Destroying the Father (Figure)

Finally, destroying the father figure, in terms of the phallic symbolic order, the ‘father’ of both the T- and G-viruses, and literally with Sherry, in either of the ‘B’ scenarios allows for Claire, Leon, and Sherry to make their escape. The game frameworks, both narrative and gameplay-wise, predicate survival on this destruction. As such, the escape is not just from a viral outbreak, but from a community consumed by the structures of dominant and toxic masculinity. Given that context, it is telling that when Claire corrects Leon’s assertion that the ordeal is over, he states “You’re right; this is just the beginning”²²¹ – the battle against toxic masculinity, and by extension impotent masculine rage, extends into the third game in the series: *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* (Capcom, 2000).

²²⁰ See: kimvonklysgd. “Resident Evil 2 Claire Scenario B Gameplay Walkthrough HD - PSx/PS3, NO COMMENTARY”. *YouTube.com*. Nov. 1, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0GZHY0D0rE> (accessed Feb. 15, 2018)

²²¹ *Resident Evil 2* (Capcom, 1998)

Chapter 3

Her Body, Its Self:

Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (1999) and Fragile Masculinity

Raccoon City is in ruins. Trapped in the chaos of the T/G-Virus outbreak shown in the events of *Resident Evil 2*, Jill Valentine, one of the original S.T.A.R.S. members to survive the Spenser Mansion incident is attempting to make her escape from the city. Having just confronted three zombie dogs, Jill/the player has passed through a gate, onto one of the small city's main streets. Running past the wrecks of various cars, along with the destroyed storefronts of cafes and bookstores, Jill/the player is party to the devastation the outbreak has caused firsthand. Jill's outfit also reflects the suddenness of the calamity: rather than wearing her protective uniform from the first game, she is instead clad in a blue tube-top shirt, black mini-skirt with a white sweater tied around her waist, and thigh-high leather boots – showing that she did not have the time to change into something more practical for the situation.

Rounding a corner, running across shards of shattered glass from both storefronts and abandoned cars, and passing a crushed fire hydrant gushing water, a sight familiar to both Jill and players of the last game comes into view: the Raccoon City Police Department. As Jill/the player enters the iron gates still holding strong in front of the austere building, the game shifts to a cut-scene. Jill, approaching the front doors of the station, is surprised by someone coming through the gates behind her. Turning in fright, she is relieved to discover that the new entrant is Brad 'Chickenheart' Vickers, S.T.A.R.S. helicopter pilot from the first game. She had encountered Brad a little earlier as he was trying to escape the city, and they had agreed to combine their efforts.

Jill's relief is short-lived, however, as Brad is not only clearly distressed, but also heavily injured, bleeding from his left arm and clutching a serious wound on his right side. Seeing Jill, Brad exclaims, 'Jill. Jill!' Starting to run toward him, Jill calls out, 'Brad!' In reply, Brad starts to warn 'We've gotta...' His warning is abruptly cut off by the arrival of the Nemesis – a 7-foot plus monster reminiscent of not just the Tyrant monster from the first game, but Mr. X, who is moving through the station itself at this moment in search of the G-virus sample and Ada Wong.

Clad in a black leather duster with several buckled straps, fingerless gloves, black leather pants, and Frankenstein's monster-esque boots, this creature was obviously dressed to intimidate. The clothing hardly seems necessary, however, as its visage could easily have accomplished that task alone. With skin a sickly yellowish colour pulled tight enough across its skull that its sharpened teeth remain permanently bared in a snarl, one eye completely obscured by flesh that had been inexpertly sutured together with surgical staples, and the other eye entirely clouded over, there is no mistaking the intentions behind that face.

As the Nemesis roars, Brad stumbles away from it, desperately calling Jill's name. Cowering in fear, Brad watches as the Nemesis stalks toward him. Grabbing him and lifting him up with its left hand, the Nemesis reveals its last, most threatening physical attribute – a hidden, 3-foot, prehensile, throbbing purple tentacle extending from its right hand. As the Nemesis' right hand is positioned directly in front of Brad's face, the tentacle is driven squarely through Brad's skull, through his open, still-screaming mouth. Throwing Brad's corpse in front of it, the Nemesis turns its attention to Jill. Jill takes a step forward, in shock, quietly calling out, 'Brad...?' The only reply she receives, though, is from the Nemesis, who growls out a single word: 'S.T.A.R.S.'

The cut-scene ends, and as the Nemesis starts moving menacingly toward Jill, the screen suddenly pauses and flashes a negative image of the tableau. The player is then forced to make a split-second decision: Fight with the Monster or Enter the Police Station - unless Jill/the player decides in the brief time window offered, the game will choose for them. Despite only having a 9mm handgun, a shotgun, and limited ammunition for each, Jill/the player opts to confront the monster. Before directly challenging it, however, Jill/the player runs over to her friend's corpse to see if he can offer any final assistance, in the form of ammunition or other resources. Brad's body offers up his security card for the police station, but nothing to ease the danger of the fight ahead. After a few shots with both weapons, it becomes clear that Jill/the player is woefully outmatched by the monster, and she/the player runs for the relative safety of the Police Station. Once inside, Jill/the player is given a shock, as the Nemesis immediately tries smashing through the doors of the Station. The doors hold, but the question remains of how long they will continue to do so.²²²

Times Change

By 1999, the release and success of both the original *Resident Evil* and *Resident Evil 2* had three major consequences which would impact the development of the next entry in the franchise. First, with the new franchise's success, imitators in terms of style, gameplay, or both became plentiful. *Nightmare Creatures* (Activision, 1997) would share the gothic setting and zombie-fighting of the original *Resident Evil*, released the year before. Electronic Arts' *Overblood* (EA, 1996) would take the *Resident Evil* formula and launch it into space. Agetec took the gameplay from *Resident Evil* and added psychic powers for *Galerians* (Agetec, 1999).

²²² This account was created from a combination of my playthrough and the Survival Horror Network's *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* Let's Play video found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WajTS0JSvOo&t=834s>

Sega would make multiple attempts to emulate the series' success. They launched their own zombie-shooting franchise in 1997, which clearly borrowed heavily from Capcom's survival horror hit, with the release in arcades of *House of the Dead* (Sega, 1997). *House of the Dead* would even see a home release on the Sega Saturn in 1998 (Sega, 1998), putting it in direct competition with *Resident Evil 2*. Further, they also released a zombie-themed overhead shooter for the PC in 1997, titled *Flesh Feast* (SegaSoft, 1997), in which the player moved through a city overrun by zombies before ending up in a nefarious corporate lab – the plot and aesthetics were shameless in their emulation of Capcom's powerhouse franchise. Also put in direct competition with *Resident Evil 2* would be Square EA's²²³ *Parasite Eve* (Square EA, 1998), which is a unique fusion of the RPG systems Square was/is famous for and *Resident Evil*-style survival horror.

Even Capcom, themselves, including *Resident Evil* series creator Shinji Mikami, would create a copycat-style game in the form of *Dino Crisis* (Capcom, 1999). Where *Resident Evil* was inspired by Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, *Dino Crisis* would be inspired by another movie: *Jurassic Park* (Universal, 1993)²²⁴. As such, *Dino Crisis* replaces *Resident Evil*'s zombies and monsters with, appropriately enough, dinosaurs. The two series were not strictly divorced from one another, though: *Dino Crisis* was sold with a demo for *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, as it launched five months before. In addition, when *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* was

²²³ Square has had a long and complicated history of partnerships and name changes, going from Square (shown in *Rad Racer* (Square, 1987) and *Final Fantasy* (Square, 1987)), to Squaresoft (see: *Chrono Trigger* (Squaresoft, 1995)), to Square EA when partnering with the North American publisher in the 1990s, back to Squaresoft (see: *Final Fantasy VIII* (Squaresoft, 1999)), and finally to Square-Enix (see: *Final Fantasy XV* (Square-Enix, 2017)) after Enix purchased the company after the devastating failure of the film *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* (Sakaguchi, 2001).

²²⁴ *Next Generation* Staff. [An Audience with Shinji Mikami](#). *Next Generation* No. 54 (June, 1999), pg. 42.

released, one of the unlockable alternate costumes for the main protagonist was the character model for Regina – the main protagonist from *Dino Crisis*²²⁵.

Part of the reason for this close linkage between *Dino Crisis* and *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* is that the actual minute-to-minute gameplay mechanics are remarkably similar, which belies the other consequence of the *Resident Evil* franchise's success. While, in name, there were only two entries in the series prior to *Nemesis*' release, in reality, there were significantly more. Capcom has long had a practice of iterative releases, in which the original game's numbering is kept and the title and gameplay receive minor tweaks and alterations. The go-to example for this practice is *Street Fighter II* (Capcom 1991). From the initial release of *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior* in 1991, four more versions of the game saw arcades within three years (*Street Fighter II Champion Edition* (Capcom, 1992); *Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting* (Capcom, 1992); *Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers* (Capcom, 1993); *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* (Capcom, 1994))²²⁶.

Capcom maintained this practice with *Resident Evil*, once it was confirmed that the game was a success. By 1999, the titles in the series included *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996), *Resident Evil: Director's Cut* (Capcom, 1997), *Resident Evil: Director's Cut Dual Shock Edition* (Capcom, 1998), *Resident Evil 2* (Capcom, 1998), and *Resident Evil 2 Dual Shock Edition* (Capcom, 1998). Each of these iterations featured minor changes – for example, the Dual Shock editions of both games featured newly implemented analog controls and force feedback, to take advantage of the newly released Dual Shock controller for the Sony PlayStation²²⁷. The fact is,

²²⁵ See: Androvich, Mark. *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis – Prima's Official Strategy Guide*. Rocklin: Prima Publishing, 1999. Pg. 95

²²⁶ This list does not include console ports, or console-exclusive variants such as *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* (Capcom, 2008)

²²⁷ The Dual Shock edition of *Resident Evil: Director's Cut* also infamously featured a new soundtrack, which has been routinely lambasted by fans to this day (see: Avalanche Reviews. "Resident Evil Retrospective: Part 1". *YouTube.com*. Oct. 9, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTXp2AVU11g> ; Stop Skeletons From Fighting.

however, that these changes were minor enough that, by 1999, the *Resident Evil* gameplay formula had become not only familiar, but also slightly stale.

Raccoon City vs. Silent Hill

The dual issues of imitation and series staleness were highlighted by the release in 1999, prior to *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, of *Silent Hill* (Konami, 1999) for the Sony PlayStation. In their previews for the game in late 1998/early 1999, *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*²²⁸, *GamePro*²²⁹, and *Electronic Gaming Monthly*²³⁰ all refer to *Resident Evil* in their descriptions, talking about how similar *Silent Hill*'s design is to the *Resident Evil* games. The *Electronic Gaming Monthly* preview even goes so far as to state:

Aside from the 3D backgrounds, *Silent Hill* is a thinly veiled knock-off of Capcom's spine-tingler; you begin your quest armed with (bet you can't guess...) a gun and a knife. To save, you must find a guest ledger to record your progress (*Resident Evil* used typewriters as an equally contrived save mechanism.) *Silent Hill*'s controls are extremely similar, too; while the camera angles may change dramatically, pressing Up on the control pad always makes Harry walk forward, while Right and Left make him turn clockwise and counter-clockwise, respectively.²³¹

In fact, most of the preview is spent comparing the two games, while still referring to *Silent Hill* as "[...] something special"²³².

"*Resident Evil* (PS1) | Re:Certified Classic [SSFF]". *YouTube.com*. June 23, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gP98OpAaRbk> ; Whang!. "The Worst Video Game Soundtrack Ever – *Resident Evil: Director's Cut Dual Shock Edition* – Whang!". *YouTube.com*. Sept. 25, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8S77G0KEtPo>)

²²⁸ *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine* Staff. "Silent Hill Preview". *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*, Vol. 2 Issue 3 (Dec. 1998), pg. 114.

²²⁹ Major Mike. "Silent Hill Preview". *GamePro* No. 125 (Feb. 1999), pg. 81.

²³⁰ *Electronic Gaming Monthly* Staff. "Silent Hill Preview". *Electronic Gaming Monthly* No. 115 (Feb. 1999), pg. 86-87.

²³¹ *Ibid*

²³² *Ibid*

Upon release, however, the comparisons to the *Resident Evil* series, while not entirely disappearing, started painting *Resident Evil* as the shallower of the two games/series. The main reason for this shift in opinion is the nature of the fear elicited in the two experiences: *Resident Evil* offers the pressure of being alone against seemingly overwhelming odds, combined with a healthy dose of jump-scares²³³; *Silent Hill* elicits a more deliberately-paced psychological horror, even as it relies more on the supernatural. *PSM* magazine stated that “Capcom’s horror megahit shocks the player unexpectedly with a B-movie flare [sic], while *Silent Hill* is more like something from Clive Barker’s imagination [...]”²³⁴. Joe Rybicki, in *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*’s review of the game, argued that “[w]here one might compare *Resident Evil* with movies like *Night of the Living Dead*, I would compare *Silent Hill* with more genuinely disturbing films like *The Exorcist*, *The Shining* (Kubrick’s, of course), and perhaps even *Psycho*”²³⁵. John Davison, in *Electronic Gaming Monthly*’s review, proclaimed about *Silent Hill*: “[p]robably the most genuinely disturbing “survival horror” game around, the story plays on psychological nastiness both in terms of the events that take place and the graphical content”²³⁶.

The unflattering comparisons to *Resident Evil* did not completely vanish, though. In Dan Hsu’s review, in the same issue of *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, he states that “[s]peaking of RE [*Resident Evil*], you can see the influences everywhere (and I do mean *everywhere*)”²³⁷ [italics in original]. Major Mike opens *GamePro*’s review of the game with the statement “[i]f imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, the developers of *Resident Evil* should be blushing after playing

²³³ Jump-scares are sudden jumps/movement/so on which elicit an immediate jump reaction from the player/audience member.

²³⁴ *PSM* Staff. “*Silent Hill* Preview”. *PSM: 100% Independent PlayStation Magazine* Vol. 3, Issue 18 (Feb. 1999), pg. 83.

²³⁵ Rybicki, Joe. “*Silent Hill* Review”. *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine* Vol. 2, Issue 6 (Mar. 1999), pg. 64-67.

²³⁶ Davison, John. “*Silent Hill* Review”. *Electronic Gaming Monthly* No. 117 (Apr. 1999), pg. 127.

²³⁷ Hsu, Dan. “*Silent Hill* Review”. *Electronic Gaming Monthly* No. 117 (Apr. 1999), pg. 127.

Konami's *Silent Hill*²³⁸. Further, he ended his review by referring to *Silent Hill* as “[a] shameless but slick Resident Evil clone”²³⁹. This attitude pervades his review, which focuses largely on the gameplay mechanics, rather than the overall atmosphere and experience of the game. The point remains, however, that *Silent Hill* changed the way survival horror video games were approached, and the *Resident Evil* series would need to respond to this change.

Active Side Quest

The response to *Silent Hill*'s challenge would be further complicated by the third consequence of the *Resident Evil* series' success. By 1999, multiple entries in the franchise were in development at Capcom: *Resident Evil Zero* for the Nintendo 64²⁴⁰, a prequel to the first game in the series, *Resident Evil 3* for the Sega Dreamcast, and *Resident Evil Gaiden*, or ‘Side Story’, a less linear city escape experience bookending the events of *Resident Evil 2*, for the Sony PlayStation²⁴¹. The complication with this situation is that, as documented by *IGN*, Sony had a deal with Capcom for *Resident Evil 3* to appear exclusively on their hardware – the now-aging PlayStation²⁴². As a result of this exclusivity deal, the side story being worked on for the Sony PlayStation became what would be known as *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, and the originally intended *Resident Evil 3*, which continued the stories of Chris and Claire Redfield from the first and second games, respectively, turned into *Resident Evil Code: Veronica*²⁴³.

²³⁸ Major Mike. “*Silent Hill* Review”. *GamePro* No. 127 (Apr. 1999), pg. 64.

²³⁹ *Ibid*

²⁴⁰ While this game would not see release on the system, it would eventually be released for the Nintendo Gamecube in 2002, featuring the same graphics style/engine as the *Resident Evil* remake for the same system.

²⁴¹ Kawamura, Yasuhisa, in interview. *Yasuhisa Kawamura Interview (Project Umbrella)*. *Project Umbrella: The Resident Evil Compendium*, Feb. 2012. <http://projectumbrella.net/articles/Yasuhisa-Kawamura-Interview-Project-Umbrella> (accessed Aug. 16, 2018)

²⁴² Fahs, Travis. *IGN Presents the History of Resident Evil*. *IGN*, Mar. 2009. <http://ca.ign.com/articles/2009/03/11/ign-presents-the-history-of-resident-evil> (accessed Aug. 16, 2018)

²⁴³ *Ibid*

This sudden shift in release priorities led to a shift in development, as well, increasing the team size and overall effort devoted to *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*. In addition to increased development effort, the narrative aspects of the game were overhauled, as well. As Yasuhisa Kawamura, the scenario writer for *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* revealed in a 2012 interview:

Now, with the sudden promotion of the "Gaiden" game, I was forced to expand the scale of the content. The story was initially supposed to just be an escape chronicle from an infected Raccoon City, but after discussions with the producer and director, it was decided that instead of introducing a new character, Jill Valentine will play the role of the main character. It was also decided that Raccoon City would be wiped from existence. You can say that in a sense, the launch of the PlayStation 2 ended up taking the lives of one hundred thousand Raccoon City citizens.²⁴⁴

This revelation could serve to explain why Jill, an experienced special tactics operative, would be running around a zombie apocalypse in such an impractical outfit – *she was not supposed to be Jill at all*. While not directly stated in the interview, it does appear, based on the fact that Kawamura was hired by Capcom in August, 1998²⁴⁵, along with the majority of initial previews of the game appearing in June of 1999²⁴⁶, that the shift from an original character to Jill was done quickly.

The Clothes Make the Survivor

²⁴⁴ Kawamura, in interview

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*

²⁴⁶ See: Major Mike. “*Resident Evil Nemesis Preview*”. *Electronic Entertainment EXPO-sed. GamePro* issue 129 (June 1999), pg. 49; *Electronic Gaming Monthly* staff. “*Resident Evil Nemesis Preview*”. *Electronic Gaming Monthly* vol. 119 (June 1999), pg. 105; *Next Generation* Staff. “*Resident Evil: Nemesis Preview*”. *Next Generation* No. 54 (June, 1999), pg. 63; MacDonald, Mark. *It’s Back: Resident Evil 3: Nemesis Preview*. *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine* Vol. 2, Issue 9 (June 1999).

It is interesting to note that, while none of these previews comment on the shift from side story to main series entry, only Mark MacDonald’s article includes the “3” in the game’s title.

This rush to shift to Jill may explain why, instead of wearing the proper combat gear she wore in the first game, she is instead clad in a particularly revealing outfit, an issue commented on in *PSM*'s August 1999 preview of the game²⁴⁷. Yet, there are a few problems with this explanation. First and foremost, Jill's outfit from the original game is an unlockable bonus included in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*²⁴⁸. What this bonus outfit means is that, even if it were included at a late stage in the game's development, Jill could easily have been dressed for facing zombie hordes, rather than a night of clubbing. As such, it is clear that it was a deliberate choice on the part of the game's developers to have Jill in such an impractical outfit.

The second problem with this explanation is that Capcom's reasoning for why Jill is wearing it varies, depending on which official source is referenced. In Mark MacDonald's preview of the game presented by the developers, he reports that Jill is "[...] just on her way out of town (hence the casual attire) when the new nightmare begins"²⁴⁹. Despite this seemingly reasonable justification, one I also offered at the beginning of this chapter, the game contradicts it during the opening cut-scene. During that cut-scene, there is a shot of Jill sitting on her bed in the same outfit, preparing her handgun for what she deems her 'last escape'²⁵⁰. If Jill has the time to properly equip herself for her escape, she also has the time to properly attire herself.

This issue is complicated further by S.D. Perry's official novelization of the game. In her book, Perry states that the outbreak in Raccoon City was not sudden, and that it actually took four days for Jill to leave town²⁵¹. Given this timeline, Jill would have had adequate time to

²⁴⁷ *PSM* Staff. "Resident Evil 3: Nemesis Preview". *PSM: 100% Independent PlayStation Magazine* Vol. 3, Issue 24 (Aug. 1999), pg. 46.

²⁴⁸ Androvich, *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis – Prima's Official Strategy Guide*, pg. 95.

²⁴⁹ MacDonald, *It's Back*, pg. 82.

²⁵⁰ The term 'last escape' actually references the game's pre-Jill, side story title, as well as the Japanese final title of the game, *Biohazard 3: Last Escape* (see: Kawamura, in interview)

²⁵¹ Perry, S.D. *Resident Evil: Nemesis*. New York: Pocket Books, 2000. Pg. 14.

prepare for her escape – which is exactly what Perry argues. In describing and discussing Jill’s outfit, Perry rationalizes it thus:

She’d dressed for ease of movement rather than protection from the elements – a tight shirt, a miniskirt, and boots, as well as a fanny pack to hold extra magazines. The body-hugging outfit clung to her like a second skin and would allow her to move quickly.

She’d also brought a plain white sweatshirt for when she made it out of the city, which she now wore tied around her waist – for the time being, she’d rather suffer the chill and have her arms free.²⁵²

Protection against the elements may not have been an immediate concern in choosing an outfit, but surely protection against the zombie hordes would have been, especially for someone who had survived a previous encounter with them. It is also interesting to note that, in the game itself, Jill does not start out with her fanny pack – it is given to her by Carlos²⁵³, the Umbrella-hired mercenary sent to save/eliminate survivors in the city.

The impracticality of Jill’s outfit suggests an overt catering to the male gaze absent in the playable characters in previous games. As much as she is the player-character and has more actions available to her/the player than any previous player-character, she is still presented as the object critiqued by Berger²⁵⁴ and Ahwesh²⁵⁵. In point of fact, when one compares character models, Jill’s model from *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* finds its closest equivalent not in Claire, Ada, or even her own model from the original game, but in the female zombie model from *Resident Evil 2*.

²⁵² *Ibid*, pg. 24-25.

²⁵³ See: Loe, Casey, Ryan Lockhart, Gerald Guess, and Mateo Rojas. *Versus Books Official Resident Evil 3: Nemesis Perfect Guide*. Milan, OH: Empire 21 Publishing, 1999, pg. 39.

²⁵⁴ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*

²⁵⁵ Ahwesh, *She-Puppet*

Urban Demographics 2.0

Here, too, Jill's outfit is incongruous, however. Compared to *Resident Evil 2*, *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* offers both a larger amount and greater variety of female zombies. Using the Survival Horror Network's Let's Play video of the game²⁵⁶, I was able to discern the presence of fourteen female zombies in comparison with the four mentioned in the previous chapter for *Resident Evil 2*. In addition, these zombies do not all use the same character model, either. Examining the gameplay video, there are seven different character models for the female zombies apparent in the gameplay. These consist of a standard Raccoon City police uniform (no cap); sleeveless vest and knee-length skirt; a revised version of the tanktop/shorts model from the previous game; t-shirt/shorts; black evening gown; office casual blouse and skirt; and a model that looks suspiciously like a zombified version of Claire from the previous game.

This diversity of character models suggests not just a move past the sexualization of the female zombie in *Resident Evil 2*, but the identification of distinct careers, by way of not just the outfits, but their placement, as well. The female police officer zombies are all found on the streets, as well as in the police station. The black evening gown zombies are found in the ballroom and dining hall of the clock tower midway through the game. The office casual zombies are found in the police station, clock tower, and city hall, all suggesting civil service positions²⁵⁷. These zombies are more than sex objects to be taken in; they are people who were caught unawares by a catastrophe as they were going about their daily routines.

To be sure, there are still problems with these numbers and the associated presentation on offer. First, while fourteen female zombies would seem to be a massive step up from the four found in the previous game, the fact that Jill regularly faces groups of five to eight zombies

²⁵⁶ SHN Survival Horror Network, "Resident Evil 3 : Nemesis PSOne".

²⁵⁷ *Ibid*

throughout the city suggests that there are still problems with gender representation in this city of 100,000²⁵⁸. Second, these numbers cannot be counted on to be definitive. As pointed out in the *Versus Books Official Resident Evil 3: Nemesis Perfect Guide*, the game features areas that offer randomized, as well as respawning²⁵⁹, enemies²⁶⁰.

What this randomization means is that players may not actually encounter the same numbers and types of zombies presented in the video – it is dependent on the individual playthrough. Concurrent to this issue, there is no definitive accounting of the zombie varieties, as was found for the previous game. None of the guides, previews, reviews, or videos I was able to find offer a list of zombie types, as was offered in the *Versus Books* guide to *Resident Evil 2*²⁶¹. Even with these discrepancies, however, it is clear that the development team attempted to make the decaying citizens of Raccoon City more than just pastiches or undead sex objects. This shift makes the question of why Jill is presented in such a sexualized manner even more puzzling – a puzzle whose potential answer lies not with Jill, but with her Nemesis.

Nemesis – Bio-Slasher

Examining the Nemesis, it is important to look at the context of the in-game dynamics in which he is presented. First, comparing the enemy types in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* with previous games, there is no large shift in variation, as there was between *Resident Evil* and *Resident Evil 2*. In fact, comparing the enemy variety in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* to that of the original game offers a surprising recycling of types. Unlike *Resident Evil 2*, which offered five new enemy types, not including boss monsters (eight, including them)²⁶², *Resident Evil 3:*

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*

²⁵⁹ ‘Respawning’ is a term for video game opponents who reappear after a set amount of time, after being defeated by a player. It is applicable to both single-player and multiplayer games.

²⁶⁰ Loe, Lockhart Guess, and Rojas, *Versus Books Official Resident Evil 3: Nemesis Perfect Guide*, pg. 8.

²⁶¹ Guess, Rojas, *Completely Unauthorized Versus Books Resident Evil 2 Perfect Guide*, pg. 9.

²⁶² *Ibid*, pg. 9-11.

Nemesis only offers two new enemy types, one of them a boss (not counting the Nemesis, itself)²⁶³. This lack of new enemy types is even more surprising when considering that this comparison is to the *original* game from 1996, not *Resident Evil 2*. To be clear, this comparison refers to distinct types of enemies, not variations on those types (for example, different zombie models, or the Hunters, whose variations in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* are largely cosmetic).

Because of this lack of new encounters on offer, the Nemesis winds up doing a lot of the heavy lifting, as it were, in making the game a unique experience. As a result of this pressure to perform, the Nemesis winds up becoming a dominating force reappearing throughout the game, chasing Jill/the player at various points across the city. Even here, the experience is not an entirely new one for the series. As discussed in the previous chapter, during the playable characters' secondary campaigns, Mr. X offered a similar juggernaut-like series of confrontations – even bursting through walls at various points. What makes the Nemesis unique is that, while the major confrontations occur at pre-designated points, these are not nearly as scripted as the attacks in *Resident Evil 2*. When Mr. X broke through a wall, or ran through a door, it was a pre-scripted set-piece, not to be repeated. By contrast, when Nemesis appears, it can follow Jill/the player through multiple rooms – a chase that is dictated by gameplay systems, rather than as a pre-scripted event.

This dynamic, in terms of both gameplay and between Jill/the Nemesis, invites comparisons to the killers in the slasher films discussed by Carol J. Clover in her foundational article, Her Body, Himself (also the first chapter of her book, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*)²⁶⁴. In many respects, the Nemesis, despite being a literal monster, shares many parallels with the

²⁶³ Loe, Lockhart Guess, and Rojas, *Versus Books Official Resident Evil 3: Nemesis Perfect Guide*, pg. 9-11.

²⁶⁴ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, pg. 21-64

filmic killers Clover examines, most closely *Halloween*'s Michael Myers, and Jason Voorhees of the *Friday the 13th* series. As Clover states about the typical slasher movie killer:

They are usually large, sometimes overweight, and often masked. In short, they may be recognizably human, but they are only marginally so, just as they are only marginally visible – to their victims and to us, the spectators. In one key respect, however, the killers are superhuman: their virtual indestructability. Just as Michael (in *Halloween*) repeatedly rises from blows that would stop a lesser man, so Jason (in the *Friday the Thirteenth* films) survives assault after assault to return in sequel after sequel.²⁶⁵

Many of these traits are in evidence in the Nemesis' behaviour, as highlighted in the description at the beginning of the chapter. The Nemesis, in each of the encounters in the game, appears out of nowhere, announced only by a roar or a growl of 'S.T.A.R.S.'. It can also take damage that would handily destroy any of the other enemies in the game, albeit with progressive form changes (an important aspect which will be discussed presently). The Nemesis additionally shares physical traits with Clover's description. The Nemesis is large and recognizably human, or humanoid, at any rate. As well, the flesh pulled across its face, while not a mask in and of itself, is masklike enough to give the dichotomous dehumanizing effect Clover mentions.

While the Nemesis itself does not return for any sequels, the cyclical return discussed by Clover can be paralleled via gameplay, in the player's repeated confrontations with the Nemesis throughout the game. These confrontations can be treated as the procedural equivalent of a sequel – a similar experience, with minor variations. It can also be argued that the Nemesis is, indeed, a sequel return of sorts. As detailed in the *Resident Evil Archives*, the Nemesis is a variation on the Tyrant monster which has appeared in each prior game (Tyrant, itself, in the

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, pg. 30.

original game, and Mr. X in *Resident Evil 2*)²⁶⁶. As such, Nemesis conforms even more closely to Clover's configuration, with one key change – rather than simply being a spectator, the audience member is actively confronting the killer from sequel to sequel. Not only does this active repetitive confrontation carry more investment for players familiar with prior games, it also suggests thematic ties to those prior games, an important factor when examining the Jill/Nemesis dynamic.

Phallic, Yet Impotent, Bio-Weapons

There are some important distinctions to be made between the Nemesis and Clover's conception of the slasher-killer. First, Clover acknowledges the phallic nature of the slasher's typical penetrating weapon, be it machete, drill, knife, or so on²⁶⁷. In doing so, however, she also argues that these tools highlight a non-phallic, or feminine, sexuality to the killer²⁶⁸. She points out that the killers who are not stuck within a pre-adolescent mental framework (oftentimes obsessing over mother figures, literal or figurative) or in the throes of gender confusion are, as she put it, 'sexually disturbed'²⁶⁹. In this framework, violence is not tied to sex, but is a replacement for it, often because the killer is impotent, either directly physically or induced by psychological factors²⁷⁰.

The issue with the Nemesis, then, is that it does not quite match up with these characteristics. Foremost, while the Nemesis' main weapon, the throbbing purple hand tentacle, most certainly aligns with the phallic nature of the slasher's tools, it is not an extra-physical replacement for a phallus. Instead, it is the bio-organic weapon (or B.O.W.) equivalent of a

²⁶⁶ Otomo, *Resident Evil Archives*, pg. 159.

²⁶⁷ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, pg. 47.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pg. 28.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, pg. 29.

phallus or phallic body part. This alignment of the tentacle with a phallus is not just a psychoanalytical conceit as taken by Clover, but a cultural one, as well. As Susan Napier discusses in her chapter on hentai, or Japanese pornographic animation, in her book on anime, most of the phalluses in these films are offered in the form of what she dubs the “demonic phallus incarnate”²⁷¹. She further elaborates by pointing out that “[u]ntil fairly recently [as of 2001] it was forbidden to show male genitalia in comics, animation, film, or photography [...] it was still presumably easier to get away with showing nonhuman genitalia in the form of demonic phalluses or phalluslike tentacles”²⁷².

Yet, despite this tentacle being a literal body part, it is no less impotent. As evidenced in the scene at the beginning of the chapter, the Nemesis has no difficulty with getting this body part to function. At the same time, there is no way for it to achieve any sort of orgasm/ejaculation – unlike the G-Virus-mutated Birkin from *Resident Evil 2*, there is no way that the Nemesis can procreate. Again, Napier’s examination of hentai proves instructive here. In talking about the male body in hentai, she states:

In general, male orgasm is depicted far less frequently than male frustration or simply endless penetration, no doubt due in part to censorship limitations and also because orgasm might suggest a vulnerable loss of control. The sexual male’s combination of frustration and desperate need for control underlines once again the paucity of sexual identities available to the Japanese male.²⁷³

Because the Nemesis is an embodied tool of control, created by Umbrella specifically to eliminate S.T.A.R.S. members under cover of the T-Virus outbreak²⁷⁴, this frustration underlines

²⁷¹ Napier, Susan. *Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke*. New York: Palgrave, 2001, pg. 65.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, pg. 79.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, pg. 80-81.

²⁷⁴ Otomo, *Resident Evil Archives*, pg. 159.

the key difference between Birkin and the Nemesis. Birkin is a representative of toxic masculinity, trying to control and co-opt women and feminine aspects; the Nemesis, by contrast, offers a depiction of impotent masculinity where that identity is so fragile that the only way to express it is through horrific and ever-escalating violence.

The argument can be made that, contrary to the above assertion, the Nemesis can procreate, much like Birkin. After all, it is able to infect Jill with the T-Virus outside the Clock Tower/City Hall. There is an important distinction to be made here. While both monsters attack and infect unwilling hosts, Birkin is actually able to create offspring; the Nemesis simply kills the host with the virus, which then results in just another zombie. The end result of the Nemesis' attacks can be seen with Brad Vickers. After the highly suggestive way in which the Nemesis dispatches him outside the Raccoon City Police Department, he can be found very close to where he was killed as a zombie, to be fought by the player in *Resident Evil 2*²⁷⁵. As such, the Nemesis is not procreating using the host – the closest equivalent would be the spread of a sexually-transmitted disease.

Not Your Typical Final Girl

With the Nemesis conforming so closely to Clover's conception of the killer in slasher movies, it would make sense for Jill to conform to the killer's opposite number, and Clover's most famous concept, the Final Girl. This is not the case, however. Certainly, Jill shares some of the traits Clover attributes to the Final Girl character²⁷⁶. Jill is clearly intelligent – she would have to be, in order to survive not one, but two large-scale encounters with zombies and other bio-engineered weapons. She carries herself with gravity - it is a little hard not to be grave in the face of a zombie apocalypse. Finally, she is mechanically and practically competent. This last

²⁷⁵ See: Guess, Rojas, *Completely Unauthorized Versus Books Resident Evil 2 Perfect Guide*, pg. 119.

²⁷⁶ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, pg. 40.

facet largely informs the gameplay of the experience: Jill not only has to solve the mechanical puzzles spread throughout the city but is also required to mix her own ammunition²⁷⁷, along with the fact that she remains ‘the master of unlocking’ – opening otherwise inaccessible doors for the player.

In one major aspect, though, Jill differs significantly. Clover describes the Final Girl as being ‘boyish’²⁷⁸ and characterized by her lack of sexuality and her ‘unfemininity’²⁷⁹. Clover even goes so far as to suggest that the Final Girl’s name typically illustrates that unfemininity, in names such as Terry, Max, Joey, and so on²⁸⁰. Even here, Jill does not conform – Jill is traditionally considered a feminine name. Moreover, the main criticism leveled at Jill, one expressed earlier in this very chapter, provides the main evidence of this discord. Jill’s outfit, rather than being ‘bookworm’-ish²⁸¹, is overtly sexualized. Not only that, but there is no sudden turnaround in the confrontations between Jill and the Nemesis. Jill does not suddenly ‘masculinize’ herself in a final confrontation with the Nemesis, using a phallic weapon, as Clover articulates²⁸². Instead, Jill, and therefore the player, has the option of facing the Nemesis head-on in each encounter, from their initial confrontation onward.

Paul Wells, in his overview of the cinematic horror genre, posits a critique of Clover and counter-interpretation of the Final Girl which may further assist in positioning Jill. He states that:

Clover’s definition of ‘the final girl’ [...] as a ‘phallic’ heroine, is questionable. These are not quasi-men, literally castrating male figures. They often distinguish themselves by not merely rejecting the established tents of masculine behaviour, but enhance their

²⁷⁷ See the detailed guide for doing so in Loe, Lockhart Guess, and Rojas, *Versus Books Official Resident Evil 3: Nemesis Perfect Guide*, pg. 7.

²⁷⁸ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, pg. 40.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 48.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 40.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 39.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, pg. 49.

credentials as modern *post-feminist* women by moving beyond both the traditional/generic expectations of women, and feminist/psychoanalytic orientations.

[italics in original]²⁸³

While the notion of ‘post-feminism’ may be a dubious one, the idea that the rejection of traditional feminine values inherently meaning an adoption of masculine ones being a fallacy is an important distinction to make. Clover, in taking that stance, assumes a gender binary dynamic even as she argues that she does not²⁸⁴. Wells points out that not adhering to traditional feminine mores does not automatically mean that one then adheres to masculine ones.

The question thus becomes what to make of this non-conformity to Clover’s model. The answer aligns with Helen W. Kennedy’s examination of Lara Croft²⁸⁵. Viewed in the context of her confrontations with the Nemesis, Jill’s outfit takes on connotations of someone comfortable with their sexuality. Moreover, Jill’s appearance and ability to confront the Nemesis in each encounter offers a contrast and conflict between her confident female sexuality and the Nemesis’ embodiment of impotent and, by extension, fragile masculinity. This conflict is emphasized by the Nemesis’ multiple transformations after various defeats. After Jill defeats the Nemesis in the courtyard outside the Clock Tower, it discards its coat and, more to the point, develops several new tentacles. Both of these changes, the bare chest and the additional phallus-like appendages, carry a certain air of masculine posturing in the face of repeated losses to Jill.

Moreover, the Nemesis’ final form is a massive blob covered in writhing tentacles, not unlike the form Tetsuo takes at the end of *Akira* (Katsuhiro Otomo, 1988). The main difference between Tetsuo and the Nemesis is that the Nemesis does not mature beyond this state. Susan

²⁸³ Wells, Paul. *The Horror Genre: From Beelzebub to Blair Witch*. London: Wallflower Press, 2000, pg. 19.

²⁸⁴ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, pg. 14-16.

²⁸⁵ Kennedy, *Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or CyberBimbo?*.

Napier, in discussing *Akira*, argues that Tetsuo's metamorphosis and subsequent apotheosis is illustrative of his transition from adolescence to adulthood²⁸⁶. Taken in this context, the Nemesis never moves beyond an adolescent conception of masculinity, in which case it is no wonder that such a masculinity is so fragile.

To be sure, this does not lessen the issue surrounding her presentation and the male gaze. Much like Kennedy recognized the problematic valorization of Lara Croft as a feminist character given her overt catering to the male gaze²⁸⁷, such a recognition must be made here. Jill's presentation, both in terms of visual representation and as a set of embodied gameplay skills, offers a similar dichotomous position – one for which there is no easy answer. This position is complicated even further by the return of another character from the first game in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*' ending: Barry Burton. After Jill single-handedly defeats the Nemesis for the final time, she and Carlos are rescued at the last minute from the nuclear detonation which destroys Raccoon City by a helicopter piloted by Barry. As such, even after all of Jill's/the player's solo accomplishments throughout the game, she/the player is still rescued in the end by the father-figure from the original game.

Raccoon City vs. Silent Hill, Round 2

Given this dynamic of confident female sexuality and fragile masculinity in the Jill/Nemesis relationship, even with the problem of Barry's last-minute rescue, a comparison can be, and must be, made to *Silent Hill*. As mentioned before, *Silent Hill* offered a challenge to *Resident Evil*'s dominance of the horror genre on the PlayStation. In addressing this challenge, there is a distinct positionality taken by each game, not just in terms of scientific versus supernatural origins for its monsters. In this regard, Clover's discussion of not just the slasher

²⁸⁶ Napier, *Anime*, pg. 44

²⁸⁷ Kennedy, *Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or CyberBimbo?*.

film, but the very movies *Silent Hill* was compared to in contemporary reviews, is useful.

Moreover, Creed also directly addresses one of *Silent Hill*'s key inspirations, illustrating how the *Silent Hill* and *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* offer oppositional stances on gender.

The most obvious split, on a basic gameplay level, between the two games is in terms of the avatar offered to the player. In *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, the player controls Jill, a highly trained special operations officer; *Silent Hill* put players in control of Harry Mason, an ordinary man with no special weapons training or skills. Aside from the difference in weapon handling for the player, there is the fact that *Silent Hill* offers a male perspective, and a male perspective only. Unlike *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, and the *Resident Evil* series more broadly, where the player plays as both male and female protagonists in the same game, *Silent Hill* only allows the player a male protagonist. This male only protagonist is the case for the series until *Silent Hill 3* (Konami, 2003), a game four years and a console generation removed from the comparison to *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*.

This dichotomy in protagonists between the two games is important, in that it shows the reversed dynamics between characters – a reverse that extends to the antagonistic forces in the respective games, as well. Where *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* casts the monster as a hulking brute hell-bent on the player's destruction, the source of the monsters in the town is Harry's own daughter, who is revealed to be a manifestation of a girl possessed by a demon and held captive by a cult. In other words, the protagonist/antagonist relationship in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* is actually mirrored in *Silent Hill*, even down to the antagonist's apparent adolescent nature. That the antagonist in *Silent Hill* is a girl on the cusp of adolescence is an important factor in examining the gender dynamics of the game, and the way the two games contrast with each other.

It is telling that Joe Rybicki compared *Silent Hill* to *The Exorcist* in his review of the game, because that film, as Clover and Creed both demonstrate, centers on gender dynamics. Clover points out that possession films, like *The Exorcist* and her other example, *Witchboard*, are stories about female bodies – in her two examples, one just entering adolescence, the other just entering adulthood proper²⁸⁸. Despite this focus on the female body, Clover argues that these films are ineffably stories about the men who confront these possessions and their character arcs; as Clover puts it, “[t]o that quandary, the experience of the troubled woman, however theatrical its manifestation, is largely accessory”²⁸⁹. For example, in *The Exorcist*, the film focuses on Father Karras’ crisis of faith and how it is affected/changed due to the experience of dealing with Regan’s possession²⁹⁰.

In this regard, *Silent Hill* goes a step further. Not only is the story focused on the male protagonist, not only is Harry’s the *only* perspective the player experiences, but he is the only entryway into the game itself. Mason’s daughter does not even really appear beyond the opening cut-scene until the very end of the game. Moreover, it is revealed that she is confined to a hospital bed the entire time. Mason is literally the driving force of the story, in that he is the one who keeps it moving both narratively, as well as physically. It is his movement through the space of the town, and his uncovering of the mysteries within that progress the game.

Further to this, it is not a coincidence that Cheryl, Harry’s daughter, and the girl who manifested her are both at the age where they would be entering puberty. Both Clover and Creed comment on this fact in their examinations of *The Exorcist*. Clover compares the nature of the possession in *The Exorcist* to the manifestation of supernatural powers in *Carrie* and *The Fury*:

²⁸⁸ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, pg. 90.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 85.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

all, ostensibly, coming-of-age puberty stories²⁹¹. Creed, also, states that “[i]t is clearly significant that Regan is possessed in her thirteenth year, which marks the commencement of puberty, the threshold between girlhood and womanhood, the time when adolescent sexual desires find shape and expression”²⁹². Creed seems so locked into her Freudian/Kristevan mode of examination, however, that she extrapolates this notion to the idea that Regan is clearly aiming for an incestuous relationship with her mother, rather than the far simpler, but still on-point fact that the film makes female puberty monstrous. Clover does pick up that thread of thought, though, and suggests that, between her examples of *The Exorcist* and *Witchboard*, it is not just female puberty which is made monstrous, but female bodily sexuality as a whole²⁹³.

Returning to the comparison between the two games, this is the crux of *Silent Hill*'s difference from *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*. If, in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, the player takes the role of confident female sexuality fighting against an impotent and ragingly fragile masculinity, then *Silent Hill* tasks the player with confronting, and defeating, female puberty. In the ‘best’ ending for *Silent Hill*, Harry manages to rescue both children, along with Cybil Bennett, a police officer from a neighbouring town who also winds up possessed – Harry must confront her possessed form and either drive the spirit out of her or kill her²⁹⁴. The most noteworthy part of this ending is that, Alessa, the hospitalized and possessed girl re-manifests as a newborn – Harry/the player literally defeats her pubescent form, causing her to revert to infancy. Thus, while *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* may have been the more played out series at that point, it

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, pg. 71.

²⁹² Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine*, pg. 40.

²⁹³ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, pg. 82-83.

²⁹⁴ See: SHN Survival Horror Network. “Silent Hill Walkthrough Longplay Gameplay Lets Play No Commentary”. *YouTube.com*. Jan. 17, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8X4ZW6bvvt4> (accessed Sept. 3, 2018).

arguably had the more progressive gender politics compared to the new contender to the throne in *Silent Hill*. *Resident Evil Code: Veronica*, however, does not share that distinction.

Chapter 4

The Castrating Sister

Resident Evil Code: Veronica (2000) and the Reification of the Monstrous Feminine

Chris Redfield is experiencing déjà vu, or, perhaps more appropriately, trauma recall. Trapped in Antarctica while attempting to rescue his sister Claire, who, herself, is on a mission to save him after his disappearance, Chris has found himself standing in a perfect reproduction of the main hall from the Spenser mansion – the site of his first conflict with the machinations of Umbrella. Albert Wesker, the man who had betrayed Chris and the rest of the S.T.A.R.S. members within the mansion, is present, adding to the eerie mirroring of those original events.

Chris has just saved Claire from poisoning, after finding her bound by a green mucous-like substance under the main staircase in the great hall. As Claire reawakens, the Redfield siblings are shocked to learn that Alexia Ashford, younger of the two siblings behind the Umbrella corporation, has been awakened from her cryogenic slumber. Claire, in particular, is shocked because she did not believe there *was* an actual Alexia. Throughout her attempts to rescue Chris, she repeatedly came into contact, and conflict, with Alfred Ashford, the older sibling. Alfred was so jealous of his seemingly superior sister, and so psychologically damaged by that jealousy, that he believed himself to be both of them – even going so far to transform his voice and appearance when the Alexia personality manifested.

Alfred, however, is dead – killed by Steve Burnside, a fellow survivor of the Umbrella-owned prison island Claire had escaped from. With Alfred's dying breath, he awoke the real Alexia via voice recognition commands for the facility. Alexia *is* real; she had injected herself with the T-Veronica virus and then went into suspended animation, in order to allow the virus

time to gestate. After being separated from Claire while trying to pursue Alexia, Chris is injured and takes cover in the main hall so that he can recover and continue to aid his sister. It is while he is hiding that Wesker has decided to make his move.

Concealed behind a pillar in the main hall, Chris watches, in the form of a cut-scene, as Wesker confronts Alexia – he standing at the foot of the grand staircase, she on the landing, in front of a portrait of herself, Alfred, and their father. “At last, I have found you, Alexia”, Wesker proclaims, confidently following up with a commanding “Come with me”. Alexia’s response is simply to laugh. Starting up the stairs toward Alexia, eyes glowing an inhuman red, Wesker continues: “You’re responsible for the creation of the T-Veronica virus, and now the only existing sample is in your body. I want it. NOW.”

Alexia, seemingly amused by Wesker’s demand/threat, replies with “You want it? You are not worthy of its power!” Laughing, she starts descending the staircase toward Wesker. As she does so, flames start to spontaneously ignite around her body, burning off all of her clothing, exposing her new, T-Veronica mutated body. Wesker looks on in awe before being casually swatted across the hall by the mutated Alexia. Despite landing on his feet, Wesker seems to know that he needs to change his approach, dashing away from Alexia rather than confronting her head-on.

“You’re coming with me,” he proclaims, perhaps more confidently than he should. Alexia’s counter is to throw droplets of her own blood at him, which ignite on contact with any of the surfaces with which they come in contact. Wesker dashes along a wall, jumps, and punches T-Veronica Alexia in the face. The only thing this action accomplishes, though, is igniting Wesker’s clothing, forcing him to roll away to tamp out the flames, winding up directly

in front of Chris' hiding spot. Alexia then throws a spray of blood droplets in Wesker's direction, forcing both he and Chris to dodge, exposing Chris' presence in the process.

"Chris!" Wesker cries. "Wesker", Chris spits out in disgusted acknowledgement. Alexia then throws another spray of blood droplets at both men, separating them and igniting Wesker's arm. "Chris, since you're one of my best men, I'll let you handle this", Wesker arrogantly states before running out the front door of the hall. Chris is unable to follow, however, as Alexia ignites the door, making it impassable. As Chris tries to escape via the stairs, she ignites those, also, forcing a confrontation between them.

Trapped in the main hall with T-Veronica Alexia, the game returns control of Chris to the player for the showdown. Chris/the player shoots at her with his shotgun point blank, before realising why that is a mistake: shooting her causes her to bleed, and the blood does what it has been doing throughout – igniting upon contact. Retreating to a safe distance, Chris/the player tries again, shooting at Alexia as she slings blood droplets which act as weaponized barriers. Eventually, after enough shotgun blasts and dodging of Alexia's blood-slinging, she collapses and the fires she ignited die out. Chris/the player walks over to the stairs and finds the pendant from the choker that Alexia had been wearing which had burned off along with the rest of her clothing. This pendant, combined with the dead Alfred's ring found earlier, will allow Chris/the player to proceed through the mansion replica and, with any luck, even escape with his sister.²⁹⁵

Lucid Dreamcast

With the shift in development that resulted in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* being the next numbered entry in the series, the question of what happened to the intended third installment, and how it was received, arises. Rather than being cancelled, this prototype third installment did

²⁹⁵ This account was created from a combination of my playthrough and the Survival Horror Network's *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* Let's Play video found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0qQQ4iSp2E&t=15783s>

indeed move forward, as *Resident Evil Code: Veronica*, and did launch on the Dreamcast as intended. In fact, it appears as though very little of the game was changed with the transition from being a numbered entry to side story status (even if only in name). This lack of change is unknowingly highlighted in the *Electronic Gaming Monthly* preview of the game in February of 2000, in which it was noted, not incorrectly, that *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* felt more like a side story, and that *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* seemed to be the proper continuation of the story²⁹⁶.

While in terms of story, *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* offered proper progress, the gameplay offered a mix of new elements with a return of several others, and the removal of gameplay aspects from *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* – something that both the *Electronic Gaming Monthly*²⁹⁷ and *GamePro*²⁹⁸ reviews of the game commented on and complained about. The ‘tank’ controls returned yet again, but this time, the characters could utilize two guns at once, allowing for the targeting of multiple enemies simultaneously²⁹⁹. Moreover, the pre-rendered backgrounds of previous games were replaced with fully polygonal environments – a change that allowed in-game ‘camera’ movements for the first time in the series³⁰⁰. The *Electronic Gaming Monthly* preview also notes that some of the gameplay additions present in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* were not included in *Resident Evil Code: Veronica*: exploding objects (outside of zombies who, inexplicably, have plastic explosives strapped to them), the dodge function, the ability to use stairs without an action button, and the branching path decisions from *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* are all absent³⁰¹.

²⁹⁶ *Electronic Gaming Monthly* staff. ‘*Resident Evil Code: Veronica* Preview’. *Electronic Gaming Monthly* Vol. 127 (Feb. 2000), pg. 62

²⁹⁷ *Electronic Gaming Monthly* staff. ‘*Resident Evil Code: Veronica* Review’. *Electronic Gaming Monthly* Vol. 131 (June 2000), pg. 162

²⁹⁸ Major Mike. “Dream an Evil Dream: *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* Review”. *GamePro* Vol. 140 (May 2000), pg. 48-49.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 63.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 62-63.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 64.

Nothing highlights this dichotomy of change and regression more than the last quarter of the game. Chris has ventured to Antarctica to rescue Claire, after discovering that she is no longer on Rockfort Island. While there, he discovers an almost exact replica of the Spenser mansion from the first game. This replica encompasses more than just the main hall discussed in the opening of this chapter, including the tiger statue room which originally contained a crest and the Magnum³⁰², the art gallery which originally housed the first-floor map³⁰³, and even the room with the shotgun which generated the infamous ‘Jill sandwich’ line³⁰⁴.

These rooms do not offer the same affective experience as the first game, having been altered by their recreation on the more powerful hardware. All of these rooms have been rendered in fully 3D polygons, so they are no longer the static, pre-rendered backgrounds of the first game. As such, the camera angles are different, not only offering different perspectives but also camera movement. It can therefore be argued that the inclusion of these rooms offers the same sort of ‘new’ experience that *Resident Evil: Director’s Cut* did – the same areas the player has experienced previously but presented differently.

Despite this repetition in terms of gameplay and environments, the game received glowing reviews. Francesca Reyes’ review in *Official Sega Dreamcast Magazine*³⁰⁵, Blake Fischer’s review in *Next Generation*³⁰⁶, and Mark McDonald’s review in *Electronic Gaming Monthly*³⁰⁷ all note how the gameplay is largely the same as prior entries, but still give the game

³⁰² See: Hodgson, David S.J. *Prima’s Official Strategy Guide Resident Evil Code: Veronica*. Roseville: Prima Games, 2001, pg. 112.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 117.

³⁰⁵ Reyes, Francesca. “*Resident Evil Code: Veronica* Review”. *Official Sega Dreamcast Magazine*, Issue 5 (May/June 2000), pg. 76-79.

³⁰⁶ Fischer, Blake. “*Resident Evil Code: Veronica* Review”. *Next Generation Magazine*, Lifecycle 2 Vol. 2 Issue 5 (May 2000), pg. 94-95.

³⁰⁷ MacDonald, Mark. “*Resident Evil Code: Veronica* Review”. *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, No. 131 (June 2000), pg. 162.

10 out of 10, 5 out of 5 stars, and 9.5 out of 10, respectively. Only Major Mike’s review of the game in *GamePro* offers an overt critique of the lack of change, stating that:

Resident Evil: Code Veronica [SIC] is the weakest of the four “original” Evil titles – which isn’t such a shocking comment considering how the others fared in terms of quality and popularity. While the other RE games topped themselves with each consecutive release, Veronica is pleasantly stuck in neutral. Sure, the Dreamcast-powered graphics take the series to new visual heights, but the “simple” Resident Evil play engine, coupled with the tried and true puzzle-and-fight game structure, is starting to become a little too familiar.³⁰⁸

While this criticism, a thread that continues throughout his review, does impact the game’s review scores, it is a minimal impact: he gave the game a 4.5 out of 5 for graphics and sound, and 4 out of 5 for control and fun factor³⁰⁹.

(Lack of) Diversity Hiring

One of the aspects not retained from *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, or even *Resident Evil 2*, is the presence of female zombies. As detailed in Prima’s official strategy guide for *Resident Evil Code: Veronica*³¹⁰ and confirmed via a viewing of the Survival Horror Network’s Let’s Play video for the game³¹¹, there are no female zombies in the game whatsoever. As Hodgson lays out in Prima’s strategy guide, there are seven different types of zombie in *Code: Veronica*: prisoners, soldiers, policemen, workers, graveyard zombies, Wesker subordinates, and bomb zombies – zombies that have somehow been strapped with explosives³¹². It should be noted that Hodgson

³⁰⁸ Major Mike, *Dream an Evil Dream*, pg. 48

³⁰⁹ Hodgson, *Prima’s Official Strategy Guide Resident Evil Code: Veronica*, pg. 49.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 12.

³¹¹ SHN Survival Horror Network, “Resident Evil : Code Veronica X HD Remaster Walkthrough”.

³¹² Hodgson, *Prima’s Official Strategy Guide Resident Evil Code: Veronica*, pg. 12.

specifically identifies the police zombies as *policemen*; gone are the policewomen from *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*.

It is unclear why there are no female zombies present in this, the most graphically superior and detailed entry in the franchise at that point, on more powerful hardware than the Sony PlayStation. It is possible that, in keeping with the first game, Umbrella has only employed men and therefore those are the only zombies present. It is also possible that Alfred's jealousy of his sister, an issue discussed later, may have led to a subconscious aversion to women. Because there is no discussion, or even acknowledgement, concrete or otherwise, of this discrepancy that I have been able to find, these reasons are entirely speculation.

Zapping by Any Other Name...

Key to both gameplay and story, however, is a modified return of the 'zapping' system from *Resident Evil 2*. *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* tasks players with playing as both Redfield siblings, Chris and Claire. Instead of the two playable protagonists experiencing the same events simultaneously, as in *Resident Evil 2*, the game gives control of each sibling to the player in what could be called 'stages' or, perhaps more appropriately, 'chapters'³¹³. The actions the player takes as one protagonist still affect the way in which the other protagonist experiences the game, but with (slightly) less repetition and, arguably, less freedom. The main way in which the Redfields affect each other is through shared item boxes – meaning that, for example, an item placed in the box by Claire can then be accessed by Chris during his 'chapter'.

Conversely, this sharing means that any item that is actively being held by one sibling will be inaccessible to the other during their 'chapter', potentially increasing the difficulty of the game dramatically depending on the items/weapons being held. Interestingly, in a parallel to the

³¹³ For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the protagonist switching as 'chapters' from here on.

original game, it is usually Chris who is put in the more difficult position as a result of this gameplay mechanic³¹⁴. Once again, Chris appears to be the so-called ‘hard mode’ for the game. Additionally, unlike the ‘zapping’ system from *Resident Evil 2*, or even the choice available at the beginning of the original game, the player is forced to play as both protagonists, in the order dictated by the game. In other words, if the player only wanted to play as Claire, that option is not available to them.

Siblings and Subordinates

This forced switching between Claire and Chris leads to very specific dynamics between the two siblings. As detailed in Prima’s official *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* strategy guide, each character is controlled by the player twice: initially, Claire is the protagonist, through both Rockfort Island and Antarctica, before switching to Chris upon his arrival at Rockfort Island and through *his* arrival in Antarctica. Once the brother and sister meet up in Antarctica and are separated again, Claire is once again playable. Finally, the player finishes out the game as Chris³¹⁵. Unlike *Resident Evil 2*, where the idea was to give the player a (potentially flawed) understanding of the protagonists’ simultaneous narratives, *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* incorporates this mechanic for thematic purposes. As the *GameTrailers* retrospective discusses, the game is engaging in a comparison/contrasting between two sets of siblings: Chris and Claire, and Alfred and Alexia Ashford, highlighting the different motivations between the two family units³¹⁶.

³¹⁴ See: the notes on pg. 85, 90, and 111 of Hodgson (*Prima’s Official Strategy Guide Resident Evil Code: Veronica*)

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ *GameTrailers* staff. *The Resident Evil Retrospective – Part III*. *GameTrailers.com* (2009) (archived on YouTube). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0XFQZ-O5iA> (accessed Oct. 7, 2018).

This switching in and of itself is not the noteworthy part of this mechanic. Instead, it is the overall tasks each character is burdened with during each of their respective sections of the game. While Claire's inciting goal at the outset of the game is finding Chris, who has been missing since the end of the original game (also her motivation throughout the entirety of *Resident Evil 2*)³¹⁷, that is not her driving motivation once the player assumes control. Once the game proper starts, Claire has been kidnapped by Umbrella and imprisoned on Rockfort Island – where a new viral zombie outbreak has occurred. As such, Claire/the player is more focused on survival and escape, with her search for Chris shifting to the background. This is the case both on the initial island and when she is forced to go to an Umbrella research station in Antarctica by Alfred Ashford, one of the heads of Umbrella and one of the games main antagonists (more on him presently).

When the player takes control of Chris, however, his driving motivation *is* a rescue operation. Chris has learned of Claire's incarceration, and has come to the island expressly to save her from the clutches of Umbrella. This, despite the fact that Claire was supposed to be saving Chris. In fact, the only major effort the player can take to assist Chris as Claire, notifying him that Wesker is alive and searching for something on the island³¹⁸, is apparently a failure. As noted in the *Resident Evil Archives*, despite arriving on the island after Claire has already left, and, therefore, after she has sent the warning about Wesker, Chris is still taken aback and shocked at Wesker's appearance, alive and seemingly superhumanly enhanced³¹⁹.

What this dynamic suggests is another way in which *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* has regressed to the configuration of the original game in 1996. As with Jill, Claire is depicted as

³¹⁷ Hodgson, *Prima's Official Strategy Guide Resident Evil Code: Veronica*, pg. 2.

³¹⁸ See: Otomo, *Resident Evil Archives*, pg. 80.

³¹⁹ *Ibid*, pg. 88.

being a confident capable woman, charging in to handle situations and rescue those she cares about. Unlike in *Resident Evil 2*, however, but much like the original game, Claire is much less capable than it would appear. Throughout *Code: Veronica*, Claire requires repeated rescue, not only by Chris, but also by Steve Burnside. Claire is regularly provided with weapons and assistance by Steve, as Barry does with Jill, even eliminating Alfred at a pivotal narrative point in Antarctica. Unlike the Barry/Jill relationship, though, there is an overt romantic connection between Claire and Steve, suggesting that at least part of Steve's motivation is courtship, in a traditionally heterosexual and patriarchal way.

That this romantic/sexual motivation is the case is highlighted in *The Resident Evil Archives*' recounting of the events of *Code: Veronica*. Towards the end of the game, Steve is kidnapped by Alexia and exposed to the T-Veronica virus. Claire attempts to rescue him but arrives too late – she finds him imprisoned and already beginning to mutate. The mutated Steve chases Claire/the player down a hallway, swinging at her with a giant axe; there is nothing the player can do except run from this newly minted monster. At the last moment, as another monster in the form of a giant tentacle attacks, Steve recovers some awareness and uses his axe to kill it, being mortally wounded in the process. He dies after telling Claire that he loves her, despite only knowing her for just over a day³²⁰.

The telling part of this recounting is the way in which Otomo articulates Claire's unarticulated interior monologue upon Steve's death. As it is phrased in the *Archives*:

And with that, Steve would never move again. Claire's personal knight had died in her arms. *You saved me so many times... And yet, I couldn't help you when you needed it the*

³²⁰ *Ibid*, pg. 90.

most... Unable to believe he was dead, Claire sat and wept until she had no more tears left to cry. [italics in original] ³²¹

Otomo encapsulates Steve's motivations, Claire's inefficacy as a rescuer, and, at the same time, highlights that Claire is playing out the same dutiful daughter/woman script from both Voorhees'³²² and Aoki's³²³ discussions mentioned in the first chapter.

Test Tube Trauma

With any of the prior games in the series, Claire's playing out the dutiful woman script, quite literally via the player, would be the main topic of conversation, much as it was for Jill in chapter one. The presence of the Ashford twins, however, overshadows that conversation. These antagonists not only affect the events and play experience of *Code: Veronica*, but retroactively shifts the perceptions of all of the games which had come before. This shift is possible via another return occurring in the game: a return to the ideas present in Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous Feminine*.

Creed's work has appeared in the discussions of both *Resident Evil 2* and *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* in the previous chapters, in that those games use the ideas present in her foundational writing in an oppositional way. Those games offer the masculine as monstrous against female protagonists trying to escape the threat and oppression of said monstrous masculine. *Code: Veronica*, on the other hand, not only adheres to Creed's concepts of the monstrous feminine, but doubles down on that adherence, making *both* Ashford 'twins' examples of different forms of the same core aspects.

³²¹ *Ibid*

³²² Voorhees, "Will We Be Dutiful Daughters?"

³²³ Aoki, Feminism and Imperialism.

It is important in discussing this configuration to address the twins' origins - the reason why the word 'twins' is somewhat of a misnomer. As detailed in the *Resident Evil Archives*, both Alfred and Alexia were the results of a cloning program instituted by their 'father' (read: gene donor), Alexander Ashford – this project was dubbed Codename: Veronica, after “[...] the first great matriarch of the Ashford family”³²⁴. The program was designed to create genius duplicates of Alexander; it was only halfway successful³²⁵. Alexia, the younger of the clones, was born a genius, going on to finish university, as valedictorian no less, at the age of 10³²⁶. Alfred, on the other hand, “[...] was only marginally more intelligent than the average person and was thus dubbed a “failure””; and yet he was the one who discovered at the age of 12 that both 'siblings' were actually clones, leading to animosity for and distrust of Alexander³²⁷. Additionally, Alfred was shunned in favour of Alexia, a situation which led to his psychosis during *Code: Veronica*, and the first of two ways in which Creed's monstrous feminine is confirmed.

A Sister is a Boy's Best Friend

Looking at the way in which Alfred is presented to the player throughout the gameplay sections on Rockfort Island, it is clear that, much like the original *Resident Evil* was inspired by George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, Alfred's behaviour is inspired by Hitchcock's *Psycho* (Universal, 1960). Despite the transparency of the inspiration, none of the reviews in *GamePro*³²⁸, *Electronic Gaming Monthly*³²⁹, *Next Generation* magazine³³⁰, or *Official Sega*

³²⁴ Otomo, *The Resident Evil Archives*, pg. 132.

³²⁵ *Ibid*, pg. 133.

³²⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 132.

³²⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 133.

³²⁸ Major Mike, “Dream an Evil Dream”.

³²⁹ *Electronic Gaming Monthly* staff, “*Resident Evil Code: Veronica* Review”.

³³⁰ Fischer, “*Resident Evil Code: Veronica* Review”

*Dreamcast Magazine*³³¹ comment on it, nor does the Prima strategy guide³³², or even the *GameTrailers* retrospective published nine years after the game's release³³³.

Yet the homage is unmistakable and is more than simply the split personality trope in drag. The environments come complete with preserved top-floor bedroom space for the absent Alexia in Alfred's hilltop house on Rockfort Island akin to Bates' mother's room. There is even a scene in the game where Claire listens to 'Alexia' domineer over Alfred while on Rockfort Island, paralleling Norman Bates' dressing down of himself (as 'mother') upon Marion Crane's arrival in Hitchcock's film. Moreover, the elder Ashford sibling is clearly named after *Psycho*'s auteur director, Alfred Hitchcock. At the core of this homage is Alfred's inferiority complex surrounding his sister, which serves as an entryway into Creed's examination of *Psycho* and its relevance to *Code: Veronica*.

Mothers and Other Lab Equipment

Creed, in her discussion of *Psycho*, talks about how the horror film is the genre most typical to represent the mother/son relationship in cinema, always to monstrous effect³³⁴. In this regard, and because, as she notes, "[...] Tania Modeleski refers to *Psycho* as the 'quintessential' horror movie"³³⁵, Creed uses the film as an exemplar of what she deems the castrating mother figure. She argues that the dynamic between Bates and his mother, even posthumously, is one of fear of castration. She complicates this idea by aligning Mrs. Bates with Marion Crane, asking whether the female figure is castrating, or herself castrated under a phallogocentric society, ultimately making their stories not their own, but Norman's³³⁶. To this end, Creed points out that,

³³¹ Reyes, "Resident Evil Code: Veronica Review"

³³² See: Hodgson, *Prima's Official Strategy Guide Resident Evil Code: Veronica*, pg. 70.

³³³ *GameTrailers* Staff, [The Resident Evil Retrospective – Part III](#).

³³⁴ Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine*, pg. 139.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 140.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 141.

given the timeframe of the film, Mrs. Bates' true nature can never be ascertained – all of the traits and behaviours the audience is led to associate with her are filtered through the portrayal offered by her son, Norman³³⁷.

Obviously, Creed's discussion of *Psycho* and the castrating figure do not perfectly align with Alfred in *Code: Veronica*, but even these misalignments serve to highlight her theory. The first major deviation is that of the mother figure: there is no such figure to speak of. In removing the mother figure from the equation entirely, *Code: Veronica* removes the Freudian separation anxiety and overbearing female parent from which Creed bases her theories not just about *Psycho*, but the phallic mother, in general³³⁸. Despite this absence, there is still an overbearing female presence in the form of Alexia, or rather 'Alexia'. Again, the first time Claire and the player are introduced to 'Alexia', she is domineering and belittling Alfred behind closed doors.

Much like Creed's argument about the unknowability of the real Mrs. Bates, the actual dynamics between the Ashford 'twins' remain a mystery. There are only two times the twins are shown legitimately interacting with each other: the old film reel Claire finds on Rockfort Island, depicting both Alfred and Alexia as children torturing a dragonfly³³⁹, and when the real Alexia is revived in the Antarctica facility, at which point Alfred dies before any meaningful interaction can occur³⁴⁰. While Alexia is shown caressing the dead Alfred's hair upon revival, she is also staring into the distance as she does so, making the seemingly warm and loving gesture ambiguous.

A Family Affair

³³⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 143.

³³⁸ See: *Ibid*, pg. 46, 139

³³⁹ See: Hodgson, pg. 37.

³⁴⁰ See: *Ibid*, pg. 88.

Perhaps the main difference between Alfred Ashford and Norman Bates is that Alfred does not actually kill Alexia, the focus of his split personality/jealousy, or their father Alexander, the overbearing parent who fostered that jealousy, for that matter. To be clear, the nature of Alexander's overbearing parenting actually manifests in his neglect. As Alfred is considered a 'failure', and inferior to Alexia, it is these unattainable expectations which are a constant pressure on Alfred, causing him to, as the *GameTrailers* retrospective put it, "crack under the pressure"³⁴¹.

This cracking did not result in Alfred exacting revenge against either figure, though, even when he clearly had the opportunity to do so. Alexia is the one who removed both herself and their father from Alfred's life, neither of which was fatally permanent (at the time, at any rate). She voluntarily entered stasis for fifteen years, in order for the T-Veronica virus to gestate. Further, she was the one to eliminate Alexander, by infecting him with an earlier version of the T-Veronica virus, causing him to become a hideous monster, and then imprisoning him in the same Antarctic base³⁴². As such, Alexia fulfils the castrating figure role Creed discusses even more than Mrs. Bates, because even the revenge/aggression that Norman Bates attains is denied Alfred – Alexia is the one who handles the matter. As such, the dying Alfred awakening/unleashing the fully gestated T-Veronica Alexia is as much a final attempt at control while, at the same time, one final loss of it.

The Alexorcist

Alexia, then, as the dominant of the Ashford twins is seemingly the obvious choice for the final boss and dominant opposition for the game³⁴³. In this regard, while she does share

³⁴¹ *GameTrailers* Staff, [The Resident Evil Retrospective – Part III](#).

³⁴² Otomo, *Resident Evil Archives*, pg. 132

³⁴³ It is interesting to note that, for the Sony PlayStation 2 re-release, *Resident Evil Code: Veronica X*, a cut-scene was inserted promising a climactic confrontation between Chris and Wesker, but the player is not allowed the

similarities with the main antagonists from games past (some variation of T/G-virus infection; multiple forms; a fondness for tentacles), she also resembles the villainous force from another survival horror game: *Silent Hill*. This affinity is not oppositional, as was the Nemesis' in the final main numbered entry for the Sony PlayStation, but aligns surprisingly closely with the possession narrative in *Silent Hill*. If one chooses to look at the viral infection as a form of possession, then Alexia, like Cheryl and the girl who generated her in *Silent Hill*, had the possession cultivated at a young age before being confined. In addition, the attacks of both are fire-based, with the powers manifesting at/with puberty. As such, Clover's discussion of the demon possession narrative once again becomes relevant.

It is key to understanding the codes embedded in the monstrous Alexia both in that her body visibly changes and that her blood after that change becomes her primary attack, narratively and during gameplay. Creed articulates exactly this weaponization in discussing the ways in which Regan's possession in *The Exorcist* are represented. As she states:

What is most interesting about Regan's journey is the way in which it is represented as a struggle between the subject and the abject. It is Regan's body which becomes the site of the struggle – a struggle which literally takes place within the interior of and across the body. Slime, bile, pus, vomit, urine, blood – all of these abject forms of excrement are part of Regan's weaponry. Regan is possessed not by the devil but by her own unsocialized body.³⁴⁴

Alexia, too, represents the eruption of this unsocialized body, as can be seen in the narrative at the beginning of this chapter. While there have been other antagonists in the series to this point

chance to actually fight the former S.T.A.R.S. captain – any fighting occurs in the cut-scene, and is brief as it is interrupted by the base's self-destruct sequence.

³⁴⁴ Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine*, pg. 40

whose clothes have burned off as a sign of their growing monstrosity (Mr. X in *Resident Evil 2*; the Nemesis in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*), Alexia is the first to do so in order to manifest any power, whatsoever.

During her transformation, she shifts from proper society woman in full gown and gloves to an abject, and yet still sexualized, body. Unlike the other antagonists in the series, who continued to wear clothes, or at the very least pants, until they were no longer recognizably human, Alexia burns off *all* of her clothing, including the choker whose pendant acts as a security key, at the outset. This immolation reveals an hourglass figure and full breasts, despite the mutation occurring. In particular, this transformation juxtaposes the one the Nemesis experiences after its coat gets burned off, leaving him in just leather pants. As stated in the prior chapter, the Nemesis' transformation comes across as masculine posturing, and is a stark contrast to Alexia's appearance in the main hall, which is overtly feminine.

More importantly, that her blood is her main weapon, not just in this fight but across all of her forms, affirms Creed's application of Kristeva's notion of abjection to the possession narrative. It is no coincidence that, according to *The Resident Evil Archives*, Alexia placed herself in suspended animation, in order for the T-Veronica virus to gestate, at the age of 12: just at the onset of puberty³⁴⁵. Thus, the changes brought about by the virus are, as Clover articulates³⁴⁶ and as discussed in the previous chapter, are coming-of-age changes, and the fact that her blood burns on contact and, as in the scene described at the beginning of the chapter, drives men from her carries connotations of menses.

The Monstrous Phallic Womb

³⁴⁵ Otomo, *Resident Evil Archives*, pg. 132

³⁴⁶ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, pg. 71

This abject sexuality and monstrous female puberty are not the only ways that Alexia conforms to Creed's monstrous feminine. As mentioned, in keeping with the other games in the series, Alexia shifts through multiple forms before her final defeat at the hands of the player/Chris. After the player/Chris initiates the self-destruct sequence for the Antarctica facility (another series tradition), Alexia arrives to confront the Redfield siblings. She does so by emerging from the opening of an overtly phallic giant tentacle, covered in a film of slime. After emerging thus, it only takes one shot from the player/Chris' gun (while both siblings are present, it is Chris who remains the player-character) to cause her to transform into her second form³⁴⁷.

Becoming distinctly insect-like, but with a large distended belly, Alexia is immobilized during this phase of the confrontation. Instead of moving to attack, she generates what Hodgson dubs 'parasites' to attack the player/Chris³⁴⁸. These parasites emerge from the distended belly/'fleshy sac' (again, Hodgson's term³⁴⁹), much like the eggs in James Cameron's *Aliens* (20th Century Fox, 1986) or Nola's rage children from Cronenberg's *The Brood* (Elgin International Films, 1979). She has also, in keeping with series tradition, developed attack tentacles which she will use in this battle. This form is significantly harder to dispatch, but once it has been, Alexia enters her third and final form – the insect-like attributes are emphasized as she splits away from the distended belly amidst a swarm of insects from throughout the facility. At this point, it is a matter of the player hitting her once while she is flying around with the weapon offered by the game during this transformation, much like the rocket launcher in previous games.

³⁴⁷ Hodgson, *Prima's Official Strategy Guide Resident Evil Code: Veronica*, pg. 127

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 128

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Throughout this battle, Alexia transforms from Creed's/Clover's monstrous female puberty to a combination of Creed's dual concepts of the monstrous womb and phallic mother. In discussing films such as the aforementioned *Aliens* and *The Brood*, Creed points out that the horror in these films comes from a mother figure who, as she puts it, is permitted too much power³⁵⁰. This power stems from the mother figure's ability to reproduce without a male presence, along with the fact that these offspring are wholly subservient to this 'omni-parent', as it were³⁵¹. Still adhering to her Freudian psychoanalytic frame work, Creed then argues that this power, both to give birth and to hold dominion over the creatures produced offers an opposition between the female womb's 'natural functions' (her phrasing) and the patriarchal symbolic order, in which the male body is the proper and clean one³⁵².

In addition, the presence of the tentacles in Alexia's second form, and the transformation of her legs into a prehensile stinger in her final form suggest Creed's notion of the phallic mother. For this concept, she refers not to *Aliens*, but its precursor, Ridley Scott's *Alien*. In this discussion, she describes the titular monster as the fetishized phallus of the mother figure, both carrying feminine markers (in the form of the xenomorph's lithe figure and less confrontational attack approach) and the phallus-weapon in both the monster's tail and second mouth/proboscis³⁵³. This notion of the feminine phallus aligns not only with the tentacles Alexia sprouts in her second form, but also with the tentacle that delivers her to the final battle. Further, the stinger Alexia develops in her final form carries no other purpose than, as Creed puts it, "[...] to tear apart and reincorporate all life"³⁵⁴. Finally, the fact that the virus which facilitates these

³⁵⁰ Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine*, pg. 47

³⁵¹ *Ibid*, pg. 46-47

³⁵² *Ibid*, pg. 49

³⁵³ *Ibid*, pg. 22

³⁵⁴ *Ibid*

changes is named after the Ashford family's most prominent matriarch³⁵⁵ doubles down on the monstrosity of the mother figure presented in the game.

Cause and Affect: A Conclusion

Resident Evil Code: Veronica's uncritical embrace of the monstrous feminine figure examined by Creed carries farther reaching consequences than just this one game. Making Alexia not just the main antagonist of this game, but of the whole series to this point forces all of the prior games in the series to be re-examined under this new light. Gone are all the potentially progressive elements from *Resident Evil 2* and *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* discussed in the previous chapters. The idea of the womb masculinized from *Resident Evil 2*, and of the monsters as male oppressors, are inverted because, at their core, it was Alexia who was the cause of it all. The same can be said of the masculine terror of the eponymous Nemesis – at its heart lies the monstrous Alexia.

Even all of the male monsters from the prior games, such as William Birkin, are re-cast as victims. Given the history presented in *Resident Evil Code: Veronica*, as well as the player being tasked with eliminating the monstrous feminine core of the Umbrella corporation, in both Alfred acting as Alexia and Alexia herself, these monsters from previous games are reframed. Going back to the idea of the T/G-Virus as possession, if one reads it that way, then figures like William Birkin are unwilling hosts, much like Alexander Ashford and Steve Burnside. Birkin, to continue the example, was forced to inject himself with the G-Virus in order to save himself; it was never his plan to do so. Alexia, on the other hand, *willingly* submitted to the virus in her body, and encouraged it via her suspended animation so that it could properly gestate³⁵⁶. Moreover, Birkin's G-Virus, while admittedly his obsession, was created at the behest of Alexia.

³⁵⁵ Otomo, *Resident Evil Archives*, pg. 132

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*

Because of this retroactive revision of the series' events, or instead, the figures behind them, it would seem to follow that the player defeating Alexia would mean the downfall of the Umbrella corporation – the evil organization behind every outbreak since the original game. This notion is actually borne out in *Resident Evil 4*, as that is exactly what happens – the Umbrella corporation is no more by the start of that game. That would not be the extent of the backslide in terms of gender representation which occurs in *Resident Evil 4*, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Leon-ses of Gender:

***Resident Evil 4* (2005), the Sexism of Escort Missions, and Regressive Masculinity**

The Umbrella Corporation is no more.

It has been five years since the incidents of *Resident Evil Code: Veronica*. Those events, combined with the highly publicized bio-organic weapons outbreak in Raccoon City and the resultant eradication of the town and all its residents in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, have led to the dissolution of the Umbrella Corporation, with its remaining board members being brought up on charges. As a result, it would seem as though the world has slowly started moving on from the horror of this bio-weapon outbreak.

Leon S. Kennedy, for example, is certainly not in the same place as he was during his escape from Raccoon City with Claire Redfield in *Resident Evil 2*, both physically and psychologically. Currently, he/the player is in rural Spain, trapped on the grounds of an enormous medieval castle. He also appears to have changed significantly in the time between Raccoon City and now, including an undefined stint in the U.S. Special Forces. He is no longer the naïve rookie cop whose first day on the job was spent unexpectedly facing zombie hordes, monsters, and corporate spies.

Instead, Leon is tasked with rescuing the President's 20-year-old daughter, Ashley Graham, who had been kidnapped from her college in Massachusetts. The trail has brought Leon/the player to a small Spanish village which holds a sinister secret – the Las Plagas parasite. Overseen by the mysterious Lord Saddler, all of the residents of the village and surrounding area have been infected with the parasite, placing them wholly under Saddler's control and turning

them into ‘Los Ganados’ – translated loosely as ‘the swarm’. Leon/the player has finally found Ashley, dressed in the same sleeveless cashmere sweater, pleated miniskirt, and knee-high boots as she was wearing when she was kidnapped. His success is not without complications: Leon and Ashley are both infected with the Las Plagas parasite, courtesy of Saddler, and are now looking both for a way out and a cure.

This search has led them here: one of the grand halls of a baroque Spanish castle, confronted on all sides by infected cult members garbed in black and red robes. The massive room they are currently trapped in consists of a walkway to a large, retractable staircase situated between two shallow pools which leads to the balcony, and a small enclosed passage and storage room under the balcony. The staircase proper is currently retracted, blocking the way forward and preventing escape. Moreover, Leon/the player is being prevented from operating the crank to reposition the staircase by waves of Las Plagas cultists. Realizing that confronting these overwhelming hordes in the wide-open hall is a fool’s errand, he/the player grabs Ashley and rushes to the passage under the balcony.

Even here, though, the sheer number of enemies swarming them are proving to be too much to handle. Enemies, some with projectile weapons, others with medieval melee weapons, are coming from both ends of the passage, making it difficult to manage their approach. Because of this, and because it puts Ashley in immediate danger as a result, Leon/the player retreats further, going into the small storage room in the passage. Leon/the player’s reasoning stands that, with only the one small doorway through which the cultists can progress, it will be easier to manage their ingress, a few cultists at a time.

At first, this plan appears to be a solid one. Leon/the player moves Ashley to the back of the room and orders her to ‘Wait’, to keep her from being too close to the inevitable violence.

Leon/the player then pulls out a shotgun and waits for the cultists to open the door and start moving into the room. For the first few waves, the shotgun seems to be an effective method of crowd control, keeping the cultists clustered in the doorway. It soon becomes apparent that there are too many for this form of offense, though, as cultists manage to gain ingress proper into the room and start moving toward Ashley to reacquire her for Saddler.

One of the cultists is able to maneuver past Leon/the player and stands behind Ashley, about to grab her. Swinging the sights of the shotgun around, Leon/the player expects Ashley to do what she has always done previously when aimed at – be smart enough to duck out of Leon/the player’s sights and allow him to eliminate the imminent threat to her well being. This time, however, there is a glitch in the game, and a different behaviour of Ashley’s is triggered.

In certain contextual situations, when Leon/the player uses the aiming reticule to look at Ashley, she chides him for being a pervert as it is possible to look up Ashley’s skirt, usually while she is climbing up or down a ladder. This is the behaviour triggered now, instead of the lifesaving (and game-saving) one which is supposed to occur. Because Leon/the player is expecting the self-preservation behaviour, the shotgun is fired before comprehension of the glitch fully takes place – as a result, Ashley takes the full force of the shotgun, dying instantly. Her death causes Leon/the player to fail both the immediate mission, and the overall goal of the game, triggering a Game Over screen. The player is now forced to reload the last save spot and try to make their way back to this spot in the game.³⁵⁷

Umbrella Folds

In contrast to the relative stability the PlayStation era offered for the series, both in terms of reception and sales, the early 2000s were a period of transition and upheaval for the *Resident*

³⁵⁷ This account was created from a combination of my playthrough and the Survival Horror Network’s *Resident Evil 4* Let’s Play video found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-DpUeN4tE8>

Evil franchise. As far back as 2000, there were attempts to shake up a gameplay formula “[...] that Capcom itself conceded was growing tired”³⁵⁸ with mixed results. 2000’s *Resident Evil: Survivor* for the Sony PlayStation offered a first-person shooter inflected with the franchise’s long-term mechanics (and notoriously bad voice-acting), ironically returning the series to one of the initial concepts for the original game in 1996³⁵⁹. The game was met with unfavourable reviews, with *IGN*’s Doug Perry giving it a 4.0 out of 10³⁶⁰, *GameSpot*’s Ben Stahl giving it a 4.1 out of 10³⁶¹, and *Electronic Gaming Monthly*’s reviewers giving it a 3.5, 5, and 4 out of 10, respectively³⁶². The game was originally even more of a departure for the series as it was known at the time because, as Mark MacDonald indicated in the *Electronic Gaming Monthly* review, it was initially intended to have light gun support which was removed for the North American market but included in the Japanese and European versions of the game³⁶³.

Additionally, two different *Resident Evil* games were planned for the Game Boy Color: a full port of the original 1996 game, and a spinoff titled *Resident Evil Gaiden* (Capcom, 2001). The port of the PlayStation game was cancelled before completion due to its quality (or lack thereof), only seeing the light of day in 2012 as a ROM of the prototype uploaded to the internet³⁶⁴. *Resident Evil Gaiden*, on the other hand, did see limited release, but it too was unfavourably received. *IGN*’s Craig Harris gave the game a 4 out of 10, saying that “[...] the

³⁵⁸ Casamassina, Matt. *Resident Evil 4 Review*. *IGN.com*, Jan. 7, 2005. Under “Articles”: <https://ca.ign.com/articles/2005/01/07/resident-evil-4-7> (accessed Nov. 11, 2018).

³⁵⁹ *GameTrailers* staff, *Resident Evil Retrospective – Part I*

³⁶⁰ Perry, Doug. *Resident Evil: Survivor Review*. *IGN.com*, Sept. 13, 2000, under “Articles”: <https://ca.ign.com/articles/2000/09/14/resident-evil-survivor> (Accessed Nov. 11, 2018).

³⁶¹ Stahl, Ben. *Resident Evil: Survivor Review*. *GameSpot.com*, Feb. 4, 2000, under “Reviews”:

<https://www.gamespot.com/reviews/resident-evil-survivor-review/1900-2545924/> (Accessed Nov. 11, 2018)

³⁶² *Electronic Gaming Monthly* staff. *Resident Evil: Survivor Review*. *Electronic Gaming Monthly* No. 136 (Nov. 2000), pg. 258.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ Booker, Logan. *Rare, Unreleased Resident Evil Game Boy Color Carts Bought, ROMs Uploaded*. *Kotaku*, Feb. 11, 2012, under “Australian Stories”: <https://www.kotaku.com.au/2012/02/rare-unreleased-resident-evil-game-boy-color-carts-bought-roms-uploaded/> (Accessed Nov. 12, 2018).

game design just doesn't work"³⁶⁵. *GameSpot*'s Scott Provo gave the game a 5 out of 10, stating “[b]esides the Resident Evil namesake and a well-crafted story, there’s nothing that sets Gaiden apart from any of the countless other action games available for the Game Boy Color”³⁶⁶. The *Electronic Gaming Monthly* staff awarded the game 5, 3.5, and 4 out of 10³⁶⁷, practically mirroring the review scores for *Resident Evil: Survivor*.

The game design for *Resident Evil Gaiden* greatly diverged from the main games in the series, both in that it was presented from an overhead view similar to Konami’s *Metal Gear* for the Nintendo Entertainment System (1988) and that the combat came in the form of timed button presses to match a fast-moving slider at the bottom of the screen. While the gameplay mechanics did *Resident Evil Gaiden* no favours, the premise of being trapped on a ship overtaken by the undead is one that Capcom saw promise in and would revisit multiple times. *Resident Evil: Dead Aim* (Capcom, 2003), another first-person game in the style of *Resident Evil: Survivor*, and *Resident Evil: Revelations* (Capcom, 2012), a game which will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter, featured the same premise with the latter bringing back Jill Valentine from the original game as a playable character. This premise would also eventually be integrated into the main numbered entries in the series with an extended sequence in 2017’s *Resident Evil VII: Biohazard*, which will also be discussed in a later chapter.

Capcom even tried a foray into the realm of online multiplayer for the series with 2003’s *Resident Evil Outbreak* (Capcom, 2003). *Resident Evil Outbreak* brought the static camera angles, tank controls, and inventory management of the main entries in the series into the online

³⁶⁵ Harris, Craig. *Resident Evil Gaiden Review*. *IGN.com*, June 26, 2002, under “Articles”: <https://ca.ign.com/articles/2002/06/26/resident-evil-gaiden> (Accessed Nov. 12, 2018).

³⁶⁶ Provo, Scott. *Resident Evil Gaiden Review*. *GameSpot.com*, July 31, 2002, under “Reviews”: <https://www.gamespot.com/reviews/resident-evil-gaiden-review/1900-2876153/> (Accessed Nov. 12, 2018).

³⁶⁷ *Electronic Gaming Monthly* staff. *Resident Evil Gaiden Review*. *Electronic Gaming Monthly* No. 155 (June, 2002), pg. 124.

space, via the Sony PlayStation 2's network adaptor. Instead of offering a cohesive narrative, like any of the other games in the series, *Outbreak* offered episodes – smaller missions with specific goals tasked to the player, lacking any direct chronological order or linkages between them. Up to four players could work together to make their way through each of these scenarios, choosing pre-determined characters.

As the *GameTrailers* retrospective illustrates, there is a gender disparity in the characters on offer with only three of the eight player-character options being women, whose careers are stated as 'reporter', 'student', and 'waitress'. This situation is in contrast with the male characters, whose careers include 'security guard', 'doctor', 'police officer', 'plumber', and so on – all skilled trades or positions of authority. Furthermore, the skills these careers imparted skewed along gender lines, as well. While the plumber, police officer, and security guard all have increased combat proficiency, the reporter, student, and waitress bore passive skills – lockpicking, carrying capacity, and healing respectively³⁶⁸.

In an indication that Capcom's development team had a fundamental lack of understanding about how online cooperation needs to function, there was no voice chat implemented in the game. Instead, the developers included a few pre-set phrases intended to avoid breaking immersion in the experience – an intentional design choice which made playing the game at the time significantly more difficult. Despite this obstacle to online cooperation, as detailed by Avalanche Reviews, there are still fan servers maintained for the game to this day, long after the 2007 shutdown of the official servers for the game³⁶⁹.

³⁶⁸ *GameTrailers* Staff, *The Resident Evil Retrospective – Part IV*

³⁶⁹ Avalanche Reviews. "Resident Evil Outbreak: RE Retrospective". *YouTube.com*. Aug. 27, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5k2A01X6pt4> (Accessed Dec. 18, 2018)

This problem Capcom was facing with the series becoming rote was exacerbated by the release of *Silent Hill 2* (Konami, 2001), the most favourably received entry in Konami's competing franchise according to Metacritic³⁷⁰. *Silent Hill 2* did more than offer the perceived mere jump scares of the *Resident Evil* franchise, or even the psychological mind game played by its own prequel. Instead, the developers used the premise of the game to, as Derek Alexander discusses in his video on the subject, examine manifestations of desire, frustration, trauma, and abuse, of a sexual nature or otherwise, without cheapening these issues or offering definitive answers about them³⁷¹. In the face of this inarguably mature experience, far beyond the gore and titillation the video game industry considered 'mature' at the time, the *Resident Evil* series needed to change or be left by the wayside.

Counting to Four

These attempts at change for the *Resident Evil* franchise were all offshoots, side stories, and spinoffs. The real shakeup for the series would be the next planned numbered entry – *Resident Evil 4* (Capcom, 2005). The first major upheaval would come in the form of system exclusivity. As reported by *Electronic Gaming Monthly* in December 2001, after the release of *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* for the Sega Dreamcast (along with the port of the game for the Sony PlayStation 2), Capcom signed an exclusivity deal for the series with Nintendo for their then-new GameCube system³⁷². This deal saw the next six releases in the series, including a from-scratch remake of the original 1996 game, the previously-in-development for the Nintendo 64 prequel *Resident Evil 0*, ports of *Resident Evil 2*, *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, *Resident Evil*

³⁷⁰ See: *Metacritic.com*. "Silent Hill 2". <https://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-2/silent-hill-2> (accessed Dec. 16, 2018)

³⁷¹ Stop Skeletons From Fighting. "Silent Hill 2 | Re:Certified Classic [SSFF]". *YouTube.com*. Nov. 1, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=195KJ5jUquc> (accessed Dec. 16, 2018)

³⁷² Dudlak, Johnathan and Chris Johnson. "GameCube gets Evil" (under Press Start). *Electronic Gaming Monthly* No. 149 (Dec. 2001), pg. 30-34.

Code: Veronica X, and, most importantly, *Resident Evil 4* all become exclusives for Nintendo's 128-bit system³⁷³. This exclusivity was a significant shift for a series that was previously largely associated with Sony's PlayStation brand.

Along with this exclusivity, the core gameplay for this fourth numbered entry in the series was planned to go through drastic changes – so much so, in fact, that three in-development builds of the game were scrapped before the development team settled on a story and gameplay style³⁷⁴. Two of these builds featured an emphasis on paranormal monsters and varied locations but would never see completion or release³⁷⁵. One of these scrapped builds diverged so greatly from the *Resident Evil* series but was far enough along in development and showed enough promise, that it was instead spun off into its own game, eventually becoming a franchise in its own right. Taking place in a large castle and featuring fast-paced stylish melee and ranged combat, this former *Resident Evil* game would be reborn in the form of *Devil May Cry* (Capcom, 2001)³⁷⁶. While not always resulting in separate game franchises, restarting development on a *Resident Evil* game was not new to the series, as documented in previous chapters – in that regard, the series' heritage shone through. *Devil May Cry* may not have wound up as a *Resident Evil* game, but it did influence at the very least the character trajectory Leon would experience.

The final, fully-developed version of *Resident Evil 4* featured major departures in almost every aspect of gameplay. First and foremost, the static (or slightly panning, in the case of *Resident Evil Code: Veronica*) camera angles from every major entry in the series to that point were replaced with a persistent, closely zoomed third-person perspective. Alongside this shift in

³⁷³ *Ibid*, pg. 30.

³⁷⁴ GameTrailers staff. *The Resident Evil Retrospective – Part V*. *GameTrailers.com* (2009) (archived on YouTube). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0wupRgitJ4> (Accessed Nov. 18, 2018).

³⁷⁵ *Ibid*.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

perspective, the aiming/combat system was overhauled to more closely resemble that found in first-person shooters, with one notable difference – just like the prior entries in the series, the player cannot move while aiming/fighting. The inventory system became less limiting, acting as an almost puzzle-like experience to determine how to fit items in without leaving gaps. Saving no longer required ink ribbons and would happen automatically at the end of each chapter in the game.

These changes in perspective, aiming, inventory, and saving were necessary, as there was a shift in what was expected of the player throughout the game. Gone was the deliberate pacing, slowly moving enemies, careful ammo/inventory management, and convoluted puzzle-solving of prior games. *Resident Evil 4* was instead focused on fast-paced action, including chase Quick-Time events³⁷⁷, large set-piece monster battles, fighting off waves of faster, more co-ordinated enemies with a large assortment of upgradeable weapons, and, eventually, ensuring the continued protection and survival of the President’s daughter as she accompanies the player/Leon. Here, as well, the influence of the build that would become *Devil May Cry* can be felt, with the shift to a more action-focused approach. Despite this faster more action-oriented pace, *Resident Evil 4* would also turn out to be the longest game in the series. Compared to the average three-to-eight-hour playthrough of prior games in the series, *Resident Evil 4* could take, as James Mielke³⁷⁸ wrote in his review of the game, up to twenty hours to complete³⁷⁹.

This litany of changes led to *Resident Evil 4* being heralded as revolutionary, not just for the series, but for the industry. *GamePro*’s Major Mike stated in his review that the game “[...] reinvents the tried-and-true mechanics of the series in important, innovative ways”, giving the

³⁷⁷ These gameplay segments are characterized by a quick-paced on-screen event with specific button press prompts which the player needs to input within a given time window.

³⁷⁸ Or ‘Milkman’ as he is credited as in this article.

³⁷⁹ Mielke, James. *Resident Evil 4 Review*. *Electronic Gaming Monthly* No. 189 (Mar. 2005), pg. 131.

game a 4.0 out of 5 for control, and a 4.5 out of 5 for graphics, sound, and fun factor³⁸⁰. The *Electronic Gaming Monthly* staff gave the game a 10, 9.5, and 10 out of 10³⁸¹, with Mark MacDonald proclaiming “*RE4* not only brings the series out of its creative rut, it also packs the most refined graphics and gameplay in survival-horror since... well, ever”³⁸². *IGN*’s Matt Cassamassina dubbed the game “[...] simply the best survival horror game ever made”, awarding it a 9.8 out of 10³⁸³. *GameSpot*’s Greg Kasavin gave the game a 9.6 out of 10, calling it “[...] an amazing achievement”³⁸⁴. Even four years after its release, the *GameTrailers* staff referred to *Resident Evil 4* as “[...] the game [Shinji Mikami] will be remembered for”³⁸⁵. Yet, for all of this praise, there are some fundamental issues with *Resident Evil 4* which also make it the most regressive entry in the series to that point.

Rural Demographics

Within the first ten minutes of gameplay in *Resident Evil 4*, Leon comes across a shack in the woods. Upon entering this shack, the player encounters the corpse of a woman pinned to the wall by way of a pitchfork driven through her head. If the player examines the corpse using the “check” button prompt, they are privy to what appears to be Leon’s perspective on this grisly tableau: “Guess there’s no sex discrimination here”³⁸⁶. This statement acts as both a window into the changes in Leon’s personality (an issue which will be addressed presently), and what appears

³⁸⁰ Major Mike. *Resident Evil 4 Review*. *GamePro* No. 198 (Mar. 2005), pg. 60.

³⁸¹ *Electronic Gaming Monthly* staff. *Resident Evil 4 Review*. *Electronic Gaming Monthly* No. 189 (Mar. 2005), pg. 131.

³⁸² MacDonald, Mark. *Resident Evil 4 Review*. *Electronic Gaming Monthly* No. 189 (Mar. 2005), pg. 131.

³⁸³ Casamassina, *Resident Evil 4 Review*.

³⁸⁴ Kasavin, Greg. *Resident Evil 4 Review*. *GameSpot.com*, under “Reviews”:

<https://www.gamespot.com/reviews/resident-evil-4-review/1900-6115968/> (Accessed Nov. 21, 2018).

³⁸⁵ *GameTrailers* staff. *The Resident Evil Retrospective – Part IV*. *GameTrailers.com* (2009) (archived on YouTube). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqiUYYztdrY> (Accessed Nov. 21, 2018).

³⁸⁶ See: SHN Survival Horror Network. “Resident Evil 4 HD PS3 720p Walkthrough Longplay No Commentary”. *YouTube.com*. Jan. 5, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-DpUeN4tE8>, at 10:12.

to be a commentary on the gender disparity in prior games. The game should, perhaps, not be so quick to be smug about this situation, however.

As with *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, it is not possible to determine a definitive number/ratio of male to female rank-and-file enemies in the game (zombies for *Nemesis*, the so-called Los Ganados for *Resident Evil 4*), albeit for a slightly different reason. While *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* varied the number of zombies in order to keep the experience unpredictable (as detailed in the chapter on that game), *Resident Evil 4* does so dynamically, based on the player's skill level. As Mark Brown discusses in his video, "What Capcom Didn't Tell You About Resident Evil 4", the game adjusts the number of enemies at any given time depending on how well the player is handling the challenge³⁸⁷. If the player is moving easily through the game, the number of enemies increases; if the player is doing poorly, the number and difficulty of the enemies encountered diminishes³⁸⁸.

While it is not possible to determine how many female Ganados are present in the game in any given playthrough as a result of this mechanic, it is entirely possible to determine the number of character models for those female enemies, as well as their general placement. As with the discussions for *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* and *Resident Evil Code: Veronica*, the official strategy guide for *Resident Evil 4* only offers up vagaries about the distinct versions of these enemies. Aside from drawing a distinction between Los Ganados and when their heads burst open to reveal matured Las Plagas, Dan Birlew, the guide's author only states that "[i]n the early moments of the game, Los Ganados appear as male and female villagers of various ages that are extremely hostile"³⁸⁹. In spite of this vague description, and despite the plethora of male Ganados

³⁸⁷ Mark Brown. "What Capcom Didn't Tell You About Resident Evil 4 | Game Maker's Toolkit". *YouTube.com*. June 2, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFv6KAdQ5SE&t=81s>.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁹ Birlew, Dan. *Resident Evil 4 Official Strategy Guide*. Indianapolis: BradyGAMES Publishing, 2005, pg. 12.

character models throughout, it can be easily determined that there is only one female model in the game – two if the inclusion of a hat qualifies as a separate character model.

Moreover, these models only appear in the more rural settings of the game. The opening village, the rustic dam, the mines – the female Ganados appears alongside their male villager counterparts. As soon as Leon/the player enters the castles which act as strongholds for Los Illuminados, or the laboratory facility at the end of the game, all of the rank-and-file Ganados are depicted as male cultists or commandos, a fact alluded to in Birlew's enemy description in the game's official strategy guide³⁹⁰. It would appear that, despite their dissolution, Lord Saddler has inherited similar hiring practices to the Umbrella corporation. That Saddler's plan hinges on a 20-year old woman in the face of his preference for male underlings is actually telling of the game's attitudes as a whole.

I Wanna Hold Your Hand

Saddler's plan for Ashley is to infect her with the Las Plagas parasite, and then return her to her father. Infected, she would be completely acquiescent to Saddler's will. In this passively obedient state, she would then be used as a disease vector of sorts, ensuring that her father and his cabinet were all infected with Las Plagas, giving Saddler complete control over the U.S. Government. Leaving aside the fact that, for Saddler's plan to work properly, he would need to also infect the majority of either the House or Senate, the entire scheme relies on Ashley being passive and obeying orders exactly.

It is ironic, then, that the game mechanics task her with doing the *exact* same thing for the player – following orders without question. Once Leon has rescued Ashley from her captors, she is a near constant companion for the player. While the relationship between Ashley and Leon is

³⁹⁰ *Ibid*

hardly equal, nor should it be considering the age and experience difference between them, Ashley does not contribute to the duo's escape efforts or even her own safety, whatsoever. Outside of hiding in seemingly magical bins that the game's enemies are unable to open for some reason or ducking when Leon aims his gun sights at her so that he can hit enemies behind her, both of which are actions that the player must initiate, Ashley shows no self-preservation instinct when in direct confrontation with Los Ganados. Rather than moving away from enemies as they approach her, or fighting them once they have grabbed her, Ashley will simply scream, crouch, and passively wait for Leon/the player to rescue her. Hiroyuki Kobayashi essentially stated as much during an interview with Kevin Gifford during the game's development, saying "[y]ou must protect her while also protecting yourself [...] if the enemies grab her, you'll have to shoot them in the leg so that she can escape safely"³⁹¹. Mark MacDonald elaborated even further in his preview write-up for the game, stating that "[Ashley's] constantly in danger of being recaptured, unable to get over obstacles without your help, and often in the way of your bullets"³⁹².

Moreover, the Japanese commercial for the Nintendo Wii release of the game (Capcom, 2007) highlights that *this is how Capcom expects women to behave*. In the commercial, a man is playing *Resident Evil 4* on his Wii when a woman who looks suspiciously like Ashley, complete with knee-high high-heeled boots, brings him a coffee. As he plays, she coos and fawns over how amazing he is at the game. When Ashley is grabbed by one of Los Illuminados in the game, though, the woman sitting beside him is grabbed by Bitores Mendez, one of Saddler's lieutenants, as the room fills with Los Ganados. She screams and wriggles, but does not actively try to fight back, while the man playing the game uses the Wiimote to start shooting the game

³⁹¹ Kobayashi, Hiroyuki, in interview with Kevin Gifford. "Meet the Residents". *Electronic Gaming Monthly* no. 189 (Holiday, 2004), pg. 38-39.

³⁹² MacDonald, Mark. "EGM's Opinionated Guide to What's Next: *Resident Evil 4*". *Electronic Gaming Monthly* No. 181 (Aug. 2004), pg. 82.

characters standing between them. The player uses the Wiimote to free the woman from Mendez' grasp, at which point she runs to him and embraces him – mirroring Ashley doing the exact same thing on the TV screen³⁹³.

The Dreaded Escort Mission

This behaviour is fairly typical of the 'escort mission', a widely used gameplay conceit, which is surprisingly under-examined in academia from what I could, or rather could not, find. Aside from Sarah Stang's discussion of Elizabeth in her chapter on the *BioShock* series, in which she argues that Elizabeth's presence during gameplay does *not* constitute an escort mission because she is useful and is never targeted by enemies³⁹⁴, I could find little to no academic discussion of escort missions. Anita Sarkeesian does address this situation, though, via a more popular press approach. Sarkeesian looks at the escort mission not just in *Resident Evil 4*, but in a broader gaming context in her *Tropes Vs. Women in Video Games* video, "The Lady Sidekick"³⁹⁵. In the video, Sarkeesian dubs this gameplay mechanic 'the damsel escort mission', which entails the player escorting a typically female computer-controlled character who acts as not only passive, but an actual hindrance to the player's progress³⁹⁶.

In point of fact, Sarkeesian uses Ashley as an example of this mechanic in action, alongside *Ico*'s (SCEA, 2001) Yorda, whom she casts as the archetypal characterization of this sort of gameplay. As stated in the video:

³⁹³ Israel Ramos. "Resident evil 4 For Wii Japanese TV Commercial". *YouTube.com*. Apr. 14, 2007. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNJrxoSUTsM>

³⁹⁴ Stang, Sarah. *Big Daddies and their little sisters: Postfeminist fatherhood in the BioShock series*. *Beyond the Sea: Critical Perspectives on BioShock*. Ed. J. Aldred & F. Parker. Pg. 30-57. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2018.

³⁹⁵ *Feminist Frequency* staff, "The Lady Sidekick".

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Damsel escort missions occur when a female joins the male player character, but is largely helpless, and rather than being a clear benefit to the player, she feels more like a burden.³⁹⁷

By this description, *Ico*'s Yorda qualifies for this moniker even more than Sarkeesian explains in her video. She points out that the majority of the gameplay in *Ico* consists of environmental puzzles designed to allow Yorda, who cannot leap or climb on her own, to progress through the game's castle³⁹⁸. More than that, however, in most instances, Yorda *will not even walk on her own*, an issue Sarkeesian does not discuss. Instead, the player has to actively call her to their side or guide her by the hand – so much so that the R1 button on the PlayStation 2 (or 3, in the case of the remaster³⁹⁹) is dedicated to that very task.

By this token, Ashley is nowhere near as helpless as she could be; she can walk on her own, after all. She only does this, though, when Leon/the player orders her to. While *Ico* has a Call/Hold Hand button, Leon has a set of commands for Ashley, including 'Wait', 'Follow me', and 'Hide'. In addition, there are context sensitive commands, such as ordering her to jump from ledges and ladders, allowing Leon to catch her. This scenario with the ladders is also where the chiding script mentioned at the beginning of this chapter comes into play, as it is possible for Leon/the player to look up Ashley's skirt as she is using a ladder. Much like the weirdly inappropriate 'Easter egg' behaviours in regard to women present in Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid* games⁴⁰⁰, the presence of this particular behaviour serves to not only undermine the tension

³⁹⁷ *Ibid*

³⁹⁸ *Ibid*

³⁹⁹ *Ico & Shadow of the Colossus: The Collection* (SCEA, 2011)

⁴⁰⁰ For example, in *Metal Gear Solid* (Konami, 1998), Solid Snake/the player can switch to a first-person viewpoint to ogle companion character Meryl's breasts, to which she reacts by blushing and commenting on the attention.

of the overall game scenario, but also highlight the gendered and sexualized nature of Ashley's presentation and characterization within the game.

Are You a Bad Enough Dude to Protect the President's Daughter?

Ashley's helplessness is part of a larger discourse on gender roles/norms, one that Sarkeesian does discuss in her video. As she states in regard to the common configuration of escort missions:

If anything we could do with a lot more narratives that focus on companionship, cooperation, and support, but the models games give us rarely offer us experiences where this kind of support is truly mutual. Instead, we see a pattern of men frequently carrying and helping women in situations where they're otherwise helpless. This pattern is rooted in sexist ideas about men as protectors and women as the ones who need this kind of protection. It's coded into the gameplay that men are the ones who kill and protect, and that women are the ones who experience moments of helplessness and need to be carried.⁴⁰¹

To be sure, Leon and Ashley absolutely fall into this dynamic, but it is more complex than elided to in Sarkeesian's discussion. First to return to an earlier observation made in this chapter: that Leon and Ashley's relationship is not equal is not inherently a point for criticism. One has received police and special forces training, on top of having survived an ostensible zombie apocalypse⁴⁰², while the other has not had to endure anything remotely like that, or the current situation at hand. The experiences of the two characters simply do not match up equally, and there is no shame in that inequality.

⁴⁰¹ *Feminist Frequency* staff, "The Lady Sidekick".

⁴⁰² It should be noted that, as Leon is killed and replaced with a shape-shifting Bio-Organic Weapon in *Resident Evil Gaiden*, that narrative has been excised from the series' canon and is, therefore, not included in his experiences here.

Where that inequality *does* become a problem, however, is in the way Ashley is sexualized in the context of this power dynamic with Leon. Aside from a brief comment about *BioShock Infinite*'s Elizabeth busting out of her corset⁴⁰³, Sarkeesian does not address the sexualized nature of the gender imbalance inherent in the escort missions she discusses⁴⁰⁴. In this regard, it is important to recognize that Ashley's character model bears more than a passing resemblance to Elisabeth Moss in her performance as Zoey Bartlett, the President's daughter on the television show *The West Wing* (Warner Bros. Television, 1999-2006). There are two notable exceptions to this resemblance, though: Ashley is blonde instead of a redhead, and her bust is considerably larger.

The latter is directly commented on by supporting character Luis Sera when he first encounters Ashley with Leon. Despite the fact that Leon, Ashley, and Luis are trapped in an abandoned cabin besieged by Los Ganados, Luis still feels the need to remark "Well, I see that the President's equipped his daughter with ballistics, too"⁴⁰⁵ upon seeing her for the first time. Ashley does retort with "How rude, and I don't see any relevance with my figure and my standing"⁴⁰⁶, but the matter is then dropped entirely in favour of bickering over who should introduce themselves first.

In addition, there are some variations on the character model which highlight the sexualized nature of Ashley's role in the game. First is her alternate outfit, unlocked after finishing the game for the first time. While Leon's alternate outfit is his police uniform from *Resident Evil 2*, Ashley's is a skimpy, low-cut ensemble designed to, as Dan Birlew puts it in the

⁴⁰³ A situation which was changed between the game's initial announcement trailer and subsequent full release, a change which can clearly be seen in Sarkeesian's video, itself.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid*

⁴⁰⁵ *Resident Evil 4*

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid*

official strategy guide, “enhance her ballistics, as Luis would say”⁴⁰⁷. Tied to this skimpy outfit is a topic raised in Censored Gaming’s video on the ways in which the game was altered and censored in various regions. In this video, the issue of breast physics tied to Ashley’s character model is discussed⁴⁰⁸. Breast physics is a ‘feature’ made famous (or infamous) by the *Dead or Alive* series (Tecmo, 1998-present), in which the female characters’ breasts are given their own independent physics algorithms in order to simulate the ‘bounce’ that occurs during activity. This concept is at its most evident/exploitative in the *Dead or Alive* spinoff game, *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* (Tecmo, 2003), where the game uses the volleyball activity as an excuse for the in-game camera to linger on the exaggeratedly bouncing breasts of the all-female cast while they exert themselves.

This is an issue because, as Censored Gaming’s video illustrates, Ashley’s model has pronounced breast physics applied in the North American release of the game. While toned down in the Japanese and European releases of the game, the breast physics are still present. It was only with the Sony PlayStation 2 and PC ports of the game that these physics were removed entirely⁴⁰⁹. To be sure, there is no reason for these physics to be present in the game, or any game for that matter; this is clearly an aesthetic decision designed to titillate, much like in the aforementioned *Dead or Alive* series.

Ashley’s appearance was also something *Electronic Gaming Monthly*’s previewers felt the need to comment on, as well, stating:

⁴⁰⁷ Birlew, *Official Resident Evil 4 Strategy Guide*, pg. 218

⁴⁰⁸ Censored Gaming. “Resident Evil 4 Censorship – Censored Gaming”. *Youtube.com*. Jul. 8, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23WNqVBZyGE>

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid*

What's even spookier is how damn cute Ashley – the presidential daughter Leon is charged with rescuing – is in that fetching skirt. Will she and Leon hook up? It won't be too long before we can find out for ourselves.⁴¹⁰

It seems intentional that none of the staff writers for the magazine is credited for this line. It is, however, indicative of the larger issue present with Ashley's design, and one that has come up repeatedly throughout the series – the Male Gaze, and the ways in which various entries in the series cater to it.

The Interactive Male Gaze Revisited

In the chapter on the original *Resident Evil*, the idea of the interactive male gaze was tied to the fixed camera angles which emulated a traditional cinematic presentation, as well as the gameplay and objectives given to the player. With *Resident Evil 4*, that discussion needs to be revisited, as there is no longer a fixed camera and the series' long-time gameplay mechanics have been significantly altered for the first time in the franchise. Instead, the camera is permanently affixed to the player-character throughout the game. I use 'player-character' here instead of simply stating 'Leon', because there is a distinction to be made – a distinction which brings this new form of the interactive male gaze into stark relief.

Returning to Mulvey, she argued that the cinematic male gaze consisted of two aspects: that the camera's gaze is directly conflated with the Freudian male gaze⁴¹¹, and that the central identification figure in cinema is an idealized male one, who drives the action forward⁴¹².

Resident Evil 4 ties the two together so closely that they are almost indistinguishable. While Leon is still visible on-screen to the player, the camera is literally tied to his gaze – the player

⁴¹⁰ *Electronic Gaming Monthly* staff. "The Hot Ten". *Electronic Gaming Monthly* No. 184 (Nov. 2004), pg. 68.

⁴¹¹ Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure*, pg. 11

⁴¹² *Ibid*, pg. 12-13

only sees what Leon sees, especially during combat. This yoking of camera to protagonist is why Ashley's chiding script is so crucial to this discussion of the game – it calls attention to the way in which the male gaze is reified as an interactive element. As with the breast physics, there is no reason for Ashley to chide the player for looking up at her while she is climbing a ladder; in fact, it makes sense for her protector to do so, to ensure that she is still nearby and safe. The fact that she has this behaviour suggests that, despite the seemingly negative response for looking up her skirt, accidental or otherwise, the developers *want*, or at the very least expect, the player to do exactly that, as though it were a feature of the game.

This yoking also calls attention to the shift in Leon's personality from *Resident Evil 2* to *Resident Evil 4*. *Nintendo Power* even highlighted this shift in their 2011 article, [Evil Anniversary](#), celebrating the series' fifteenth anniversary. Awarding Leon the title of 'Best Personality Makeover', the *Nintendo Power* staff states:

Resident Evil 2-era Leon S. Kennedy overslept on his first day of work, moped his way through the entire game, and was easily duped by enemy spy Ada Wong after she flashed a little leg at him. Yet somehow he managed to transform into a cool, confident, killing machine in Resident Evil 4 – albeit one who still whines about the events of Resident Evil 2, creepily hits on every girl in the game, and says things like, “Sorry, but following a lady's lead just isn't my style”. But hey, baby steps.⁴¹³

Setting aside the ambiguous reasoning for calling his personality shift the 'best', this description illustrates Leon's shift to idealized male protagonist as found in Mulvey's conception. If, as discussed in the chapter on the game, Leon was relatively ineffectual in *Resident Evil 2*, he becomes the main active force in *Resident Evil 4*. In doing so, he eschews any conception of

⁴¹³ *Nintendo Power* Staff. [Evil Anniversary](#). *Nintendo Power* Vol. 266 (Apr. 2011), pg. 46-47.

women as equals; after all, ‘following a lady’s lead just isn’t my style’. This personality shift can also be attributed to an earlier build of the game, and the breakout character from that build: *Devil May Cry*’s Dante. Many of the personality traits demonstrated by Leon can also be found in abundance in *Devil May Cry*’s protagonist, especially in his interactions with female companion/mission-giver Trish. Interestingly, however, *Devil May Cry* maintains the fixed camera angles eschewed by *Resident Evil 4*.

The Virtual Strife of Camera Positioning

This contrast between fixed camera angles and a dynamic perspective camera emphasizes the fetishistic nature of the virtual camera discussed in chapter 1, while also adding to Mulvey’s male gaze in a couple of important ways. First, written as it was in 2001, Lev Manovich’s discussion of the ways in which ‘new’ media use the cinema as cultural interface⁴¹⁴ applies more directly to the fixed camera angles of the *Resident Evil* games that came before *Resident Evil 4*. Here, again, Manovich is more focused on how cinematic functions, such as dolly, zoom, and so on are mapped onto virtual space as familiar referents⁴¹⁵ than why they are, or how they are changed by that same space. Instead, a turn to D.N. Rodowick’s discussion of digital cinema in his book, *The Virtual Life of Film*⁴¹⁶, proves useful.

Rodowick, in addition to looking at how the digital image is more manipulatable and, therefore, more painterly than analog images, also discusses the nature of the virtual camera. Just as the images themselves are manipulatable in ways chemical processes would never allow, the virtual camera inside a virtual environment decouples the viewpoint from what would be possible with traditional film apparatuses⁴¹⁷. As such, the virtual camera is capable of moves and

⁴¹⁴ Manovich, *Language of New Media*, pg. 78-79.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid*

⁴¹⁶ Rodowick, D.N. *The Virtual Life of Film*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 105.

positioning that would not be physically possible, either in terms of space or time⁴¹⁸. Therefore, extrapolating from this idea, the restrictions on camera positioning within a virtual environment would be non-existent.

This notion is important in looking at *Resident Evil 4* because of the way in which the camera is positioned with Leon's perspective, in relation to the segments of the game where the player controls other characters – namely Ashley and Ada. As mentioned previously, when playing as Leon, the camera maintains a close fixed perspective, showing Leon from the waist up. This view is not the case with either Ashley or Ada. When playing as either of these characters, the camera is positioned in such a way that they are shown from the buttocks up, seemingly highlighting the assets of these characters. This highlighting applies particularly to Ashley, due to the actions the player is able to perform when playing as her.

In the castle in chapter 3–4 of the game, in what the guide designates as the servant quarters⁴¹⁹, the player is tasked with playing as Ashley, after she and Leon become separated. Ashley is not suddenly given offensive capabilities in the shift from companion character to playable one. Instead, her main forms of defense are to pick up and throw lanterns at cultists and, more relevant to this discussion, crawl under furniture to escape from them. While more effective than she is as a companion character, Ashley is not given significantly more offensive/defensive capabilities than Sherry Birkin is when the player takes control of her in *Resident Evil 2*, despite one being 12⁴²⁰ and the other being almost twice that age⁴²¹.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid*, pg. 138-139.

⁴¹⁹ Birlew, *Resident Evil 4 Official Strategy Guide*, pg. 130.

⁴²⁰ See: Otomo, pg. 129

⁴²¹ See: Otomo, Jun. *Resident Evil Archives II*. Trans. Zpang America, inc. Indianapolis: BradyGames Publishing, 2011, pg. 64.

The reason that Ashley's ability to crawl is relevant is because the camera takes the exact same view of Ashley as when Leon looks up at her while she is on a ladder. Because these perspectives are so remarkably similar, it can easily be argued that the camera is still viewing the proceedings from his perspective, even when he is not physically present. As such, much like with Jill in the original game, when playing as Ashley the implied active protagonist is still the idealized male – Barry in the original game, and Leon here. It is just that the changes made to the gameplay systems and the ways in which they interact with the narrative make the casting of the idealized male protagonist more overt and stereotypically masculine than in the first *Resident Evil*.

Moreover, while much of the same critique of the male gaze tied to the camera can be applied to Ada, there are unique aspects to her experience which also highlight Leon's importance as actor. Most importantly, the player cannot choose to play as Ada from the beginning – Leon's campaign needs to be completed, making it explicit that he needs to act before Ada is allowed to do anything. Furthermore, not all of Ada's playable sections are included in all versions. The original Gamecube release of the game only included "Assignment: Ada", a side story that only warranted four pages' worth of coverage in the official strategy guide⁴²² and is considered non-canon, according to the official wiki for the series⁴²³. The version that is canon, "Separate Ways", was not included in the Gamecube release but is included in every subsequent one; it, too, cannot be played until the main campaign is completed⁴²⁴. By the by, Ada's experiences, canon or otherwise, are locked by the gatekeeper that is Leon's campaign.

⁴²² Birlew, *Official Resident Evil 4 Strategy Guide*, pg. 218-221

⁴²³ Unknown author. "Assignment: Ada". *Resident Evil Wiki*, under "Resident Evil 4 minigames". https://residentevil.fandom.com/wiki/Assignment:_Ada (accessed Feb. 21, 2019).

⁴²⁴ Unknown author. "Separate Ways". *Resident Evil Wiki*, under "Resident Evil 4 minigames". https://residentevil.fandom.com/wiki/Separate_Ways (accessed Feb. 21, 2019).

The Bro Code

Even taking into account the notion of the player choosing Chris in the original game, Leon's shift in personality between *Resident Evil 2* and *Resident Evil 4*, alongside the 'shoot first, examine later' gameplay he embodies, emphasizes the machismo with which the idealized male protagonist of the series would come to be imbued with moving forward. Chris himself would be infused with an almost comical amount of this same machismo in the next entry in the series. This next entry carries forward the problems *Resident Evil 4* has with gender, and complicates them even further by overtly introducing race relations issues with the series venturing to Africa.

Chapter 6

Grunt, Moan, Howl:

Resident Evil 5, Intersectionality, and Race Representation

If Leon S. Kennedy radically changed between the Raccoon City incident and finding himself in Spain rescuing the President's daughter, Chris Redfield's change has been even more dramatic. Having been ensnared by the bio-weapons disasters instigated by Umbrella from the beginning, Chris has gone through more trials and travails than arguably anyone else in the *Resident Evil* series, perhaps excepting Jill Valentine. Chris has fought through the initial outbreak at the Spenser Mansion, the aftermath of the events Claire and Steve endured on Rockfort Island, and rescued his sister from both an enhanced Albert Wesker and a T-Veronica virus-mutated Alexia Ashford. Because of these experiences, he has evolved just as drastically as Leon, while avoiding the arrogance that accompanied Leon's transformation. Chris has become dedicated to the eradication of bioweapons and bioterror; so much so that he has been a member of the Bioterrorism Security Assessment Alliance, or B.S.A.A. for short, since its inception.

Accompanied by Jill, Chris has worked tirelessly with the B.S.A.A to track down and end the threat of bioweapons across the globe, along with the people who would make and use them. This determination turned into near-obsession after he and Jill found the location of the final remaining Umbrella founder, Oswell Spenser, for whom the mansion in the first game was named. Finding Spenser came paired with an unexpected encounter – an even more enhanced Albert Wesker. After Jill seemingly sacrificed herself to defeat Wesker during this confrontation by driving the two of them out of a window overlooking a cliff-face, Chris threw himself into his

crusade. This decision changed him physically and emotionally, refusing to take on another partner and hitting the gym more aggressively, making him significantly more muscular.

That was two years ago. Now, five years after the events of *Resident Evil 4*, Chris finds himself in the Kijuju region of Africa on assignment for the B.S.A.A., with a new partner thrust upon him: Sheva Alomar. Sheva is native to the region, giving her just as large an investment in the current mission as Chris, if not more so. The pair are currently rushing to intercept an arms dealer notorious for trafficking in bioweapons, Ricardo Irving. Moving through the village, Chris and Sheva have discovered that the problem is larger than just apprehending a criminal – the almost exclusively Black population of the village seems to have been infected with a parasite that bears an uncomfortably close resemblance to the Las Plagas parasite encountered by Leon in *Resident Evil 4*.

This new outbreak has caused the mission to go sideways. After witnessing a gathering of these infected villagers, which culminates in the execution of their mission contact, followed by a swarm of villagers attacking the duo and being wiped out by helicopter support, Chris and Sheva are trying to simply survive long enough to make it to the extraction point. Working both together and independently to make sure they have a way through a section of the village, Chris/the player and Sheva separate to try to find a way through a locked gate. While waiting for Sheva, Chris/the player is attacked by several Black infected residents, including an infected female member of the village. He is not the only one attacked, though. After dispatching these assailants, Chris/the player can only watch from the other side of a fence as a blonde white woman in a black dress stumbles and falls as she is running away from an infected Black villager, who catches up to her and drags her away. Co-operating with Sheva, Chris/the player navigates around the fence and through a host of infected villagers.

He/the player and Sheva then arrive in a small open square, just as the game switches to a cut-scene of the blonde woman who was dragged away before staggering to the railing of a second-floor balcony, screaming ‘Help! Somebody help me!’. She is then dragged back inside by a Black man, presumably another infected villager, while still screaming for help. Chris/the player and Sheva race to the room the woman was dragged into, guns drawn as they run inside. Another cut-scene triggers, in which the woman stumbles and falls whimpering into Chris’ arms, leading him to ask ‘Hey, what’s wrong?’ With Sheva continuing to scout the room, Chris calls out to her over the woman’s head, ‘Be careful, they may still be here’.

Dangling limply from Chris’ arms, the woman lulls him into dropping his guard enough for her to reach for the knife strapped to his back. Noticing the movement, Chris asks ‘Are you okay?’ just before she grabs the weapon. As she does so, she suddenly rises and what appears to be boneless mandibles erupt from her mouth – she has clearly been infected with the same parasite as the other villagers. Sheva, hearing the eruption of activity, spins around while bringing her gun to bear. Yelling ‘Chris!’, she fires at the infected woman, allowing Chris to break free of her grasp. Now standing firmly and threateningly, the woman starts to move toward Chris again as the cut-scene ends. Chris/the player is now forced to kill the woman who he/they were just trying to save, along with the large writhing tentacle-like parasite that erupts out of her head.⁴²⁵

What Do We Do Now?

In the wake of *Resident Evil 4*’s overwhelming success (as the *GameTrailers* Retrospective states, the game earned ‘over twenty game of the year awards’⁴²⁶), it seems as if

⁴²⁵ This account was created from a combination of my playthrough, the *Resident Evil Archives Vol. II* (Otomo, 2011), and the Survival Horror Network’s *Resident Evil 5 Let’s Play* video found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVtsp24Bz6o&t=3608s>

⁴²⁶ *GameTrailers* Staff, [The Resident Evil Retrospective – Part V](#).

Capcom was caught unawares, unsure of how to follow up on that success. Where the period between the original game and *Resident Evil 4* saw numerous spin-offs, off-shoots, side stories, and re-releases, the period between *Resident Evil 4*, in 2005, and *Resident Evil 5*, in 2009, was relatively sparse in comparison. The next immediate release Capcom put out after *Resident Evil 4* was *Resident Evil: Deadly Silence*⁴²⁷, a touch-screen enhanced port of the original 1996 game for the Nintendo DS in 2006 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the series. While porting the entire Sony PlayStation game to the handheld DS was an impressive technical feat in 2006, it was still yet another re-release of the same, now decade-old, game.

The only other major game of note during this period was *Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles* for the Nintendo Wii in 2007; this game was not anything particularly new either, serving as both a recap of previous games and a prelude to *Resident Evil 4*. Much like *Resident Evil: Survivor* and *Resident Evil: Dead Aim*, *Umbrella Chronicles* was presented from a first-person perspective and focused on shooting. Unlike those games, though, the player did not control movement – it was an on-rails shooter⁴²⁸, akin to Sega's *House of the Dead* from a decade earlier but using the Wiimote controller as an analogue to the latter's light gun peripheral. The narrative, like the gameplay, was largely recycled, as much of the game is spent retelling the events of *Resident Evil 0*, *Resident Evil* (albeit the version of events from the 2002 Gamecube remake), and *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*. The only new material present in the game is the framing story, which covers Chris and Jill infiltrating one of Umbrella's final strongholds in Russia, which leads to the dissolution of the company prior to *Resident Evil 4*.

⁴²⁷ The game's title is in keeping with a naming trend for Nintendo DS games of having titles whose initials were 'DS'. See: *Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow* (Konami, 2005); *Advance Wars: Dual Strike* (Nintendo, 2005); *Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword* (Tecmo, 2008); and so on.

⁴²⁸ An on-rails shooter is a game where player-character movement occurs automatically, so the main game mechanics are simply aiming and shooting.

Other than these two releases, the only *Resident Evil* games to come out during this period were released for various mobile phone platforms. The *GameTrailers* Retrospective for the series, produced in the lead-up to *Resident Evil 5*'s release, detailed the mobile games both released and in development at the time⁴²⁹. *Resident Evil: The Missions* (Capcom, 2006), *Resident Evil: Confidential Report* (Capcom, 2006), and *Resident Evil: Genesis* (Capcom, 2008) all released for pre-smartphone mobile phones. Because of the limitations of the platform, all of these games featured the same isometric, sprite-based, ¾ perspective view, and focused heavily on quick episodic puzzle-solving⁴³⁰. Interestingly, both *The Missions* and *Genesis* featured Jill Valentine as the protagonist/player-character⁴³¹, but there is no indication that any of these games are considered canon for the series. Nor is there any way that I could find to go back and play games at this point in time - the hardware needed to run them is no longer widely available, and there is no archive or emulation of these games that appears to be available. The most advanced of the mobile games to see release in this timeframe was *Resident Evil: Degeneration* (N-Gage Mobile, 2008) for the Nokia N-Gage, released in 2008 and associated with the computer-generated animation feature film of the same name⁴³². Featuring similar gameplay to *Resident Evil 4*, and even starring Leon Kennedy as the player-character, the game was technically impressive but about as memorable as the N-Gage itself.

Out of Africa

Despite this lack of presence for the series during this period, work on *Resident Evil 5* began in 2005, the year *Resident Evil 4* was released⁴³³. In the official strategy guide for the

⁴²⁹ *GameTrailers* staff, [The Resident Evil Retrospective – Part IV](#)

⁴³⁰ *Ibid*

⁴³¹ *Ibid*

⁴³² *Ibid*

⁴³³ Takeuchi, Jun and Masachika Kawata in interview. *The Complete Official Guide to Resident Evil 5*. London: Piggyback, 2009, pg. 4.

game, Jun Takeuchi and Masachika Kawata, producers for *Resident Evil 5*, claim that the reason for the long period between *Resident Evil* core titles was that the game consoles at the time were simply not powerful enough to achieve their vision for the game. As they state in the forward for the guide:

The objective we set was simply unachievable with the technology available in 2005.

This meant that our team had to come up with its own groundbreaking solutions, which only started to bear fruit in 2008 when development reached the point where we could almost play the game from start to finish.⁴³⁴

While certainly a good-sounding explanation from a publicity standpoint, this explanation may be glossing over a key fact: Shinji Mikami, the man who created and oversaw the *Resident Evil* series up until *Resident Evil 4*, left Capcom after its release⁴³⁵. Not only did Mikami leave to create his own game studio, Clover Studios, but he brought Hideki Kamiya, the director responsible for *Resident Evil 2* with him⁴³⁶.

As such, there does not appear to be any evidence of the sort of major delays/restarts for *Resident Evil 5* that most of the other main games in the series experienced at Mikami's hands⁴³⁷. At the same time, the absence of two of the key figures responsible for the series' creation, initial success and successful reinvention carried the potential for the production of a game largely derivative of the landmark prior entry in the series. In this regard, there are certain aspects of *Resident Evil 5* which very clearly come from *Resident Evil 4* – the camera and controls are

⁴³⁴ *Ibid*

⁴³⁵ Unknown Author. "Shinji Mikami (Person)". *Giant Bomb*. <https://www.giantbomb.com/shinji-mikami/3040-32999/> (Accessed Mar. 20, 2019).

⁴³⁶ *Ibid*

⁴³⁷ A fact backed up by Avalanche reviews in their retrospective on the game (Avalanche Reviews. "Resident Evil 5: RE Retrospective". *YouTube.com*. Apr. 27, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSBuDZJTFk8&t=165s> (Accessed Mar. 20, 2019)).

nearly identical, but with *Resident Evil 5* (arguably awkwardly) taking advantage of the dual joystick configuration of controllers for the Xbox 360 and Sony PlayStation 3, for example.

In addition, *Resident Evil 5* maintains the globe-trotting aspect of the series that began with *Resident Evil Code: Veronica*, this time taking place not in Antarctica or Spain, but in Africa. This setting led to one of the major changes *Resident Evil 5* would institute, as well as the focus of one of its major issues, which will be discussed presently. Due to the setting, which was chosen early on in development⁴³⁸, the game largely takes place during the day meaning that the majority of the game is brightly lit – a fact that changes the fundamental nature of the *Resident Evil* experience. Because the environments are so well lit and visible, the typical jump scares associated with the series needed to be reworked, and new methods for creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty needed to be determined⁴³⁹. With this major fundamental change in place, Capcom felt confident enough to release the first trailer for the game at the Tokyo Game Show in 2007 and then, ten months later, at E3 2008, to demonstrate how they approached these thematic challenges. This would be a decision which would erupt in unexpected, and potentially unwanted, attention.

UN-expected Response

It would be impossible to discuss *Resident Evil 5* critically without discussing the controversy surrounding that initial trailer. When the trailer was shown at E3 2008, the reaction of a significant portion of the gaming press was one of discomfort, to say the least. MTV News' Tracey John discussed the reaction, stating "Multiplayer editor Stephen Totilo wrote about his uneasiness upon viewing it, and commenters from other outlets discussed whether or not the

⁴³⁸ Takeuchi and Kawata, in interview, *Official Guide to Resident Evil 5*, pg. 193.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid*

trailer was racist”⁴⁴⁰. The figure most tied to discussions over the reactions to the trailer, however, was *Newsweek*’s N’Gai Croal. As a prominent journalist of colour, Croal’s reactions and commentary were taken seriously enough that Jun Takeuchi even met with him following the aftermath of the E3 trailer showing⁴⁴¹.

Croal’s objection to the trailer is not that there are Black monsters (or ‘zombies’, as he calls them, perhaps because of the series’ lineage)⁴⁴², but that the presentation of those monsters bears a distinct similarity to racist imagery, both historical and modern-day⁴⁴³. To put it succinctly, the trailer seemed to depict a white, U.N.-type soldier mowing down infected impoverished Africans and being valourized for it. As Croal himself puts it:

That’s the whole thing where only Chris Redfield appears to be human before they turn into zombies; the humanity of other people is in question. It’s like you barely see their faces, he doesn’t really interact with them, he sort of walks through this thing and it’s sort of, “Is he there? Is he not?” It’s a very strange thing, and it taps into sort of this very racist iconography.⁴⁴⁴

This lack of humanity in the trailer is only heightened by knowledge of the series’ history, particularly *Resident Evil 4*. The villagers in *Resident Evil 4*, after being fully infected with Las Plagas, were no longer considered human or able to be saved – so much so that shooting their heads off in-game caused bladed tentacles to erupt from their necks, emphasizing the loss of

⁴⁴⁰ John, Tracey. “*Newsweek*’s N’Gai Croal on the *Resident Evil 5* Trailer: ‘This Imagery has a History’”. *MTV.com*, Apr. 10, 2008, under “News”: <http://www.mtv.com/news/2456617/newsweeks-ngai-croal-on-the-resident-evil-5-trailer-this-imagery-has-a-history/> (accessed Apr. 10, 2019)

⁴⁴¹ See: Totilo, Stephen. “*Resident Evil 5* Producer Meets with His Chief Critic”. *Kotaku.com*, May 19, 2009: <https://kotaku.com/resident-evil-5-producer-meets-his-chief-critic-5261282> (accessed Apr. 10, 2019)

⁴⁴² Croal, N’Gai, in interview. “*Newsweek*’s N’Gai Croal on the *Resident Evil 5* Trailer: ‘This Imagery has a History’”. *MTV.com*, Apr. 10, 2008, under “News”: <http://www.mtv.com/news/2456617/newsweeks-ngai-croal-on-the-resident-evil-5-trailer-this-imagery-has-a-history/> (accessed Apr. 10, 2019)

⁴⁴³ *Ibid*

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid*

humanity. This, despite the fact that they were clearly still capable of thinking, communicating, and coordinating complex strategies. At the same time, one of the key plot points of the game is ensuring that both Leon and Ashley are cured of their infection with the same parasite, highlighting the distinction between them and the people surrounding them.

Moreover, even with the zombies from earlier entries, the lack of humanity has been argued in 2012 by no less than George A. Romero, the man who created the modern image of the walking dead/zombie. In an interview at Bell Lightbox after a screening of *Night of the Living Dead* in November of 2012, Romero commented on the state of the zombie in video games. Discussing the use of these monsters in games with Colin Geddes, the interviewer, both state that the zombie in video games allows the player to attack/destroy the human form without feelings of guilt. Because that form is undead and, therefore, less human than enemies like the soldiers found in military games, it makes violently eradicating these human forms acceptable⁴⁴⁵. This loss of humanity is even explicitly documented in the famous/infamous “Itchy, Tasty” groundskeeper’s diary found in the original 1996 game⁴⁴⁶. As such, the infected in the *Resident Evil* series have always been seen as ‘less than’. The reason why *Resident Evil 5* problematizes this scenario is because of the ways in which it approaches this infected population, as argued by Croal.

Regional Demographics

That all of the rank-and-file infected, or Majini, are racialized is not in question, and is actually corroborated by the game’s extras. One of the unlockable bonuses offered in *Resident*

⁴⁴⁵ Romero, George A. in interview. TIFF Originals. “George A. Romero | Night of the Living Dead | Higher Learning”. *YouTube.com*. Jan. 24, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=7&v=uCpJKakWVRc (Accessed Apr. 10, 2019).

⁴⁴⁶ The diary in question follows the writer’s progression from exposure to zombification, with the accompanying loss of humanity/identity in the face of physical decay and increasing ravenousness.

Evil 5 is a set of ‘figures’, comprised of the character models for all of the monsters and major characters in the game. Looking over these figures (a task made even easier in the two-page spread offered in the official strategy guide⁴⁴⁷), it is evident that, aside from the blonde woman mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, all of the Majini are presented as Black. More than that, they largely carry harmful stereotypes about Black people, Africans in particular. For example, the three Majini models used for the wetlands are depicted as naked except for grass skirts, and all carry spears which they throw at Chris/the player. There is also a model from this section of the game, which both the guide and figures menu refers to only as ‘Giant Majini’⁴⁴⁸, wearing what appears to be a large tiki mask and wielding a large spiked club.

In addition to these racist representations, the figures list points out an issue that the guide itself does not cover properly in regard to the gender disparity present in the Majini population – a condition also present in the guides for previous games, as discussed in prior chapters. In the section of the guide that details the enemies throughout the game, uncomfortably dubbed the ‘Bestiary’ (further highlighting the inhumanity of the enemies), the Majini are broken down into the section of the game in which they are found: Town, Wetlands, and Base⁴⁴⁹. These enemies are not further delineated in any of the write-ups to show how many varieties are present in each locale or how they are differentiated from each other as individuals. Instead, they are all just grouped together as a single enemy type.

The figures menu, on the other hand, offers models for each Majini, allowing for an easy way to determine how many female Majini are present in the game, and where they can be found. This task is a simple one - there is only one female Majini model present and is only

⁴⁴⁷ Price, James and Zy Nicholson. *The Complete Official Guide to Resident Evil 5*. London: Piggyback, 2009, pg. 158-159.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 159

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 134-135

located in the opening town portion of the game⁴⁵⁰. Moreover, the model's appearance also carries hallmarks of stereotyping, with a checkered skirt and a bandana wrapped around her head in such a way as to resemble the corporate figurehead, Aunt Jemima. This resemblance is not to, as Doris Witt discusses, the revamped version of the character from 1989 which attempted to rehabilitate the mascot's image⁴⁵¹. Instead, the character model bears a striking similarity to the original version of Aunt Jemima – a character whose iconography was designed to tap into what Witt, by way of Arthur Marquette, describes as “what was rapidly becoming a widespread post-bellum celebration of antebellum plantation cooking”⁴⁵². This iconography was based on a drag ‘mammy’ character in a vaudeville blackface performance – As Witt details:

Rutt attended a performance by the blackface team of Baker and Farrell at a local vaudeville house. One act was "a jazzy, rhythmic New Orleans style Cakewalk to a tune called 'Aunt Jemima' which Baker performed in the apron and red-bandanna headband of the traditional southern cook" (Marquette 143). [...] Rutt appropriated both the name and the image for his pancake mix⁴⁵³.

Taken in combination with the fact that the first person to portray Aunt Jemima was “the slender Nancy Green”⁴⁵⁴, the female Majini's appearance may not be intentionally discriminatory, but carries overt stereotypical overtones.

This comparison to an American stereotypical depiction is not simply an anomaly or mere conjecture. Croal, in his initial interview noted that, in the infamous E3 trailer, Takeuchi seemed to be drawing heavily from the imagery and visual style of *Black Hawk Down* (Columbia

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid*, pg. 158

⁴⁵¹ Witt, Doris. *Black Hunger: Food and the Politics of U.S. Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pg. 22.

⁴⁵² *Ibid*, pg. 26

⁴⁵³ *Ibid*

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid*, pg. 27

Pictures, 2001), a film Croal critiqued in terms of how it represents the country and people of Somalia⁴⁵⁵. Further, after the meeting between Croal and Takeuchi, it was revealed that, during *Resident Evil 5*'s development, Takeuchi drew inspiration for the Majini in the grass skirts discussed above from the Hovitos tribespeople protecting the temple ruins in the opening sequence of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Paramount, 1981)⁴⁵⁶.

This revelation is particularly disconcerting both because the depiction of these tribal natives in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* was, itself, problematic and because that scene *takes place in South America* in 1936, as indicated in the title caption at the beginning of the film. As such, Croal, after his meeting with Takeuchi, offered the position that:

[A] two-to-three-week trip to unspecified African countries and looking at a number of movies set in Africa alongside pop-cultural inspirations like the Indiana Jones series simply hadn't been enough to sufficiently educate [Takeuchi] or the team about the legacy of the imagery that they were tapping into [...]⁴⁵⁷

This American popular culture inspiration, rather than proper research, could also be the reason why the fictional Kijuju region in the game is as unspecified as the African countries visited during the developers' research trip.

Moreover, the strategy guide provides evidence that this lone female Majini model was not always the case for the game. In looking at the "Behind the Scenes" section of the guide, there are a series of enemy concept sketches provided⁴⁵⁸. In those sketches, among all of the male Majini and the lone female Majini who were included in the final game, there is a sketch for another, unused female Majini concept. This issue is compounded in *The Art of Resident Evil*

⁴⁵⁵ Croal, in interview, "This Imagery has a History".

⁴⁵⁶ Totilo, "Resident Evil 5 Producer Meets with His Chief Critic".

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid*

⁴⁵⁸ Price and Nicholson, *The Complete Official Guide to Resident Evil 5*, pg. 196

5, in which it is revealed that there were not one, but three unused female Majini concepts⁴⁵⁹, all of whom are less stereotypically designed than the lone model chosen for the final game.

At this point, the counter-argument to the accusations of racism and/or unintentionally racist imagery in the game must be discussed. The popular argument against the game's seemingly overt racist conception is, as articulated by Avalanche Reviews in their retrospective video on the game, that it is not racist to shoot zombies/monsters regardless of what ethnicity they are – they are zombies/monsters⁴⁶⁰. This stance argues that, if one takes offense to the racialized violence in *Resident Evil 5*, then one must take an equal stance with the Spanish monsters in *Resident Evil 4* or acknowledge one's oversensitivity to the issue. The idea is that if the game is read as anything more than person trying to survive by fighting monsters, then there is too much being read into the experience. This argument is widespread enough, as evidenced by articles in *Wired* (in which the argument is made by Glenn Bowman, head of Anthropology at University of Kent)⁴⁶¹, *NetworkWorld*⁴⁶², *EnGadget*⁴⁶³ and the *New York Times* review of the game⁴⁶⁴, that it requires addressing here.

There are a couple of issues to be addressed with this argument. First, the idea that the racialized violence is acceptable because it is violence against monsters speaks to Croal's point about the game making Black people inhuman/other. Second, in terms of the correlation between

⁴⁵⁹ *The Art of Resident Evil 5*. Ed. M. Kirie Hayashi. Richmond Hill: UDON Publishing, 2010, pgs. 63, 193.

⁴⁶⁰ Avalanche Reviews. "Resident Evil 5: RE Retrospective".

⁴⁶¹ Cavalli, Ernest. "Resident Evil 5 is not Racist, says Anthropologist". *Wired.com*, Mar. 6, 2009, under "Culture". <https://www.wired.com/2009/03/resident-evil-5-2/> (Accessed July 7, 2019).

⁴⁶² Peckham, Matt. "Is Resident Evil 5 Racist? Nope." *NetworkWorld.com*, Feb. 12, 2009, under "Articles". <https://www.networkworld.com/article/2262651/is-resident-evil-5-racist--nope-.html> (Accessed July 7, 2019).

⁴⁶³ Athab, Majed. "Anthropologist says Resident Evil 5 is not racist, Takeuchi continues defence". *EnGadget.com*, Mar. 6, 2009. <https://www.engage.com/2009/03/06/anthropologist-says-resident-evil-5-is-not-racist-takeuchi-cont/> (Accessed July 7, 2019).

⁴⁶⁴ Schiesel, Seth. "There's No Time to Rest Until the Last Zombie in Africa Is Toast". *New York Times.com*, Mar. 15, 2009, under "Arts - Video Game Review". <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/16/arts/16evil.html> (Accessed July 7, 2019).

the African monsters of *Resident Evil 5* and the Spanish monsters of *Resident Evil 4*, the counter here is two-fold. Spain has never been the subject of the same level of aggressive colonization and subjugation as much of Africa; Spain has, historically, been the colonizer, not the colonized. Furthermore, there is no evidence that, in the production of *Resident Evil 4*, the developers used the same level of racialized inspiration, reference imagery, and stereotyping for the antagonists as was used in *Resident Evil 5*. To deny this difference is to gloss over the history of the imagery and stereotypes used throughout the game. Thus, this discussion is not as ‘cut-and-dried’ as Avalanche Reviews would like to make it out to be⁴⁶⁵, or, at least, not in the way that they argue.

Intersecting Margins

Given the clear influence American popular culture had on the game, Capcom’s introduction of Sheva, who was not present in the E3 trailer, as a major character and gameplay component in the wake of the controversy surrounding the trailer deserves to also be examined under this lens. In doing so, Kimberle Crenshaw’s foundational concept of intersectionality becomes key to discussing the issues surrounding Sheva, as well as the representations of women throughout *Resident Evil 5*. Crenshaw, in her ground-breaking 1989 article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”⁴⁶⁶, addressed the issues with contemporary anti-racist and feminist discourse, coining the term ‘intersectionality’ in the process.

In her article, Crenshaw contends that while progress has been made in both contemporary anti-racist and feminist circles, those circles remain largely separate from each

⁴⁶⁵ Avalanche Reviews. “*Resident Evil 5*: RE Retrospective”.

⁴⁶⁶ Crenshaw, Kimberle. “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1, 8 (1989), pg. 139-167.

other, operating on a ‘single categorical axis’, as she puts it⁴⁶⁷. More succinctly, Crenshaw states that there is a “tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis”⁴⁶⁸. Therefore, to properly understand the experiences of someone who falls under both categories – American Black women in her discussion – one needs to examine the ways in which these frameworks of experience intersect with one another.

To highlight this distinction being made, Crenshaw examines a series of American legal cases to show how the intersection of gender and race discrimination are not widely recognized in a contemporary context. Her most clear-cut example is a lawsuit filed by five Black women against General Motors, arguing that the company discriminated against Black female employees⁴⁶⁹. The court ruled in favour of General Motors because, while it was revealed that they had not hired Black women prior to 1964, they did hire both White women and Black men. The logic of this ruling is that, as both ethnicity and gender categories were employed separately at General Motors, the idea of Black women specifically being discriminated against was not considered to be a factor⁴⁷⁰.

Though Crenshaw focused specifically on the experiences of Black women in her initial article, she widened the scope of the concept of intersectionality in her subsequent article, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color”⁴⁷¹. In that article, Crenshaw, while still remaining focused on the experiences of American Black women, discusses how intersectionality applies to other women of colour, as well as those with various sexual orientations and identities, language fluencies, and various

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 140.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pg. 139.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pg. 141.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid*, pg. 142-143.

⁴⁷¹ Crenshaw, Kimberle. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color”. *Stanford Law Review* Vol. 4, No. 6 (Jul. 1991), pg. 1241-1299.

social classes⁴⁷². Moreover, she discusses how these various axes, to use her phrasing, are not only not considered as intersecting by dominant hegemonic perspectives, but are actively dismissed as artificial distinctions and divisions made by older biases and prejudices, no longer relevant or necessary in discussing contemporary experience⁴⁷³. She argues that, instead of ignoring difference, acknowledging and accepting it is the best way to move forward⁴⁷⁴.

Black and White Terms

Examining *Resident Evil 5*, Crenshaw's focus on the experiences and erasure of Black women is particularly helpful, in terms of both the non-playable characters in the game and Sheva, the supporting character mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. First, returning to the scenario detailed at the beginning of this chapter, this configuration serves to highlight yet another unconscious bias the game's developers carry. In that scenario, the picture of innocence and victimhood on offer was a white blonde woman, surrounded by threatening Black men. Moreover, in a scene in the game just prior to that laid out at the beginning of the chapter, a group of Majini infecting a villager by forcing a parasite down his throat further tinges the dynamic between the blonde woman and her captors, suggesting overtones of sexual assault and subsequent infection/impregnation.

This dynamic is the same as that Crenshaw discusses in terms of sexual assault in America, one of Black men as aggressors and white women as victims, a dynamic which erases sexual violence experienced by women of colour⁴⁷⁵. Crenshaw also argues that this configuration is designed as a control tactic, stating:

⁴⁷² *Ibid*, pg. 1241-1242.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid*, pg. 1242

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid*.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid*, pg. 1266

The use of rape to legitimize efforts to control and discipline the Black community is well established, and the casting of all Black men as potential threats to the sanctity of white womanhood was a familiar construct that antiracists confronted and attempted to dispel over a century ago.⁴⁷⁶

Both of these issues are present in the configuration offered by *Resident Evil 5*. First, the plight of the blonde woman is clearly meant to evoke sympathy and a drive to protect/rescue on the part of the player. After she has been infected, the motivation then becomes one of eradication and punishment, borne out by the gameplay mechanics which only allow for violent action – there is no rescue after infection. Second, the female Majini player encounters just prior to the first encounter with the blonde woman, as detailed at the beginning of this chapter, offers something of a double standard in depiction. While the same violent act must, by inference, have been visited upon the female Majini in order to infect her, the game offers no equivalent measure of sympathy or consideration. Instead, she is just treated as one of many; a shrieking, violent antagonist to be gunned down without consideration for her experiences or the tragedy of her situation.

Not All Supporting Characters are Created Equal

This disparity between blonde white women and Black women also extends to the supporting characters in the game, albeit not in as overtly violent a fashion. As mentioned before, Sheva's motivation for getting through the game is protection of her home and the people in it, people she has a direct connection to. This motivation seems like it would potentially be one of the main driving forces of the narrative; after all, her designer, Yosuke Yamigata stated: "Her

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

existence is very important in characterizing RE5. She is a major new protagonist [...]”⁴⁷⁷.

Instead, the driving force of the narrative is Chris’ search for his presumed dead partner, Jill Valentine, whom he has reason to believe actually survived her encounter with Wesker two years ago. To be fair, Jill does experience a fair amount of othering, herself – she is turned into a mindless subordinate via a control device located in a sexually suggestive location on her exposed cleavage, and said cleavage is exposed because she is forced to wear a skin-tight blue bodysuit⁴⁷⁸. However, once the control device is destroyed and Jill regains her agency, she is treated as capable enough to be left on her own – to the extent that she even gets her own narrative-driven DLC⁴⁷⁹ chapter, dubbed ‘Desperate Escape’.

Sheva, on the other hand, is never given that opportunity. Changing the fundamental nature of the game is the decision on the developers’ part to make the entire game a co-operative experience. Whether with another person via split-screen local multiplayer⁴⁸⁰, online play, or with Sheva controlled by the computer, Chris/the player is never alone – Sheva remains a constant companion. Sheva’s lack of presence in the initial trailer led to the argument that this was done largely to address the backlash from said trailer, and that Chris was originally intended to go through the game by himself⁴⁸¹. Karen Dyer, the actor who both voiced and performed the motion capture for the character, refutes that claim, stating that she was brought into the

⁴⁷⁷ Yamagata, Yosuke, in interview. *The Complete Official Guide to Resident Evil 5*. London: Piggyback, 2009, pg. 195.

⁴⁷⁸ This titillation was intentional; as production director Yasuhiro Anpo states in *The Art of Resident Evil 5*: “The control mechanism was going to be on her head, but our project leader said, “If we put it on her chest... we could open up her chest area and it’d be sexy...” No one disagreed. (laughs)”. (pg. 32)

⁴⁷⁹ Stands for ‘Downloadable Content’.

⁴⁸⁰ Split-screen local multiplayer entails two players in the same room, looking at the same screen, which is literally being divided in able to show each player their character’s view of the game.

⁴⁸¹ Deleon, Nicholas. “Interview: Karen Dyer (Sheva from Resident Evil 5)”. *Tech Crunch.com*, Jul. 4, 2009. <https://techcrunch.com/2009/07/04/interview-karen-dyer-sheva-from-resident-evil-5/> (Accessed Apr. 24, 2019).

production in early 2007, before the initial trailer was created⁴⁸². In *The Art of Resident Evil 5*, however, Yasuhiro Anpo muddies the waters further, as it were, while discussing the opening section of the game. He states that: “[o]riginally Chris was going to be the only main character. With the addition of Sheva and co-op actions, we had to re-do the map at least twice”⁴⁸³. It is unclear from his statement whether this addition occurred after the backlash from the trailer, but does confirm that Chris was originally going to be the only protagonist of the game at one point – the exact criticism leveled at the trailer by Croal.

Though Sheva’s presence in the game may pre-date the controversy surrounding the trailer, her character model had seen significant change throughout the development process. As discussed by the developers in the ‘Behind the Scenes’ section of the strategy guide, Sheva went through several iterations, including changing her face shape multiple times, and even lightening her skin-tone/appearance “[...] so that she looks more charming”⁴⁸⁴, a fact corroborated by the concept sketches included on the same page. As the developers openly state in discussing Sheva, “[w]e had to change and modify Sheva considerably to combine two qualities, feminine attraction and the strength of a fighting woman”⁴⁸⁵. Anpo also states that “[w]e adjusted her face a few times when we kept getting feedback along the lines of, “make her cuter!” from the staff members”⁴⁸⁶.

This focus is made even clearer by Yosuke Yamagata, one of the modelers for the game. He states that:

⁴⁸² Dyer, Karen, in interview. “Interview: Karen Dyer (Sheva from Resident Evil 5)”. *Tech Crunch.com*, Jul. 4, 2009. <https://techcrunch.com/2009/07/04/interview-karen-dyer-sheva-from-resident-evil-5/> (Accessed Apr. 24, 2019).

⁴⁸³ Anpo, in interview, *The Art of Resident Evil 5*, pg. 54.

⁴⁸⁴ Takeuchi and Kawata, in interview, *Official Guide to Resident Evil 5*, pg. 195.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁶ Anpo, in interview. *The Art of Resident Evil 5*, pg. 24.

Sheva already existed at the early development phase, but we discussed many ideas for her background. Sometimes she was a civilian or a guerrilla, sometimes she was a commander of a military corps. In fact, we made in-game models of Sheva for some of these ideas. But there were certain desired constants in all iterations: beauty as a heroine, ferocity and determination as a fighter. Finally, we chose the current design which is contemporary, as with Chris, mixed with a wild look appropriate for the assignment in Africa.⁴⁸⁷

Yamagata, in *The Art of Resident Evil 5*, also highlights what the development team's notion of 'feminine attraction' entails. He states in discussing the creation of Sheva's character model:

We wanted Sheva to be seen as a dependable partner, but also wanted to make her feminine enough as to imbue the player with a desire to protect her. I struggled a bit when trying to figure out how much to bulk her up, but then Anpo came in and said, "I like slender girls", and that was that (laughs).⁴⁸⁸

All of these statements, when taken together, suggest that the main goal for Sheva was to make her sexually attractive (read: whiter), yet 'fierce' and 'wild'. This framework further plays into Crenshaw's discussion of the marginalization of Black women, particularly as it pertains to stereotyping.

Crenshaw, in discussing the difference in approach to sexual assault in America when the survivor is white versus Black, says the following:

Much of the problem results from the way certain gender expectations for women intersect with certain sexualized notions of race, notions that are deeply entrenched in American culture. Sexualized images of African Americans go all the way back to

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid*

⁴⁸⁸ Yamagata, Yosuke, in interview. *The Art of Resident Evil 5*, pg.24.

Europeans' first engagement with Africans. Blacks have long been portrayed as more sexual, more earthy, and more gratification-oriented. These sexualized images of race intersect with norms of women's sexuality, norms that are used to distinguish good women from bad, the madonnas from the whores.⁴⁸⁹

This notion of Black women being characterized as 'more sexual, more earthy, and more gratification-oriented' offers a parallel to the *Resident Evil 5* designers focus on making Sheva beautiful, ferocious, and wild. As such, it would stand to reason that it is no coincidence that Sheva's unlockable costume is a barely concealing leopard fur bikini with a Bowie knife tied to the waistband and her body covered in pseudo-ceremonial paint patterns⁴⁹⁰.

Moreover, this conception of Sheva as racialized and sexualized, and whose concerns and lived experiences are erased as a result, carries over to when the player has the chance to play as her. As Andre Brock discovered in his examination of the game, the ability for player one to play through the game as Sheva (as opposed to her being the default for player two in co-operative play) is unlocked upon initial completion of the game's main campaign⁴⁹¹. Brock, in discussing this facet of the game, notes that despite being able to play as Sheva, with Chris displaying all of Sheva's in-game behaviours, the campaign's story does not change⁴⁹². What this means is that, even when the player is in direct control of Sheva, she is still only ever a supporting character – the game is always going to be Chris' story, and, by extension, Jill's.

Further, as Brock points out, this dynamic means that, in game terms, Sheva as playable character is reduced to a mirror of Chris, without any defining game mechanics to make her

⁴⁸⁹ Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins", pg. 1270-1271.

⁴⁹⁰ Price and Nicholson, *The Complete Official Guide to Resident Evil 5*, pg. 158-159.

⁴⁹¹ Brock, Andre. "When Keeping it Real Goes Wrong: *Resident Evil 5*, Racial Representation, and Gamers". *Games and Culture* Vol 6, No 5 (2011), pg. 435.

⁴⁹² *Ibid*, pg. 436.

unique⁴⁹³. She is wholly defined both narratively and mechanically by Chris' presence, meaning her experience is entirely filtered through the white, male protagonist – a protagonist who has been significantly 'testosteroned up' from his previous incarnations⁴⁹⁴. Seen from a gameplay perspective, Sheva, despite her obvious investment in the epidemic and the well-being of the people being infected, is still unable to take any curative action regarding the Majini. Just as with Chris, all she and, by extension, the player is allowed to do is either gun them down or physically attack them hand-to-hand.

Unexpected Response 2: The Reversal

Despite the glaringly racist approaches in both representation and gameplay, *Resident Evil 5* was met with near universal acclaim upon release. *GameTrailers*, following on their retrospective for the series, gave the game a 9.0 out of 10⁴⁹⁵. The review does state that the game has 'questionable writing', but then goes on to clarify later in the video that this is in relation to the campiness the series is known for, not any of the stereotypes perpetuated⁴⁹⁶. At no point does the review address, or even acknowledge the controversy surrounding the game. Lark Anderson does similar in his review of the game for *GameSpot*, choosing instead to focus solely on the game mechanics and awarding the game an 8.5 out of 10⁴⁹⁷. In his review for *Kotaku*, Brian Crecente briefly acknowledged the controversy surrounding the game, but in the most glibly dismissive way possible. During the introduction to his review, he states: "It's unfortunate that

⁴⁹³ *Ibid*, pg. 440.

⁴⁹⁴ See: Yamagata's comment on designing Chris' character model in *The Art of Resident Evil 5*: "We were given rather blunt instructions to "make his neck thicker than his head, and his arms should be super thick, too... like, inhuman thick." His original design actually had thicker arms than the final CG did." (pg. 19)

⁴⁹⁵ *GameTrailers* Staff. "Resident Evil 5 – GT Review". *GameTrailers.com*, Mar. 12, 2009 (archived on YouTube). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPLE_L5-Pg&t=4s (accessed May 1, 2019).

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid*

⁴⁹⁷ Anderson, Lark. "Resident Evil 5 Review". *IGN.com*, under "Reviews", Mar. 13, 2009. <https://www.gamespot.com/reviews/resident-evil-5-review/1900-6206138/> (Accessed May 1, 2019).

before its launch Resident Evil 5 became about everything, but the game. The most hotly debated questions had little to do with what should matter most to gamers: Is it fun?”⁴⁹⁸

Perhaps the most unaware, or ‘tone-deaf’ review perspective taken is that of Ryan Geddes in his review for *IGN*. Geddes does discuss the game’s controversy in his review, stating:

I personally didn't find Resident Evil 5 to have an overtly racist feel, but I did find one aspect of it a bit disturbing. It was a bit strange to realize I was wandering around Africa stealing the region's gold, precious gems and expensive native treasures, which I then cashed in to pay for weapon upgrades. Add in the fact that I ended up killing the parasitically infected villagers and townspeople of the area with said weapons, and the discomfort comes full circle.⁴⁹⁹

Geddes quickly brushes this discomfort aside, however, saying that this just falls under a long tradition of in-game economies for video games not making sense⁵⁰⁰. He then compounds this callousness by stating that the people of Kijuju would not benefit from the treasures he is stealing in-game, because he is killing them all after their infection anyway⁵⁰¹. This attitude, along with viewing Sheva solely as an inventory ‘pack mule’⁵⁰² (his phrasing) display, at best, a lack of awareness for what he is saying, and, at worst, an overtly colonialist mindset. It should be noted that Geddes is writing from the perspective of an American cis-gendered white male.

Sterling McGarvey, on the other hand, directly addresses the issues with representation present in the game in his review of the game for *GameSpy*, but without the flippancy of Geddes.

He states:

⁴⁹⁸ Crecente, Brian. “*Resident Evil 5* Review: A Mutation of Fun”. *Kotaku.com*, Mar. 13, 2009. <https://kotaku.com/resident-evil-5-review-a-mutation-of-fun-5168661> (Accessed May 1, 2019).

⁴⁹⁹ Geddes, Ryan. “*Resident Evil 5* Review”. *IGN.com*, under “Articles”, Mar. 6, 2009. <https://ca.ign.com/articles/2009/03/07/resident-evil-5-review-2?page=2> (Accessed May 1, 2019)

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid*

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid*

⁵⁰² *Ibid*

The game's disturbing imagery and its portrayal of Africans has offended some and stirred up plenty of debate. Not every gamer will be bothered by what *RE5* presents in its first few levels, but there are elements that could upset others. In a few sections of the game, Chris and Sheva face off with waves of infected people dressed in tribal garb, and it's quite unsettling if you're familiar with old Hollywood stereotypes of indigenous African tribes as lawless savages, zombies or not.⁵⁰³

While McGarvey acknowledges the harmful stereotypes present in the game, he also quickly brushes them aside. Immediately after this passage in his review, he argues that it becomes clear that the game is about, as he puts it, 'corporate malfeasance in developing nations'⁵⁰⁴.

McGarvey raises a valid point about the actual villains of the game, considering they represent a large pharmaceutical conglomerate which is manipulating the populace and are focused on 'genetic purity' and 'evolution'. However, this argument does not, as he seems to think, excuse the stereotyping being carried out. He does offer the following as a way to reconcile the two perspectives: "[b]ut make no mistake: *RE5*'s political statements don't mark a watershed moment for videogames any more than an action movie set in a developing nation condemns sweatshops"⁵⁰⁵. In offering this comparison, he seems to be aligning with the game's developers themselves, in that the idea is that it is all popular culture pastiche which somehow makes it okay. His qualms did not stop him from giving the game a rating of 4.5 stars out of 5.

These reviews are telling, because all of them either ignore the issues at hand, acknowledge them but set them aside in favour of whether the game is 'fun', or actively accept the images on display under the veneer of 'just entertainment' or 'just a video game'. Moreover,

⁵⁰³ McGarvey, Sterling. "Resident Evil 5 Review". *GameFly.com*, under "Reviews", Mar. 12, 2009. <http://ps3.gamespy.com/playstation-3/resident-evil-5/961873p1.html> (Accessed May 1, 2009).

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid*

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid*

even with the reviews that do address the racist iconography in the game, none address the intersection of ethnicity and gender. Aside from discussing Sheva's performance as an AI partner, none discuss her as a character, providing further evidence of Brock's argument that Sheva's character is inconsequential and never properly developed⁵⁰⁶. However, given the sales for the game, both initially and to date, these attitudes seem to have carried across to the player base.

As indicated by Capcom's own earnings statements, and corroborated by *VideoGamer.com*⁵⁰⁷ and *Gematsu*⁵⁰⁸, *Resident Evil 5* is not only the best-selling game in the *Resident Evil* franchise, but the second-best-selling game of all time for the company as of December 2018 – almost a decade after the game's release⁵⁰⁹. Even N'Gai Croal, the game's main critic, admits that he played through the entire campaign cooperatively with Stephen Totilo⁵¹⁰. For better or worse, despite the controversy and the problems with the game, *Resident Evil 5* was, and continues to be, a massive success.

That success would inevitably influence the development of the next two games in the series, albeit in opposite ways. In the more immediate sense, it told Capcom that, despite the concerns around the racist imagery present in the game, players were still willing to accept and, moreover, embrace the experience – even its fiercest critics. It also told Capcom that this more Hollywood blockbuster-esque style for the series, with increasingly over-the-top machismo (see:

⁵⁰⁶ Brock, "When Keeping it Real Goes Wrong", pg. 435.

⁵⁰⁷ Harradence, Mike. "Resident Evil 5 is Still the Best-Selling Resi Game to Date". *VideoGamer.com*, under "News", Feb. 11, 2019. <https://www.videogamer.com/news/resident-evil-5-is-still-the-best-selling-resi-game-to-date> (Accessed May 1, 2019).

⁵⁰⁸ Romano, Sal. "Capcom Sales Update: *Monster Hunter: World* at 11.9 Million, *Resident Evil 5* at 11 Million, More". *Gematsu*, under "Industry", Feb. 8, 2019. <https://gematsu.com/2019/02/capcom-sales-update-monster-hunter-world-at-11-9-million-resident-evil-5-at-11-million-more> (Accessed May 1, 2019).

⁵⁰⁹ Capcom Staff. "Platinum Titles". *Capcom Investor Relations*, under "Financial Information", Dec. 31, 2018. <http://www.capcom.co.jp/ir/english/finance/million.html> (Accessed May 1, 2019).

⁵¹⁰ Totilo, "Resident Evil 5 Producer Meets with His Chief Critic".

the player as Chris needing to punch a giant boulder to defeat Wesker), increasingly sexualized female characters, and increasingly nonsensical action set-pieces (see: the aforementioned boulder punching, as it also takes place in the middle of an active volcano) was the right direction for the next installment of the franchise. Because of these lessons, *Resident Evil 6* would take all of these elements, including the problematic setting, even further. By contrast, *Resident Evil VII: BioHazard* would wind up being both a response of sorts to the direction the series had taken, as well as a celebration of the series to that point.

Chapter 7

Expansion and Contraction:

Resident Evil 6, Resident Evil VII, and the Contrast of Spectacle vs. Intimacy

Leon S. Kennedy is not having a good night. In the midwestern town of Tall Oaks to protect U.S. President Adam Benford, Kennedy was, instead, forced to shoot him in the head after Benford was transformed into a zombie during a bioterror attack/virus outbreak. The President was going to publicly disclose the truth behind the Raccoon City outbreak from *Resident Evil 2* and *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* and the government's dealings with Umbrella, the now-defunct corporation responsible. This disclosure was effectively silenced by the attack, orchestrated by an organization calling itself Neo Umbrella. Leon then learned that Helena Harper, the secret service agent serving alongside him as protection for the President, had been coerced into aiding Neo Umbrella in order to save her sister. The person doing the coercing: National Security Advisor Derek Simmons.

After wading through hordes of zombies in an outbreak eerily reminiscent of the Raccoon City incident, Leon and Helena find themselves in Simmons' secret labs housed under a church on Simmons family lands. The duo has navigated decrepit holding cells and less-than-sanitary operating rooms, and are now standing in what appears to be a bio-organic gestation lab. Moving through this lab, Leon/the player finds an anachronistic piece of media technology amongst all of the high-tech scientific equipment – a VHS tape. The label on the tape, written by hand, reads “Happy Birthday Ada Wong”.

Voicing Ada's name as though it were a question, Leon inserts the tape into the equally anachronistic VHS player attached to the large HDTV display. The tape, upon beginning play,

starts with a title card stating that it is “C-Virus Experiment 12235: Project Ada”. The screen then displays a disturbingly humanoid-shaped cocoon or carapace. This cocoon slowly bursts open in an eruption of ooze, revealing its occupant: a naked, fully grown, slime-covered Ada Wong. This apparent Ada arches back with arms outstretched, before slumping forward out of the cocoon and onto the floor. As Leon and Helena watch with a combination of shock and disgust on their faces, Ada, naked and still covered in ooze from the cocoon, slowly raises herself up on her arms and gazes directly at the camera, slime slowly running down her face. The tape then cuts to a different shot showing Ada further from the camera, a lab-coat wearing figure with a signet ring on the thumb of the visible hand walking into frame.

Abruptly, the tape ends and is ejected by the VCR, leaving both Leon and Helena still looking in shock at the TV display. Leon looks over at Helena and asks, “Is this what you wanted to show me?” Helena responds, “No! I thought...” as they both turn to look at the gestating tanks in the room with renewed horror. As the player regains control over Leon, he rhetorically asks, “What the hell did I just see, Ada?”⁵¹¹

Handheld Horror and Other Surprises

Presented with *Resident Evil 5*'s overwhelming and, quite frankly, confounding success, Capcom's response was unconventional, as well as somewhat of a repeat of their floundering with the series after *Resident Evil 4*'s blockbuster launch. There was an attempt to follow up *Resident Evil 5*'s success directly in 2010, but that consisted of what is now an industry standard practice: releasing a “gold” or “game of the year” edition of the game which includes all of the downloadable content released to that point. In the case of *Resident Evil 5 Gold Edition* (Capcom, 2010), the package included the base game, the “Lost in Nightmares” and “Desperate

⁵¹¹ This account was created from a combination of my playthrough and the Survival Horror Network's *Resident Evil 6* Let's Play video found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ye9sVI9cddU>

Escape” single player downloadable episodes, Mercenaries Reunion mode, and two costume packs⁵¹². As mentioned in both the *Kotaku* and *IGN*⁵¹³ reviews for the single player DLC episodes, they are both very brief – something Stephen Totilo goes out of his way to emphasize in his review of “Lost in Nightmares”⁵¹⁴. However, this effort is simply a repackaging of a game and content already available.

Much like Capcom’s post-*Resident Evil 4* approach, the first proper follow-up game in the series post-*Resident Evil 5* was also a handheld game, this time for the newly released Nintendo 3DS. Coming out in June of 2011, *Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D* (Capcom, 2011) offered a significant departure from the series. Following the example of games like *Turok: Rage Wars* (Acclaim, 1999), *Quake III Arena* (iD Software, 1999), and *Unreal Tournament* (GT Interactive, 1999) – all games released over a decade earlier – *Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D* did not have a proper single player mode. Instead, the game took the Mercenaries mode, iterations of which had been a bonus minigame in main entries in the series since *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, and made it a full release for the portable system⁵¹⁵. In this mode, the player, either by themselves or cooperatively, has to fight off waves of monsters from the *Resident Evil* games, trying to survive to the end and best their high scores. In essence, *Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D* is an ‘80s era arcade game wrapped in a survival horror aesthetic. This title feels of a piece with Capcom’s general lack of direction during that time period, as discussed by *Game*

⁵¹² See: Geddes, Ryan. “Resident Evil 5: Gold Edition Review”. *IGN.com*, under “Articles”. Mar. 17, 2010. <https://ca.ign.com/articles/2010/03/17/resident-evil-5-gold-edition-review> (Accessed Aug. 15, 2019).

⁵¹³ Claiborn, Samuel. “Resident Evil 5: Desperate Escape Review”. *IGN.com*, under “Articles”. Mar. 9, 2010. <https://ca.ign.com/articles/2010/03/09/resident-evil-5-desperate-escape-review> (Accessed Aug. 15, 2019).

⁵¹⁴ Totilo, Stephen. “Resident Evil 5: Lost in Nightmares Micro-Review: Less Fighting, More Frightening”. *Kotaku.com*, Feb. 23, 2010. <https://kotaku.com/resident-evil-5-lost-in-nightmares-micro-review-less-5478085> (Accessed Aug. 15, 2019)

⁵¹⁵ See: Drake, Audrey. “Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D Review”. *IGN.com*, under “Articles”. June 28, 2011. <https://ca.ign.com/articles/2011/06/28/resident-evil-the-mercenaries-3d-review> (Accessed Aug. 15, 2019)

Informer's Tim Turi in January of 2012⁵¹⁶. This lack of direction is perhaps best embodied by 2009's *Bionic Commando* reboot (Capcom, 2009), in which restrictive gameplay is paired with ludicrous and patriarchal narrative decisions⁵¹⁷, all to middling, nonsensical effect and poor sales⁵¹⁸.

The same criticism of lack of direction could not be said for the second *Resident Evil* game to be released for the Nintendo 3DS in January of 2012. *Resident Evil Revelations* (Capcom, 2012) acts as a prequel to *Resident Evil 5*, giving the player the opportunity to play once again as both Chris and Jill from the original game, this time in alternating chapters, as they deal with a bio-weapon outbreak. There are a few aspects of note to this game, especially considering its seemingly lesser status as a handheld title. First, *Resident Evil Revelations* reverses the dynamic offered in *Resident Evil 5*: this time, it is Jill who must search for and rescue Chris, held hostage by the terrorist organization, Veltro. Not only does the player search for Chris as Jill, there is no longer a binary choice, as is offered in the first game. In *Resident Evil Revelations*, the player plays as *both* male and female avatars, rather than being forced exclusively into one role.

This is not to say that it fully reverses the blatant misogyny the series found itself sliding into from *Resident Evil 4* onward - far from it. Jill still retains her "sexy" look from *Resident Evil 5* (detailed in the previous chapter), just with a strap across the open part of her skin-tight wetsuit where the mind-control gem from the previous game would have been. New character Jessica Sherawat is also hyper-sexualized through her unnecessarily revealing and less-than-practical scuba diving outfit (even more so than Jill's). *Resident Evil Revelations* character designer

⁵¹⁶ Turi, Tim. What's Happening at Capcom?. *Game Informer* No. 225 (Jan. 2012), pg. 22-25.

⁵¹⁷ Most infamously the misogynist plot twist that the lead character's bionic arm is actually the virtual embodiment of his dead wife.

⁵¹⁸ Turi, What's Happening at Capcom?, pg. 23.

Fuminori Sato admits retrospectively that the outfit is “[...] a quite embarrassing costume”⁵¹⁹ and is characterized by “[...] high heels and a fetish look”⁵²⁰. Moreover, Jessica’s dialogue is peppered with less-than-clever ‘flirting’ with Chris; one notable example is her telling him to follow her “sweet can” as she leads him to a gameplay objective. Jessica flirts with Chris, and by extension the player, so much that, when they separate she actually complains about him not getting the hint. Additionally, the character Rachel Foley, who is transformed into a virus-infected monster (more on this aspect presently), has a similarly revealing wetsuit, which Sato states was designed so that “[...] she also looks like a sexy biker, so I like it”⁵²¹. Open to her navel so that her unrealistic cleavage can be exposed, with her eyes completely covered by her blonde hair, Rachel is dehumanized and objectified long before she is transformed.

Another major point of note is that the game, in keeping with prior spinoffs in the series, such as *Resident Evil Gaiden* and *Resident Evil: Dead Aim*, takes place almost entirely on a ship adrift at sea and infested with monsters made up of infected passengers. *Resident Evil Revelations* shares so many thematic elements with *Resident Evil Gaiden*, in fact, that it could be argued that *Revelations* is a sort of spiritual reboot of *Gaiden*, as *Gaiden* is not considered series canon but *Revelations* is. Both are portable, both are focused on a ship adrift at sea, both feature characters from the first game in the series, both have a friendly character who is turned into a bio-organic weapon, both have a key mission in which the player needs to prevent the ship from sinking – the similarities are numerous.

Finally, *Resident Evil Revelations* offers two significant format changes to recent contemporary entries in the series. First, as a portable game, it has been structured to encourage

⁵¹⁹ Sato, Fuminori, in interview. *Resident Evil Revelations Official Complete Works*. Ed. Noriomi Ito. Trans. Motoko Tamamura and Jonathan Clements. London: Titan Books, 2015, pg. 48.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 52.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 83.

short play sessions. As such, the story is offered, not in extended chapters like with *Resident Evil 4* or *5*, but in episodes as with a TV show, or, more accurately, a DVD set of a TV show season. This format includes a “previously on” clip vignette whenever the player returns to a session, and credits at the beginning and end of each episode. This format was somewhat of a trend with horror games at the time, such as Atari’s *Alone in the Dark* reboot (Atari, 2008) and Remedy’s *Alan Wake* (Remedy, 2010). Tied to this kinship with other contemporary horror games, as well as its resemblance to earlier entries in the series, *Resident Evil Revelations* did not offer the same level of action-movie bombast as either *Resident Evil 4* or *5*. Instead, the claustrophobic atmosphere, puzzle-heavy gameplay, and careful resource management called back to the game’s more horror-oriented roots; much more so than the large action set-pieces sprinkled throughout *Resident Evil 5*. All of these surprising shifts in format for the handheld games could not, however, match the surprise surrounding the announcement of *Resident Evil 6*.

While rumours of *Resident Evil 6*’s existence swirled for a while before its announcement, its January 2012 reveal still came as something of a shock. This surprise was not because it was in development, but because the announcement indicated that it would release later that same year on November 20th⁵²². The game had actually been in development since the release of *Resident Evil 5* in 2009 but was kept a secret from the public until this announcement⁵²³. As Richard George points out in his article, “Six New Things We’ve Learned About Resident Evil 6”: “With Resident Evil 5 arriving more than three years ago, Capcom has had a considerable amount of time to work on its next installment. In fact, much of what we’ve

⁵²² Gilbert, Henry. “Resident Evil 6 announced, trailer indicates November 20 release date”. *GamesRadar.com*, Jan. 19, 2012. <https://www.gamesradar.com/resident-evil-6-announced-release-date-set-november-20-year/> (Accessed Aug. 15, 2019)

⁵²³ George, Richard. “Six Things We’ve Learned About Resident Evil 6”. *IGN.com*, under “Articles”, Jul. 19, 2012. <https://ca.ign.com/articles/2012/07/19/six-new-things-weve-learned-about-resident-evil-6> (Accessed Aug. 15, 2019).

seen so far was created almost two and a half years ago”⁵²⁴. Still, the turnaround between the initial official reveal and actual release (which was eventually pushed up, from November 20th, 2012 to October 2nd, 2012) is a shockingly quick one for the modern games industry, as Henry Gilbert expressed in his article covering the announcement⁵²⁵.

Supplementing this surprise was the release in March 2012 of *Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City* (Capcom, 2012) for the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, and PC. Set during the events of *Resident Evil 2*, *Operation Raccoon City* focuses on a squad of Umbrella-contracted mercenaries trying to contain the Raccoon City outbreak, much like the team in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*. The gameplay, as Tim Turi states in his review of the game for *Game Informer*, “[...] focuses on fast-placed gunplay on the overrun streets of Raccoon City”⁵²⁶. Developed for Capcom by Slant Six, one of the developers of Sony’s *SOCOM Navy Seals* series, the game did not do any favours for the franchise, receiving a 6 out of 10 in Turi’s review and a 4 out of 10 from Audrey Drake in her review for *IGN*⁵²⁷. Both reviews state that a series of questionable design decisions make the game unintentionally difficult to play, something which kept it from reaching even moderate success. With this damage to the franchise’s reputation, *Resident Evil 6* needed to succeed, and it could be argued that it both did and did not do so.

6 Times Three

Resident Evil 6 continued the evolution started in *Resident Evil 4*, and furthered in *Resident Evil 5*, towards a more action-oriented experience. As stated in the *Electronic Gaming Monthly* preview for the game, “[n]o matter if Capcom meant for it to happen or not, *Resident*

⁵²⁴ *Ibid*

⁵²⁵ Gilbert, “Resident Evil 6 Announced”.

⁵²⁶ Turi, Tim. “*Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City* Review”. *Game Informer* No. 229 (Apr. 2012), pg. 83.

⁵²⁷ Drake, Audrey. “*Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City* Review”. *IGN.com*, under “Articles”, Mar. 20, 2012. <https://ca.ign.com/articles/2012/03/20/resident-evil-operation-raccoon-city-review> (Accessed (Aug. 24, 2019)).

Evil now exists in the world of the third-person shooter [...]”⁵²⁸. *Resident Evil 6*’s foothold in this world is an awkward one – while *Resident Evil 4*’s main campaign can take up to twenty hours to complete, as discussed in the chapter on that game, *Resident Evil 6* has four campaigns, all around ten hours in length, with game mechanics changing drastically between them along with the playable characters.

Leon’s campaign is the closest to the previous games, tasking the player with fighting through not one, but two viral zombie outbreaks (one in the U.S., and one in China) and playing like an extension of the last two games in the series. Chris, returning from *Resident Evil 5*, has his campaign heeding the advice offered in the *Electronic Gaming Monthly* preview and taking cues from Western third-person shooters – specifically, the trend at the time toward cover-heavy squad-based shooters popularized by the *Gears of War* (Epic Games, 2006) series of games⁵²⁹. Newcomer Jake Muller, son of long-time series villain Albert Wesker, is paired with *Resident Evil 2*’s Sherry Birkin⁵³⁰ in a campaign that feels like a mix between the co-operative gameplay offered in *Resident Evil 5* and the more individualistic cover-based gameplay and environment traversal of the *Uncharted* (Naughty Dog, 2007) series. Finally, Ada Wong’s campaign, originally locked until all of the other campaigns were completed⁵³¹, is characterized by stealth gameplay and puzzle solving absent in the action-heavy campaigns of the other protagonists.

⁵²⁸ *Electronic Gaming Monthly* Staff. “*Resident Evil 6* Preview”. *Electronic Gaming Monthly* No. 254 (Mar./Apr. 2012), pg. 57.

⁵²⁹ Capcom’s other major attempt to capitalize on this trend, 2010’s *Dark Void*, was so poorly received that it only sold 500,000 units out of a projected 2-million-unit estimate. (See: Turi, [What’s Happening at Capcom](#), pg. 23)

⁵³⁰ In a show of just how much time had passed between the release of *Resident Evil 2* and *Resident Evil 6*, Sherry, who was a twelve-year-old in the former game, is now a full-grown adult in the latter game.

⁵³¹ See: Matulef, Jeffrey. “Resident Evil 6’s on-disc DLC will be free”. *Eurogamer.net*, under “Articles”, Oct. 11, 2012. <https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2012-10-11-resident-evil-6s-on-disc-dlc-will-be-free> (Accessed Aug. 27, 2019).

That the game vacillates this heavily between these vastly different gameplay styles suggests that Capcom's lack of concrete direction overall affected *Resident Evil 6*'s development⁵³².

To be fair to *Resident Evil 6*, it was not the only long-running survival horror franchise entry dealing with a lack of direction during this period. Released that same year, *Silent Hill: Downpour* (Konami, 2012), developed by Vatra Games for Konami made an impact for the series, but a resoundingly negative one. Steven Hopper, in his review of the game for *IGN*, laments the increased focus on combat and the unoriginal and unfulfilling story, giving the overall experience a 4.5 out of 10⁵³³. Phillip Kollar has similar complaints in his *Polygon* review, describing a large portion of the game as “[...] a series of dumbfounding action game clichés that a franchise like *Silent Hill* shouldn't be bound to”⁵³⁴, giving the game a 5 out of 10. *Resident Evil 6* shares these problems with *Silent Hill: Downpour* but is also tied up in the pop culture fascination that made *Resident Evil 5* problematic.

Pop Culture Influences, References, and Confusion

As discussed in the previous chapter, several popular Hollywood action movies heavily influenced the style and direction of *Resident Evil 5*. Based on the success experienced with that approach, Capcom took their weaving of a plethora of pop culture influences into the series to increasingly ludicrous extremes. In *Resident Evil Revelations*, for example, supporting character

⁵³² I have been unable to find much in the way of discussing *Resident Evil 6*'s development, outside of small interview pieces like Richard George's with the game's producer Yoshiaki Hirabayashi (George, Richard. "Developing Resident Evil 6". *IGN.com*, under "Articles", Feb. 6, 2012. <https://ca.ign.com/articles/2012/02/06/developing-resident-evil-6> (Accessed Aug. 27, 2019)). I am not the only one with this issue, as the Avalanche Reviews Retrospective video on the game states the same issue (Avalanche Reviews. "Resident Evil 6: RE Retrospective". *YouTube.com*. May 23, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuG8luceGag> (Accessed Sept. 6, 2019)).

⁵³³ Hopper, Steven. "*Silent Hill: Downpour* Review". *IGN.com*, under "Articles", Mar. 12, 2012. <https://ca.ign.com/articles/2012/03/12/silent-hill-downpour-review> (Accessed Sept. 4, 2019).

⁵³⁴ Kollar, Philip. "Silent Hill: Downpour review: hung out to dry". *Polygon.com*, under "Reviews", Jun. 14, 2012. <https://www.polygon.com/2013/1/24/3698370/silent-hill-downpour-review-hung-out-to-dry> (Accessed Sept. 4, 2019).

Keith Lumley's appearance was derived from an unlikely source. Lead character designer Takashi Yoshikawa recounts in the *Resident Evil: Revelations Complete Official Works* that “[h]is hood comes from an idea that Art Director Takematsu had – he wanted something like that cartoon character Kenny, from *South Park*, a boy who dies in every episode”⁵³⁵.

This influence can also clearly be seen at play in *Resident Evil 6*, which results in the story becoming a confusing mess. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, in Leon's campaign, the player descends into the catacombs in the depths of Simmons family-owned lands. In these catacombs, which seem to have no apparent bottom, Leon and Helena encounter catacomb tombs⁵³⁶ and blade traps⁵³⁷ seemingly lifted directly from *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (Spielberg, 1989). More overtly, the entire catacomb section of the game appears to be what could generously be called an ‘homage’ to Richard Donner's *The Goonies* (Richard Donner, 1985). The catacombs resemble the caves explored by the Goonies in their search for the pirate, One-Eyed Willy, even including sliding along underground water flows (*Resident Evil 6* uses these for the setting of a boss encounter in order to justify their presence in the game). The motif of the man-made structures in these catacombs are, confusingly, a combination of late medieval and Roman empire, particularly in the garb of the zombies found there, echoing the pirates and 15th century aesthetic in the film. Several of the traps and puzzles appear to overtly echo the same kind of booby traps repeatedly emphasized in Donner's film, as well.

⁵³⁵ Yoshikawa, Takashi, in interview. *Resident Evil Revelations Official Complete Works*. Ed. Noriomi Ito. Trans. Motoko Tamamuro and Jonathan Clements. London: Titan Books, 2015, pg. 67.

⁵³⁶ See: the scene in which Harrison Ford's Indiana Jones and Alison Doody's Dr. Schneider navigate the hidden tomb of the first knight in Venice.

⁵³⁷ Specifically, the scene in which Harrison Ford's Indiana Jones must kneel to avoid being decapitated by the hidden blades in the walls of the entrance to the Holy Grail's hidden alcove.

In addition to these influences in Leon's campaign, Eiichiro Sasaki, the game's director, has openly admitted the filmic influence for Chris' campaign. In an interview with John Gaudiosi for *Digital Trends*, Sasaki stated the following:

There were a lot of cinematic influences in Resident Evil 6, but the most specific one I can point to is for Chris' campaign. The real influence for that comes from the movie *Aliens*. If you think about that movie, you have this group of people who trained really hard and they start from a position of confidence and security, but as they get more and more involved in the situation it gets worse and worse and members of their team get picked off one by one. Well, the same thing happens to Chris.⁵³⁸

There is a key distinction to bear in mind here – one that Sasaki appears not to consciously recognize. In Cameron's *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986), the reason for the heightened fear experienced by the military figures in the game is because their patriarchal/hyper-masculine subject position⁵³⁹ is subverted by both the presence of civilian survivor Ellen Ripley, and the overtly female-coded Queen alien.

Tying the development of *Resident Evil 6* to the *Alien* film franchise brings the discussion back to Barbara Creed and the concept of the monstrous feminine. As mentioned in the chapter on *Resident Evil 2*, Creed illustrated the concept of the monstrous feminine using the precursor to Cameron's *Aliens*, Ridley Scott's 1979 film, *Alien*⁵⁴⁰. Several of the talking points Creed offers from *Alien* apply to *Aliens*, with the added facet of overt militaristic machismo common to

⁵³⁸ Sasaki, Eiichiro, in interview. "Resident Evil 6 director Eiichiro Sasaki talks terror, tension and tie-ins". *DigitalTrends.com*, under "Gaming", Aug. 23, 2012. <https://www.digitaltrends.com/gaming/resident-evil-6-director-eiichiro-sasaki-talks-terror-tension-and-tie-ins/> (Accessed Sept. 6, 2019).

⁵³⁹ Even the female member of the space marine squad is characterized by this machismo. In an exchange after being woken from cryosleep, the character Hudson remarks to his squadmate, Vasquez, "Hey, Vasquez, have you ever been mistaken for a man?", to which she responds, "No; have you?". (Cameron, *Aliens*, 1986)

⁵⁴⁰ Creed, *Horror and the Monstrous Feminine*

Hollywood films from the 1980s in the form of the Colonial Marines⁵⁴¹ who comprise the majority of the protagonist group. For this examination, Kellner and Ryan's examination of Hollywood's new militarism in the 1980s proves instructive.

Militaristic Insecurity and the Return of the Monstrous Feminine

While Kellner and Ryan, like Creed, discuss *Alien* directly in their book, *Camera Politica*, they do so from a socio-economic perspective – deconstructing it as a critique of capitalist structures⁵⁴². Much like the *Resident Evil* franchise at this point, a shift from horror to action is in order. Kellner and Ryan discuss the post-Vietnam zeitgeist within America, and specifically within Hollywood, in terms of an uncertainty overtaken by conservative neo-militarism⁵⁴³. The post-Vietnam condition is an important one for *Aliens*, as Cameron has said in interview that the Vietnam war and the psychological problems returning soldiers experienced were a heavy inspiration for the film's plot⁵⁴⁴. This neo-militarism, as Kellner and Ryan state, is coded in the 1980s as anti-communist and aggressively masculine⁵⁴⁵. Their phrasing even sounds as though describing a large part of the plot of *Resident Evil 6*: “[i]n the late seventies and early eighties, the “world communist conspiracy” becomes associated with “terrorism”, the use of non-state-sanctioned violence to gain political ends”⁵⁴⁶.

This idea dovetails with the problem of setting a Japanese-made game in mainland China. Given China and Japan's history and animosity toward each other in the 20th century, there was always the potential for problematic representation. This is especially true considering the

⁵⁴¹ A name and notion that, in themselves, are worthy of their own discussion/deconstruction.

⁵⁴² Kellner, Douglas, and Michael Ryan. *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988. Pg. 183-184.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid*, pg. 196-197.

⁵⁴⁴ Cameron, James in interview. “Interview with James Cameron and Gale Anne Hurd on *Aliens*”. *Lofficier.com*, 2001. <https://www.lofficier.com/cameron.htm> (Accessed Sept. 15, 2019).

⁵⁴⁵ Kellner and Ryan, *Camera Politica*, pg. 214-215.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 214.

Japanese video game industry has had uncomfortably outspoken figures on the subject, such as *Dragon Quest* (Enix, 1986) series composer Koichi Sugiyama, who took out a full-page, English-language ad in the *Washington Post* denying the scope or even occurrence of Japanese war crimes in China during World War II⁵⁴⁷.

With this notion in mind, similar criticisms as those leveled against *Resident Evil 5* can be made here. In addition to the minute-to-minute gameplay consisting of all of the characters at some point gunning down hordes of infected Chinese citizens, the sheer level of destruction on Chinese soil caused by explosions, vehicle collisions (such as the tanker explosion presented not once, but twice in Leon's campaign), and more during these sequences must also be taken into account. To be sure, there have been bombastic explosions littered throughout the *Resident Evil* franchise, going back to the first game (providing the player earns the 'good' ending), but the scale, extent, and frequency with which they occur in *Resident Evil 6* is unprecedented. The reasoning behind including this setting in the game, and for making it the backdrop to such over-the-top violence, may not have been overtly political; intentional or not, however, the history between the two countries must be taken into account when examining the game.

This level of violence coincides with Kellner and Ryan's assertions about action movie neo-militarism. They discuss how violent imagery aligns with a patriarchal need to avoid being 'feminized', and the shame that comes along with such feminization in a patriarchal society⁵⁴⁸. This shame and the need to express masculinity through violence are overtly present in Chris' campaign. Leon, in his campaign, is willing to give Helena the benefit of the doubt and is willing to listen to and accept her – a noted shift in his personality from *Resident Evil 4*. Chris, on the

⁵⁴⁷ Stop Skeletons From Fighting. "Why the Music in Dragon Quest XI is So Terrible | Past Mortem [SSFF]". *YouTube.com*. Oct. 15, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfdFU3O3nf8> (Accessed Sept. 15, 2019).

⁵⁴⁸ Kellner and Ryan, pg. 215.

other hand, has his initial BSAA squad eliminated by the Ada Wong whose birth is detailed at the beginning of this chapter. Chris is driven to despair, drink, and then revenge against this Ada, who is eventually revealed to be a copy of the Ada Wong from the previous games (more on that presently). To that end, a large part of Chris' campaign tasks the player with hunting this Ada down, in order to arrest or kill her. Returning to the *Aliens* comparison, the parallel between the *Resident Evil 6* version of Chris and *Aliens*' Corporal Hicks is clear – both characters are hyper-masculine soldiers who lose their squads to a monstrous female and her army of monsters, and are driven to eliminate her.

At this point it should be noted that, despite multiple campaigns offering both male and female playable characters, only one of the scenarios is named after the female playable character – Ada's. In Leon's campaign, the player has the option of playing as Helena; likewise, in Jake's campaign, Sherry becomes a playable character for the first time since *Resident Evil 2*. The game goes out of its way to make clear, however, that even if the player chooses to play as these characters, much like with Sheva in *Resident Evil 5*, the stories presented *are not theirs*. This is done in two ways, in terms of story and gameplay decisions.

In Leon's campaign, even when the focus is on Helena searching for her sister, whom Simmons has conducted monstrous experiments upon, the game feels the need to focus on Leon's relationship with Ada, as well as his reactions to events. After leaving Tall Oaks for Shengzhou, the story remains solely focused on Leon and Ada, with Helena all but forgetting about the horrific mutation and death of her sister in service of Leon's character arc. Similarly, while Sherry is playable in Jake's campaign, all of the major decisions are made by Jake – Sherry simply follows along.

This situation is exacerbated by both the shoehorned romance plot between Sherry and Jake, and the developers' need to show Sherry, a character whom players familiar with the series grew to know as a 12-year-old in *Resident Evil 2*, in various states of undress. In addition to being placed in a hospital gown which is too small for her for story reasons⁵⁴⁹, her main unlockable bonus costume is her school uniform from *Resident Evil 2*. To be clear, this costume is not a scaled-up version of her uniform meant to fit the 21-year-old she is now; it is her *original* school uniform, made for a 12-year-old and now far too small for her, but much more revealing⁵⁵⁰.

In terms of gameplay, the same situation arises here as with *Resident Evil* and *Resident Evil 2*. Yes, the player can play as either Helena or Sherry, but the default, as evidenced by whom the campaigns are named after, is the male player-character, Leon or Jake, respectively. Further, Chris' campaign does not even offer the option to play as a female character, instead offering the player the choice between Chris and his squad-mate Piers. The entirety of Chris' squad is made up of men of similar build to both Chris and Piers, which makes Chris not only the default, but also the expectation for a B.S.A.A. member tasked with direct intervention (Sherry, while a B.S.A.A. member, is focused on research and extraction).

Here, then, is where Kellner and Ryan converge with Creed. Kellner and Ryan state, “[o]ne major consequence of this argument [that male militarism still craves social acceptance while operating on an isolationist level] is that it is not only male sexualization that is at stake in militarism”⁵⁵¹. If, as argued in the chapter on that game, *Resident Evil 2* presents the player with

⁵⁴⁹ Specifically, the opening of Chapter 3 of Jake's campaign, where Jake and Sherry are being forcibly confined in a secret laboratory (see: Dfactor Longplays. “Resident Evil 6 Jake Walkthrough”. *YouTube.com*. Apr. 20, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6FCMogzI0g&t=1174s> (Accessed Oct. 2, 2019))

⁵⁵⁰ See: Resident Evil Love. “Resident Evil 6 Sherry EX3 and all of her costumes compilation”. *YouTube.com*. Feb. 1, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYhaldcl1a5g> (Accessed Oct. 2, 2019).

⁵⁵¹ Kellner and Ryan, *Camera Politica*, pg. 215.

the monstrous masculine, *Resident Evil 6* offers the apotheosis of the monstrous feminine within the series. The series was already moving in the direction of the monstrous feminine as characterized by Creed in *Resident Evil 5*, with Wesker's transformation of Tricell CEO Excella Gionne into a giant grotesque tentacle monster, but *Resident Evil Revelations* and *Resident Evil 6* combine the sexual with the abject in a way which explicitly evokes Creed's discussion of the monstrous feminine.

As mentioned, in *Resident Evil Revelations*, Rachel Foley becomes infected and transforms into a monster the player must fight. This transformation does not completely eschew her human form, as Excella's does in *Resident Evil 5*. Instead, the monster Rachel becomes maintains a hyper sexualized appearance, with her wet suit in tatters exposing even more of her breasts, along with her legs. The sexualization goes even further with this infected Rachel, however, as there are tentacles wrapping around one leg, evoking the aesthetics of the hentai anime discussed by Susan Napier and referred to in the chapter on *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*⁵⁵².

Art director for the game, Satori Takamatsu, acknowledges the sexualization present in Rachel's monstrous state, saying in the *Resident Evil Revelations Official Complete Works* that:

Rachel was created because I wanted to draw a mix of an erotic and grotesque creature.

This game's secret ingredient are the elements of Japanese horror that she represents. Her real mouth has been transplanted to her forehead.⁵⁵³

That 'real mouth' refers to a concealed orifice on Rachel's forehead which houses a large pink phallus-shaped tentacle. This tentacle, and the orifice it resides in, align with Creed's discussion of the alien in *Alien* as 'phallic mother'. As Creed writes:

⁵⁵² Napier, *Anime*, pg. 65.

⁵⁵³ Takamatsu, Satori in interview. *Resident Evil Revelations Official Complete Works*. Ed. Noriomi Ito. Trans. Motoko Tamamuro and Jonathan Clements. London: Titan Books, 2015, pg. 106.

[...] the alien is more than a phallus; it is also coded as a toothed vagina, the monstrous-feminine as the cannibalistic mother. A large part of the ideological project of *Alien* is the representation of the maternal fetish object as an 'alien' or foreign shape.⁵⁵⁴

Thus, Rachel offers this maternal fetish object not as a second mouth stalk within the primary mouth, as with *Alien*, but as her 'real' mouth emerging and flailing from the middle of her forehead. The phallic mother figure is also the cannibalistic mother – one cannot be distinguished from the other, something Creed states explicitly about *Alien* in her article⁵⁵⁵.

Resident Evil 6's evil Ada takes this notion of the cannibalistic mother a step further. While not bearing the phallic object/toothed vagina of Rachel/the alien queen, false Ada is birthed in an abject fashion, and acts as a 'mother of monsters' of sorts throughout the game. Much the same as the eponymous alien is birthed from Kane's chest in *Alien*, something Creed deems a variation of Freud's 'primal scene'⁵⁵⁶, the false Ada 'births' the J'avo, the non-zombie rank-and-file enemies in the game, from virus-spawned cocoons. This birthing mirrors her own creation detailed at the beginning of the chapter, offering echoes of the same primal scene, demarcated by the tape label – 'Happy Birthday Ada Wong'. While *Resident Evil 6* wholly invests in the monstrosity of the archaic mother, the notion would be complicated in the next numbered entry in the series.

Interlude – *Resident Evil VII: Biohazard*

Waking as though from a nightmare, Ethan Winters has just regained consciousness. He had come to Dulvey, Louisiana, in search of his wife, Mia, who has been missing for the past

⁵⁵⁴ Creed, *Horror and the Monstrous Feminine*, pg. 68

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 65

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 58

three years. His search brought him to a decrepit, secluded mansion in the rural area outside Dulvey, where he found Mia. Their reunion did not go as expected. Mia, jumping between personalities, was in turns overjoyed to see Ethan and driven to extreme violence against him. After being forced to apparently kill Mia, Ethan/the player was attacked and knocked unconscious by a balding man with glasses and a beard, after telling Ethan, “Welcome to the family”.

Reviving, Ethan realizes that the nightmare is far from over. Restrained and sitting at a dining room table, he seems to be partaking in a grotesque caricature of a family dinner. The table, lit only by three candles, is covered in what appears to be a collection of plates piled high with festering entrails, flies lazily buzzing around the whole fetid scene. As Ethan groggily asks, “Where am I? What the Hell?”, a young man in a hoodie seated to his left at the table throws a piece of whatever is on the plates at him. “Rise and shine, sleepyhead. It’s time for supper”, crows the woman seated to Ethan’s right, as the hoodie-clad man continues to throw chunks of questionable origin at him.

Feeling the panic rising in his chest, Ethan frantically asks “Who are all you people? Where’s Mia?”. In response, the woman shoves something from the table into her mouth, making a quick crunching noise. She then says to Ethan in a Louisiana drawl, “Eat it. It’s good!”. The young man immediately replies with “Dumb son of a bitch wouldn’t know good if it hit him!” before throwing a full plate at him. “Lucas!” the woman exclaims, before the older man sitting between them, the same man who knocked Ethan unconscious, violently grabs Lucas’s arm. Before Ethan can even process what is happening, the older man drives a knife into Lucas’s forearm, proceeding to saw through, amputating the hand. Weirdly, Lucas does not seem

concerned, only yelling “Goddamn, old man, not again!”, implying that he has had a hand amputated before despite having both hands up until this point.

Getting up from the table with the amputated hand, the older man admonishes “Get out of the way, Marguerite!” Still holding the hand, he stalks over to Ethan, proclaiming “That boy’s got to eat! He got to have his supper.” Reaching over to a plate on the table, the older man says to Ethan, “Come here, boy. Let’s do this, come on”, before trying to cram a disgusting morsel into Ethan’s mouth. Excitedly, Marguerite starts yelling, “Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit – he’s not eating it, Jack! He’s not eating it!”, to which Jack responds, “Shut the Hell up, Marguerite!” Screaming over him, Marguerite yells, “I made that for him!” Jack, kicking a chair at her, replies, “Get the Hell outta here!” Before storming off, Marguerite yells at Ethan, “You’re a son of a bitch!”

Standing over Ethan, Jack picks up another chunk and tells him, “This was supposed to be a very special feast”. He then grabs Ethan’s jaw in one hand and raises the same knife he used on Lucas with the other, saying “Come here, boy”. Jack then proceeds to jam the knife into Ethan’s closed mouth, eliciting loud groans of pain before the knife is pulled back out. Just as Jack is about to shove the knife into Ethan’s face again, the phone starts ringing. Lucas, seemingly unfazed by his recently severed forearm, ruefully says, “Goddamn it, I bet it’s that cop again”. Jack looks at Lucas and spits out, “Goddamn pigs”. Lucas leaves the room as Jack looks back at Ethan, warning through gritted teeth, “I’m coming back for you”.

Breathing heavily, Ethan realizes he needs to escape, as control is returned to the player. Looking over to make sure he is alone, Ethan/the player sees an old, apparently comatose woman sitting to his direct left. Otherwise alone, Ethan/the player tries to escape by knocking the chair he is tied to over. The chair falls, freeing Ethan/the player, while seemingly not arousing the old

woman, who has not moved in the interim. Having gotten loose, Ethan/the player makes a hurried exit from the dining room, in order to find Mia and escape.⁵⁵⁷

Culture Shock

Resident Evil 6's lack of coherency and stringing together of pop culture pastiches did not go unnoticed by reviewers of the time. Tim Turi, in his review for *Game Informer*, stated that the game was “[...] a befuddling mess for anyone who hasn’t been keeping up with the drama since the Mansion Incident”⁵⁵⁸, before awarding it an 8.75 out of 10 for being a rewarding co-operative experience⁵⁵⁹. Richard George’s *IGN* review, in giving the game a 7.9 out of 10, says “[...] *Resident Evil 6* loses focus and fails to accurately assess which of its elements are truly worthy of being included”⁵⁶⁰. In the *Kotaku* review, Evan Narcisse argues that “[...] overall, it’s bloated and a mish-mash of cribbed ideas”⁵⁶¹. Simon Parkin states in his review for *EuroGamer* that “*Resident Evil 6* is an unwieldy tribute to the series' past, an uneven expression of its present and an unwelcome indication of its future”⁵⁶². Kevin VanOrd rated the game 4.5 out of 10 for *GameSpot*, contending that “*Resident Evil 6*'s messy mix of annoying quick-time events and constant set pieces makes it a poor caricature of modern-day action games”⁵⁶³. Despite the wide

⁵⁵⁷ This account was created from a combination of my playthrough and the Survival Horror Network’s *Resident Evil 6* Let’s Play video found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B9h4yYnstkA>

⁵⁵⁸ Turi, Tim. “*Resident Evil 6* Review”. *GameInformer.com*, under “Reviews”, Oct. 1, 2012.

https://www.gameinformer.com/games/resident_evil_6/ps3/archive/2012/10/01/incredible-co-op-with-a-few-kinks.aspx (Accessed Oct. 13, 2019).

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid*

⁵⁶⁰ George, Richard. “*Resident Evil 6* Review”. *IGN.com*, under “Articles”, Oct. 1, 2012.

<https://ca.ign.com/articles/2012/10/01/resident-evil-6-review> (Accessed Oct. 13, 2019).

⁵⁶¹ Narcisse, Evan. “*Resident Evil 6*: The *Kotaku* Review”. *Kotaku.com*, under “Review”, Oct. 2, 2012.

<https://kotaku.com/resident-evil-6-the-kotaku-review-5948171> (Accessed Oct. 13, 2019).

⁵⁶² Parkin, Simon. “*Resident Evil 6* Review”. *EuroGamer.net*, under “Articles”, Oct. 2, 2012.

<https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2012-10-01-resident-evil-6-review> (Accessed Oct. 13, 2019).

⁵⁶³ VanOrd, Kevin. “*Resident Evil 6* Review”. *GameSpot.com*, under “Reviews”, Oct. 5, 2013.

<https://www.gamespot.com/reviews/resident-evil-6-review/1900-6397338/> (Accessed Oct. 13, 2019).

variance of these reviews, *Resident Evil 6* remains Capcom's third best-selling title of all time, trailing behind *Monster Hunter World* and *Resident Evil 5*⁵⁶⁴.

This inconsistent collection of ideas and Western pop culture inspirations and references, while not well received, are at least explicable when the game is put into context as a Japanese development. In addition to the attempt at globalization discussed earlier, *Resident Evil 6* does seem to be adhering to the conventions of the zombie genre – just not the Western version of said genre. Colette Balmain, in her discussion of the zombie film in a Japanese horror context, offers some insight into the matter. Looking at multiple Japanese zombie films produced between 2000 and 2008, she highlights the ways in which the genre in Japan pulls from disparate, seemingly random, sources, and why. She states that:

The Japanese zombie film, as we have seen, is a cannibalistic genre, which not only references the traditional stereotype of the zombie, but also transgresses generic boundaries. It could be argued that Japanese zombies are vengeful *yurei* [female spirits] rather than traditional zombies, as is made clear in *Junk*. And while, at first glance the Japanese zombie film appears to be a matter of style over substance, as perhaps most evidently seen in the MTV aesthetics of *Versus*, the utilization of American forms can be seen as a type of counter-cultural and sub-cultural resistance to Japanese structural and cultural norms.⁵⁶⁵

Much of this description applies to *Resident Evil 6*, not just in terms of narrative, but gameplay, as well. It is clear in the game's case, however, that, rather than attempting a counter-cultural statement as with the films Balmain discusses, *Resident Evil 6*'s patchwork was in service of simply selling as many copies as possible, which was apparently a successful endeavour.

⁵⁶⁴ Capcom Staff, "Platinum Titles".

⁵⁶⁵ Balmain, Colette. *Introduction to Japanese Horror Film*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008, pg. 127.

Even with *Resident Evil 6*'s sales profitability, the developers of the next title recognized the problems present in the game. Andrew Reiner, in his preview for *Resident Evil VII*, offers this quote:

“We have to accept that the scale [of the series] had gotten out of hand by *Resident Evil 6*”, admits *Resident Evil 7*'s producer Masachika Kawata. “We wanted to go back to more of an intimate, personal space of horror with just one location. We wanted to go back to what made the series special.”⁵⁶⁶

While the developers would definitely draw extensive inspiration from prior entries in the series, there are also outside games which, without question, influenced the creation of *Resident Evil VII BioHazard* – specifically, Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog, 2013), Konami's *P.T.* (Kojima Productions, 2014)⁵⁶⁷, and, perhaps surprisingly at first glance, *Gone Home* (Fullbright, 2013).

Going Home

The influences of *The Last of Us* and *P.T.* on *Resident Evil VII*⁵⁶⁸ are fairly transparent. The mold/fungus as an actively antagonistic force directly parallels the cordyceps epidemic from *The Last of Us*. The first-person perspective, domestic setting, and various colour/particle filters of *P.T.* are also mirrored in Capcom's game. It is, perhaps, disingenuous to say that it was *P.T.* alone which directly inspired those aspects of *Resident Evil VII*, as it seems that *Gone Home* inspired both games. *Gone Home* has the player moving through a family home, examining personal objects, and piecing together the individual stories of the family members via these

⁵⁶⁶ Reiner, Andrew. “Resident Evil 7: Beginning Hour”. *Game Informer* Vol. 280 (Aug. 2016), pg. 80.

⁵⁶⁷ *P.T.* stands for “Playable Teaser” and was Hideo Kojima's preview for his take on the *Silent Hill* franchise, to be called *Silent Hills*. That project was cancelled when Konami and Kojima publicly and with animosity parted ways. (See: Stop Skeletons From Fighting. “Kojima vs Konami Explained | Past Mortem [SSFF]”. *YouTube.com*. Feb 2, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8pSoKfjsgw> (Accessed Oct. 19, 2019))

⁵⁶⁸ For simplicity's sake, from here on, I will be dropping the “*BioHazard*” from the game's title.

objects – gameplay aspects that *P.T.* and *Resident Evil VII*, both games that were released well after *Gone Home*, share - in an experience that has come to be termed a ‘walking simulator’. These gameplay mechanics have come to be gendered by certain groups, with the experiences that utilize them put up for debate over whether they deserve the term ‘video game’.

Ian Bogost, in his 2017 article “Video Games are Better Without Stories”, makes a couple of contentious arguments while examining *Gone Home* and another so-called ‘walking simulator’, *What Remains of Edith Finch* (Giant Sparrow, 2017). First, he contends that these titles are not video games – they merely use the conventions and technology of video games to strive toward a ‘holodeck simulation’ of a story⁵⁶⁹. Second, he contends that, as his title states, narrative is not necessary and is actually antithetical to video games as a medium⁵⁷⁰, dredging up the spectre of the ‘ludology/narratology’ debate.

This article prompted some notable responses pushing back against Bogost’s assertions. A week after Bogost’s article was published, Bianca Batti and Alisha Karabinus published a counter-article, titled “A Dream of Embodied Experience: On Ian Bogost, Epistemological Gatekeeping, and the Holodeck”, in the e-journal *Not Your Mama’s Gamer*⁵⁷¹. In their article, Batti and Karabinus point out that Bogost, in invoking the use of the holodeck in his discussion, is implicitly using Janet Murray’s ideas from her foundational 1997 book, *Hamlet on the Holodeck* – without crediting her⁵⁷². They state that:

⁵⁶⁹ Bogost, Ian. “Video Games are Better Without Stories”. *The Atlantic*, under “Technology”, Apr. 25, 2017. https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/04/video-games-stories/524148/?utm_source=atltw (Accessed Oct. 19, 2019).

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid*

⁵⁷¹ Batti, Bianca, and Alisha Karabinus. “A Dream of Embodied Experience: On Ian Bogost, Epistemological Gatekeeping, and the Holodeck”. *NYMG.com*, under “Design and Development”, May 1, 2017. <https://www.nymgamer.com/?p=16363> (Accessed Oct. 19, 2019).

⁵⁷² *Ibid*

[B]y not once crediting Murray for her work, Bogost, then, passes off Murray's work as his own while simultaneously attempting to discredit her original arguments. It's a sort of double-erasure, one rooted in male privilege and patriarchy—for it is yet another example of a man taking credit for a woman's work in an effort to silence and control.⁵⁷³

Tied to this erasure, they argue that Bogost is both gendering and gatekeeping in the practice of deciding what is and is not worthy of the title 'video game'. They argue that efforts like *Gone Home* and others like it have their foundation in the fact that more women, trans, and queer people are actively making experimental games. The idea that a game can be less action focused and more story focused, as well as whose stories are being told in these games which are derided as 'walking simulators', can be seen as threatening, hence the gatekeeping on display in Bogost's article⁵⁷⁴.

Janet Murray tacitly responded herself, in a *First Person Scholar* article soon after Batti and Karabinus' critique was published, titled "Janet Murray on Why Some Players and Critics Still Cannot Tolerate Narrative in Games". Murray, while never explicitly mentioning Bogost's article, points out that her book was printed in 1997, and was celebrating its 20th anniversary at the time of the article's writing, indicating just how prominent and available the ideas Bogost 'borrowed' from her were/are⁵⁷⁵. Murray then highlights an update to the new edition of her book which addresses this situation, arguing that when games are given narrative, they are also

⁵⁷³ *Ibid*

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid*

⁵⁷⁵ Murray, Janet. "Janet Murray on Why Some Players and Critics Still Cannot Tolerate Narrative in Games". *First Person Scholar*, May 18, 2017. http://www.firstpersonscholar.com/janet-murray-on-why-some-players-and-critics-still-cannot-tolerate-narrative-in-games/?fbclid=IwAR2flVxudIHOC_xSOoCeAKROInCu9VbQKGR6uHUyeVVNKxZKOrEiiv4VH6g (Accessed Oct. 19, 2019).

given context which makes the playing potentially uncomfortable, depending on the player's position of privilege⁵⁷⁶.

All of this debate leads to *Resident Evil VII*'s adoption of the mechanics of 'walking simulators' like *Gone Home* in service of a horror narrative. The first-person perspective that *Resident Evil VII* uses is both necessary to a game using *Gone Home*'s mechanics, but also a nod to the original concept for the first *Resident Evil*, back in 1996. As the *GameTrailers* retrospective states, and as discussed in previous chapters, the initial idea for *Resident Evil* was to take place as a first-person experience⁵⁷⁷. It is therefore no coincidence that *Resident Evil VII* is the first entry in the series to bear the Japanese name for the franchise: *BioHazard*. For *Resident Evil VII*, much like *Resident Evil Revelations*, while the player does assume the role of Ethan Winters for the majority of the game, there is also a large section where Mia becomes playable. Being able to play as Ethan and Mia both maintains the male and female avatar legacy of the *Resident Evil* series, again dating back to the first game, as well as highlighting the differences between the two protagonists.

Ethan, who is tasked with unravelling the mystery of what happened to Mia, as well as the Baker family and their homestead, is not the adolescent male power fantasy associated with most first-person shooters. Instead, Ethan/the player examines objects, plays video cassettes (which seem far less out of place in the Baker mansion than they did in a high-tech bio-lab), and solves puzzles in order to uncover the facts leading to his current circumstances. This behaviour aligns Ethan with the protagonist/avatar of *Gone Home*, casting both as female-coded – in *Gone Home*, explicitly as Katie Greenbriar; in *Resident Evil VII*, implicitly, via the gendered debate over the core nature of walking simulators discussed above.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid*

⁵⁷⁷ *GameTrailers* Staff, [The Resident Evil Retrospective – Part I](#).

Moreover, Ethan is far from invulnerable, constantly being injured (at some points in extreme ways) and unable to absorb more than a few hits from the various assailants in the homestead before succumbing to said injuries. He is also less capable with firearms, something Ben Reeves noted in his preview of the game for *Game Informer*, stating that “Resident Evil 7’s gunplay feels relatively good, but Ethan isn’t a trained killer, and his reloading speed is painfully slow”⁵⁷⁸. When placed in a first-person perspective, this lack of immediate skill with weapons is a jarring disruption of the expectations established by countless first-person shooters which have come before. Andrew Reiner, in previewing the game, immediately recognized the similarities between Ethan’s experience, despite the combat, and those of games like *Gone Home* and *Soma* (Frictional Games, 2015)⁵⁷⁹.

Mia, on the other hand, offers a more traditional first-person gaming experience during her playable section of the game. Jumping between a flashback and current circumstances, Mia’s section of the game takes place on a boat, at sea and landlocked, respectively – calling back to the series’ fascination with nautical settings. During her playable section, she is given weapons that Ethan never sees, along with the skills to use those weapons proficiently, because of who she is revealed to be. She has access to automatic weapons and military-grade hand grenades (in opposition to Ethan’s scrounged explosive devices). Even here, however, the narrative takes centre stage, hence the switching between flashbacks and current day, once again calling Bogost’s patriarchal argument into question.

What is being done with the use of these dual protagonists and the switch in game mechanics seems on the surface to be similar to what *Resident Evil 6* attempted. With *Resident Evil VII*, though, the switch in game mechanics between these protagonists subverts expected

⁵⁷⁸ Reeves, Ben. “Resident Evil 7 Biohazard Preview”. *Game Informer* Vol. 285 (Jan. 2017), pg. 60.

⁵⁷⁹ Reiner, “Resident Evil 7: Beginning Hour”, pg. 80.

gender norms of the sort Bogost was accused of having enforced in his contentious article. Ethan is placed in the potentially derisively feminine-coded gameplay space of *Gone Home*'s gameplay mechanics, highlighting that such gender coding is baseless and a fallacy. Mia is likewise given the stereotypically masculine-coded gunplay of traditional first-person shooters, serving to further underline the artificial nature of gendering these gameplay systems.

Who Will Survive the Horror, and What Will Be Left of Them?

Another way in which *Resident Evil VII* serves to subvert gender norms is in the motivations of the primary monster of the game, along with, ironically considering the last two main games in the series, one of the main Western pop culture influences on the game. It is no secret that the original *Resident Evil* was chiefly inspired by George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* and Capcom's own *Sweet Home* for the Japanese NES, as detailed in previous chapters. Where the series' developers seem to have gone wrong in more recent entries in the series is in incorporating myriad, unfocused pop culture influences.

Resident Evil VII rectifies this mistake by focusing on a smaller pool of more specific horror film inspirations, including Tobe Hooper's 1974 film, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974). As Chloi Rad states in her review for the game for *IGN*: "[i]f classic Resident Evil games were rooted in the zombie films of George A. Romero, this is Resident Evil in the tradition of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, with all the gruesome imagery, dilapidated old shacks, and cannibalistic horrors that come with it"⁵⁸⁰. Lucy O'Brien from *IGN* highlights the ties between the Baker family in *Resident Evil VII* and the cannibalistic family in *Texas*

⁵⁸⁰ Rad, Chloi. "Resident Evil 7: Biohazard Review". *IGN.com*, under 'Articles', Jan. 23, 2017. <https://ca.ign.com/articles/2017/01/23/resident-evil-7-biohazard-review> (Accessed Oct. 27, 2019).

Chainsaw Massacre, along with the social commentary such ties make⁵⁸¹. Julian Benson offers a visual comparison between the game and film in his article highlighting the influence that *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* has had on the entire *Resident Evil VII* experience⁵⁸². With *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*'s influence on *Resident Evil VII*, it might seem as though Clover's discussion would be a point of focus here, as well, as it is one of her main case studies. Robin Wood's foundational article, The American Nightmare: Horror in the 1970s⁵⁸³, proves more instructive in this context, however.

In his article, Wood discusses 1970s horror movies in the context of what he terms the 'return of the repressed'⁵⁸⁴. Wood frames the confrontation between the protagonists and monsters of these movies as a conflict between so-called normalcy and the monster, which represents an aspect of humanity which hegemonic structures have forced to be repressed/suppressed⁵⁸⁵. To clarify, the 'monster' in question can be either an actual monster or demon, as in one example he offers, *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, 1973), or a deviant human, as in his other major example, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*⁵⁸⁶. Wood offers three potential resolutions for this confrontation between the 'normal' (read: hegemonic, cis-gendered, heterosexual, white culture) and this embodied repressed concept: the monster is destroyed, restoring the status quo;

⁵⁸¹ O'Brien, Lucy. "Resident Evil 7, Texas Chainsaw, and Deep South Horror". *IGN.com*, under 'Articles', Feb. 1, 2017. <https://ca.ign.com/articles/2017/02/01/resident-evil-7-texas-chainsaw-deep-south-horror> (Accessed Oct. 23, 2019).

⁵⁸² Benson, Julian. "The Horror Cinema That Bleeds Through Resident Evil 7". *Kotaku*, Jan. 27, 2017. <https://www.kotaku.co.uk/2017/01/27/the-horror-cinema-that-bleeds-through-resident-evil-7> (Accessed Oct. 23, 2019).

⁵⁸³ Wood, Robin. The American Nightmare: Horror in the 1970s. *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid*, pg. 77.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid*, pg. 75.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid*

the monster is assimilated, removing the threat of the otherness of the monster⁵⁸⁷; or there is no return to normalcy, and the monster's perspective becomes the new normal⁵⁸⁸.

For the purposes of comparison with *Resident Evil VII*, it is important to look at Wood's examination of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and what he considers to be the 'normal vs. repressed' dynamic in that film. Leaving aside the discussion of Leatherface's chainsaw as phallic weapon, Wood suggests that, as they are paired off into heterosexual couples except for the wheelchair-bound Franklyn, the teenagers in the film represent the 'normal' to the cannibalistic, all-male family's 'repressed'⁵⁸⁹. While Wood recognizes that Franklyn, due to his disability, finds himself drawn to the family because of his ostracization by the other teenagers⁵⁹⁰, he does not take into account that Franklyn's attraction to the family is exactly because of the normalcy it suggests.

In contrast to the teenagers, whose clothes, vehicle, interest in astrology, and so on categorize them as counter-cultural hippies, the family is steeped in hetero-patriarchal tradition, with Leatherface acting as the mother figure in the infamous dinner scene. Even the hitchhiker the teens pick up at the beginning of the film, who is later revealed to be a member of the cannibalistic family, spends his time in the van lamenting the modernization of the slaughterhouse and the subsequent loss of jobs and tradition. Thus, while Wood's 'normalcy vs. repressed' dynamic still applies to the teenagers vs. cannibalistic family of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, it is not in the way that Wood conceptualizes. Instead, it is the hetero-normative patriarchal hegemonic side, the so-called 'normal', that is made monstrous in the film.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 73, 79-82.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid*, pg. 87.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid*, pg. 91.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid*, pg. 92.

So, too, is this dynamic the case for *Resident Evil VII*. During the flashback sequence of Mia's section of the game, it is revealed that Eveline, the seeming grandmother of the Baker family, is in fact a genetically engineered bioweapon. Mia, likewise, is revealed to be a covert agent transporting Eveline on the ship which both the flashback and the current search take place on. The reason Eveline appears as an elderly woman is due to the nature of her bioengineering – she ages at an accelerated rate. Because she is a genetically engineered lifeform and due to her accelerated aging, she longs for the experience of having a family. Viewing Mia as her mother, she uses her fungal abilities to take control of Mia and the Baker family, adopting them as her own, and inserting herself as both the invalid grandmother and loving daughter at the same time.

It is Eveline's conception of what 'family' is which is, at the same time, a presentation of the hetero-patriarchal 'normal' Wood decries, and a critique of that same normalcy. In constructing her 'family', Eveline first uses Mia as her 'mother', before bringing Jack, Lucas, and Marguerite under her control. Interestingly, while the rest of the family succumbs to Eveline's influence, Zoe, the family's actual daughter and the player's helper for the first half of the game, is able to resist, despite her fears to the contrary. However, Eveline's conception of 'family', with or without Zoe's presence, is that of a heterosexual nuclear unit. In adopting Lucas, Jack, and Marguerite, she gained an older brother, a matriarch, and a patriarch, and the dynamics between them once she has taken control of them are telling.

These dynamics are clearly articulated in the dinner scene detailed above. Marguerite is indeed the matriarch of the family, but she is ever under Jack's domineering position as patriarch of the family. During that scene, Jack abuses Lucas and severs his arm as 'punishment', yells and violently chases away Marguerite when she gets upset over how her 'cooking' is treated, and abuses Ethan, whom he now considers 'one of the family'. The patriarch under Eveline's

conception is not only the one who controls the household but controls it through fear. The game articulates this both via the narrative and the gameplay scenarios Ethan/the player is thrust into. Jack is the one who lumbers menacingly after Ethan; Jack is the one who openly confronts Ethan in the garage; Jack, in his final confrontation with Ethan, takes the form of a large, imposing monster.

To be clear, this dynamic is only Eveline's perception of how the Bakers should be as a family. Just before the final confrontation with Eveline, Ethan meets the actual Bakers for the first time, learning that they are just caught up in Eveline's machinations. However, the fact that Eveline, who has the mind of essentially a 10-year-old, conceives of the family unit as mother who cooks (or 'cooks' as the case may be) and tends the garden, father who dominates the family through fear, and brother who is abusive to the point of psychopathy, is a comment on the way in which the notion of family is portrayed in a hetero-normative hegemony. That this configuration is one that only ends in devastation, and is one that the Bakers, Mia, and Ethan all struggle against throughout the game is indicative of the developers' attitudes toward such a rigid conception of the family unit.

Critics recognized the more intimate nature of the fear in *Resident Evil VII*, if not entirely some of the commentary on offer. Tim Turi, in his *Game Informer* review, notes: "[t]he Bakers take center stage, and are equally important to the story as they are re-establishing Resident Evil's traditional conventions and lore"⁵⁹¹, but continues on to say that: "[n]one of these characters will be remembered as Resident Evil greats [...]", awarding the game an 8.5 out of 10⁵⁹². Chloi Rad's *IGN* review gave the game a 7.7 out of 10, saying: "Resident Evil 7 grounds itself in elements that made the original great while still indulging in a risky new shift in style

⁵⁹¹ Turi, Tim. "Resident Evil 7 Biohazard review". *Game Informer* Vol. 287 (May 2017), pg. 88.

⁵⁹² *Ibid*

that both helps and hurts the beloved formula in equal measure”⁵⁹³. Heather Alexandra, reviewing the game for *Kotaku*, states: “The small-scale focus on a central location and an emphasis on survival over flashy combat creates a dark, oppressive, and frightening atmosphere that’s long been absent from the series”⁵⁹⁴. Simon Parkin, reviewing the game for *The Guardian*, awarded a perfect five-star rating, argues: “Via the Bakers and the mysterious girl who lives in their attic, the monsters are now the main subjects of characterisation. This allows Pearsey and the game’s designers to build boss encounters around the family members’ personalities, which makes them more striking and memorable”⁵⁹⁵.

Overall, the critical reception recognizes that *Resident Evil VII* has realigned its overarching themes back to those of horror, noting the family dynamic as a basis for it, without delving too deeply into why. This return to horror allows the series to also return to the social commentary which is an integral part of the horror genre, whether it be in books, films, or video games. This shift also starts to move *Resident Evil* away from the unquestioned yet fully embraced hyper-masculinity that the series found itself taking on from *Resident Evil 4* onward. With the success of *Resident Evil VII: Biohazard*, the inevitable *Resident Evil 8* will hopefully continue this progress.

⁵⁹³ Rad, “Resident Evil 7: Biohazard Review”

⁵⁹⁴ Alexandra, Heather. “*Resident Evil 7: The Kotaku Review*”. *Kotaku.com*, under “Review”, Jan. 26, 2017. <https://kotaku.com/resident-evil-7-the-kotaku-review-1791658385> (Accessed Oct. 27, 2019).

⁵⁹⁵ Parkin, Simon. “Resident Evil 7: Biohazard Review – a masterclass in terror”. *The Guardian*, under “Technology”, Jan. 23, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jan/23/resident-evil-7-biohazard-review-a-masterclass-in-terror> (Accessed Oct. 27, 2019).

Conclusion

Horror Survives

Jill Valentine cannot believe what she is seeing. Having managed to navigate her way through the Spencer mansion, the hidden Umbrella labs, and Wesker's betrayal, she has managed to get to the helipad she saw earlier through a window in the mansion and fire a flare to signal to Brad Vickers where to land the S.T.A.R.S. helicopter. Time is of the essence, though, as the Umbrella facility's self-destruct sequence has been activated, and the timer is rapidly running down. Unfortunately, before Brad is able to land and facilitate escape for everyone, including Barry and a rescued Chris, the Tyrant, Wesker's so-called 'ultimate bioweapon', has erupted through the tarmac of the helipad intent on slaughtering the escaping survivors. Jill/the player thought that the Tyrant was no longer a threat, seemingly having dispatched it in the lab in which it was initially incubating. Instead, it has just gotten more powerful, with a lightning quick running slash attack added to its repertoire and an apparent immunity to bullets (perhaps the fight in the lab simply inoculated it to gunfire...).

Jill/the player cannot stop trying to put the Tyrant down, though – it is a matter of life-and-death, and the Tyrant cannot be allowed to escape the mansion grounds. Luckily, Jill/the player has been conserving grenade launcher and Magnum ammunition as a precaution, and so is loaded for bear. After pumping a series of grenade launcher fire rounds and Magnum bullets into the hulking bioweapon while trying desperately to avoid its razor-sharp claws, time and ammunition are quickly running out. Suddenly, Brad drops a rocket launcher from the helicopter, yelling "It's coming! Jill, kill that monster! You're an amazon, Jill!"

Rushing to the rocket launcher, Jill/the player snatches it up and aims it at the monster as it barrels down on her. Facing down the charging Tyrant, Jill/the player pulls the trigger. In the blink of an eye, the rocket fires, and as if spontaneously, the Tyrant explodes in a billow of fire, smoke, and body parts. The threat removed, Brad can land the helicopter, so all the survivors are able to board and take off as quickly as possible. The escape has happened just in time, as the mansion and its grounds erupt in a series of cataclysmic explosions, blasting apart everything below and destroying both the monsters spawned by Umbrella and the evidence of their existence. Exhausted, the survivors collapse in the chopper, relieved to escape with their lives, but certain that the fight is not over...⁵⁹⁶

Mutated Forms

Resident Evil VII: Biohazard was something of a watershed moment for the series. During the twenty plus years that the *Resident Evil* franchise has haunted the gaming landscape, it has evolved from an early attempt to understand how video games could work in 3D environments while creating real fear in the player, to a genuine phenomenon, to an action series roundly criticized for having left its horror roots behind. *Resident Evil VII*, released shortly after the series' 20th anniversary, was not just a drastic reimagining of the series, but also a return to the horror roots from which it arose.

Across these years, the series has, through its sheer longevity, provided a window into how gender attitudes amongst the developers at Capcom, and, by extension, within the video game industry have changed – for better or for worse. It is interesting to note that, as the series leaned more into the spectacle-heavy action genre, it also increasingly leaned into the more

⁵⁹⁶ This account was created from a combination of my playthrough and TurkishBullet19's *Resident Evil* Let's Play video found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moW4wLJZnHk>

misogynist conceptions of women typical of that genre, as discussed in chapter seven. Even before *Resident Evil 6*, however, the action-heavy approach influenced the gender disparity on display in the series. Compare, for example, the discussion in chapter five of the way in which Ashley is presented in *Resident Evil 4* to the way Michael Bay frames the scenes featuring Megan Fox's character in *Transformers* (Bay, 2007). Despite this seeming trend, there are still questions for which there are not, and perhaps cannot, be simple, concrete answers.

While the series might have trended towards misogyny with *Resident Evil 4-6*, *Resident Evil VII* course corrects, as it were, highlighting the problems with gender expectations in one of the core foundations of both American and Japanese societies: the family, also discussed in chapter seven. This critique calls back to the pseudo-family dynamic present in the original *Resident Evil*, suggesting a potential recognition of the power imbalance between Barry and Jill discussed in chapter one. Therefore, the simple 'is the series gender-biased/misogynist' question cannot be easily answered – even more so when looking at games like *Resident Evil 2* in chapter two or, most divisively, *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* in chapter three.

Horror Returns

Another reason questions around gender in the series cannot be easily answered is because the series is far from over. Mentioned briefly in the chapter on the original version of the game, *Resident Evil 2* received a completely overhauled remake in early 2019. This new version of *Resident Evil 2* (Capcom, 2019) incorporates elements from recent entries in the series, both in terms of gameplay and overarching narrative, while both honouring and fundamentally changing the experience offered by the original version back in 1998. Following in this trend,

Capcom is applying the same treatment to *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, releasing in early 2020⁵⁹⁷. This combined with *Resident Evil Resistance* (Capcom, 2020), a four vs. one asymmetrical multiplayer experience⁵⁹⁸ included with the purchase of the remake of *Resident Evil 3*⁵⁹⁹ means that the *Resident Evil* series continues to mutate and find ways to survive.

Resident Evil Resistance, specifically, promises to be an interesting lens through which to view the series' take on gender, offering something *Resident Evil Outbreak* did not: gender parity in the choice of characters. While the single adversarial player is cast as a male as of this writing (who looks suspiciously like, but is not related to, Albert Wesker), the other four players have an equal chance of playing as either male or female avatars⁶⁰⁰ – something that the original *Resident Evil* offered back in 1996. As the game is only in closed beta status⁶⁰¹ (again, at the time of this writing), it is unclear how *Resident Evil Resistance* will approach these characters in the final version of the game, opening up the possibility for further examination of the topic of this book.

More than a remake of a twenty-year-old game and the multiplayer experience released with it, there are rumours currently cropping up about the development of *Resident Evil 8* being discussed in the fan community. While these rumours are (yet again, as of this writing)

⁵⁹⁷ Interestingly, this remake drops the Nemesis' name from the title, distinguishing it from the original game. Capcom is still foregrounding the monster in the marketing of the game, though. (See: Capcom staff. "Resident Evil 3". *Resident Evil 3 Official Website*, 2020. <https://www.residentevil.com/re3/us/> (Accessed Feb. 15, 2020))

⁵⁹⁸ What this phrase means is that while five players are participating in the game at once, four of them are on the same team, trying to defeat the fifth player, who is given an advantage over any one opposing player. A recent example, also in the horror genre, is *Friday the 13th the Game* (Illfonic, 2017), in which one player takes the role of Jason Voorhees, while up to seven other players are cast as the camp counsellors at Camp Crystal Lake.

⁵⁹⁹ Capcom Staff, *Resident Evil 3 Official Website*

⁶⁰⁰ Capcom Staff. "Project REsistance". *Project REsistance Website*, 2019. <https://www.project-resistance.com/en/> (Accessed Oct. 28, 2019).

⁶⁰¹ Meaning that the game is still in development, but has offered access to a select group of play-testers, in order to receive feedback to further development.

unconfirmed, *Residence of Evil* on YouTube⁶⁰², *Biohazard Declassified*⁶⁰³, and ChaoticClaire on Twitter⁶⁰⁴, among others, are reporting on supposed leaks on the development of the next main entry in the game series. While, as all of the sources mentioned state these rumours should be taken with a grain of salt at present, that they are circulating at all is evidence of the series' continued longevity and relevance. As such, this discussion of gender in the series will need to extend for as long as the series does.

Neighbouring Towns

The importance of the discussion of gender in horror video games must also extend beyond the *Resident Evil* franchise. While touched upon briefly in this volume, the *Silent Hill* series is deserving of its own focus on the subject. With the rescue/escape and possession narratives present in the series, as well as the shift in development from Japanese to Western developers, and the possibility of not just one, but two new games on the horizon⁶⁰⁵, *Silent Hill* is ripe for revisiting. There is certainly no shortage of examination and discourse around *Silent Hill* 2, both academic and journalistic, but the rest of the series remains underrepresented, considering it dates back almost as far as the *Resident Evil* franchise.

Diane Carr's article, mentioned in the introduction, also highlights another series in need of more examination of its gender dynamics: *Dead Space* (EA, 2008-2013). While Carr engages

⁶⁰² Residence of Evil. "RESIDENT EVIL 8 || MORE LEAKS! | Chris Villain & Zombies With Swords!?". *YouTube.com*. Feb. 7, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iK6AI-dVJM> (Accessed Feb. 15, 2020).

⁶⁰³ Jesse. "More Resident Evil 8 Info Allegedly Surfaces [Rumor]". *Biohazard Declassified.com*, Feb. 5, 2020. <https://www.biohazardcast.com/more-resident-evil-8-info-allegedly-surfaces-rumor/> (Accessed Feb. 15, 2020).

⁶⁰⁴ ChaoticClaire (@ClaireChaotic). "New info on the #RE8 rumors". Twitter, Feb. 7, 2020, 6:20 AM. <https://twitter.com/ClaireChaotic/status/1225741068865544192> (Accessed Feb. 15, 2020)

⁶⁰⁵ Blake, Vikki. "Report: Konami has two new Silent Hill games in development". *Eurogamer.net*, under "Articles", Jan. 26, 2020. <https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2020-01-26-report-konami-has-two-new-silent-hill-games-in-development> (Accessed Feb. 15, 2020).

in a necessary discussion of representations of ability and disability in the first game⁶⁰⁶, the game couches the experience in a ‘save the damsel’ narrative. This narrative framework has been prolific in the medium since the earliest days of video games, as critiqued by Anita Sarkeesian in her three-part Tropes vs. Women in Video Games discussion on the subject⁶⁰⁷. As such, the series is built upon a foundation of patriarchal gender roles which, while this is not currently the space to argue such in-depth, the series never fully escapes.

There has also been a recent resurgence of the horror genre in video games, offering a broad canvas with which to expand the gender in horror games discussion. Games such as *Layers of Fear* (Bloober Team, 2016), *Outlast* (Red Barrels, 2014), *Soma* (Frictional Games, 2015), *Friday the 13th the Game* (IllFonic, 2017), the *Five Nights at Freddy’s* series (Scott Cawthorn, 2014-present), *Until Dawn* (SuperMassive Games, 2015), and many more have seen release, critical acclaim, and commercial success across the last decade. All of these games are both deserving of individual examination and contribute to the overall discourse on gender in horror games going forward.

Alpha Squad

This is not to say that work in these directions has not already begun. Sarah Stang has focused her research on using Creed’s monstrous feminine to examine the female monsters of Western fantasy games (video and tabletop) across a wide spectrum, such as *The Witcher* (CD Projekt Red, 2007), *God of War* (Sony Santa Monica, 2005), and *Dungeons and Dragons*. Her

⁶⁰⁶ Carr, *Ability, Disability, and Dead Space*

⁶⁰⁷ See: *Feminist Frequency* Staff. “Damsel in Distress (Part 1)”. *FeministFrequency.com*, 2013. <https://feministfrequency.com/video/damsel-in-distress-part-1/> (accessed Dec. 12, 2017); *Feminist Frequency* Staff. “Damsel in Distress (Part 2)”. *FeministFrequency.com*, 2013. <https://feministfrequency.com/video/damsel-in-distress-part-2-tropes-vs-women/> (accessed Dec. 12, 2017); *Feminist Frequency* Staff. “Damsel in Distress (Part 3)”. *FeministFrequency.com*, 2013. <https://feministfrequency.com/video/damsel-in-distress-part-3-tropes-vs-women/> (accessed Dec. 12, 2017)

article, Shrieking, Biting, and Licking, highlights the ways in which these games fall into the patriarchal order discussed by Creed in her delineation of the monstrous feminine as an adversarial construct⁶⁰⁸. Rebecca Waldie, in her chapter, You're a Hunter, Bro, directly tackles the ways in which hetero-normative masculinity is presented and problematized in *Until Dawn*, along with the ways in which this masculinity intersects with discussions of mental health and mental illness⁶⁰⁹. Her ongoing work further addresses the intersections of ethnicity and indigeneity present in the game, as well⁶¹⁰. Betsy Brey's ongoing work with the *Five Nights at Freddy's* series examines the para-narrative of the series as constructed not just by the series' creator, but by the fans as well⁶¹¹. Her discussion shows how the communal para-narrative being built suggests a deeper horror than just the surface jump-scares the series with which the series has become synonymous.

Now Leaving Raccoon City

Obviously, these are not the only scholars examining horror games, but are strong examples of the exciting directions the ideas in this dissertation can be taken for further scholarship. While hardly comprehensive (such an undertaking would wind up being two to three times more in length), it is my hope that this work has both addressed a gap in horror video game scholarship, and, by extension, screen studies in a broader sense. It is also my hope that the discussion and examination do not end here but are picked up by other scholars who will further

⁶⁰⁸ Stang, Sarah. Shrieking, Biting, and Licking: The Monstrous-Feminine and Abject Female Monsters in Video Games. *Press Start*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2018). <https://press-start.gla.ac.uk/index.php?journal=press-start&page=article&op=view&path%5B%5D=85> (accessed Feb. 18, 2020).

⁶⁰⁹ Waldie, Rebecca. You're a Hunter, Bro: Representations of Masculinity in *Until Dawn*. *Masculinities in Play*. Ed. Nicholas Taylor and Gerald Voorhees. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Pg. 71-92.

⁶¹⁰ See: Waldie, Rebecca. "The Horror of the Other: Indigenous Monstrosity in *Until Dawn*". Presented at CGSA 2019, June 7, 2019.

⁶¹¹ See: Brey, Betsy. "'FNaf Can't be Solved!': Para-Narrative Structure in *Five Nights at Freddy's*". Presented at CGSA 2019, June 5, 2019.

the ideas present here, challenge them, and re-shape the discussion by way of their contributions. Much like the bioweapons produced by Umbrella and its successors, it is my hope that the topic will rise up over and over again.

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