

Virtual Canadian Realities: Charting the Scott Pilgrim Universe

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Résumé de l'article

L'auteur examine, par une analyse politico-économique et textuelle et du point de vue de la narration transmédia, la franchise Scott Pilgrim, qui comprend une série de romans graphiques, un long métrage et un jeu vidéo. Ce faisant, l'auteur met l'accent sur le fait que la franchise élabore en réseau international une image de l'identité anglo-canadienne reposant sur une représentation sélective de Toronto. Cette représentation situe de la ville comme un filtre culturel pour des médias dont la production est mondialisée. L'auteur soutient que la narration transmédia présente un monde fictionnel très fragmenté, chaque forme de médium ajoutant une strate supplémentaire d'interprétation. En même temps, il insiste sur le fait que la franchise Scott Pilgrim fait appel à une stratégie narrative couramment reliée au « réalisme magique » mais qu'il serait peut-être plus clair, dans le cas de la narration transmédia, de désigner comme une forme de « réalisme virtuel ». De ce point de vue, tout en reconnaissant que l'univers fictionnel de Scott Pilgrim illustre les préoccupations des Canadiens quant au rôle joué par les technologies dans la construction de l'identité, l'auteur souligne que la franchise tire également parti d'une nostalgie relayée plus largement par les réseaux mondiaux qui porte sur les jeux vidéos classiques.

*Virtual Canadian Realities:
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Abstract

Through a mixture of political-economic and textual analysis, this article examines the Scott Pilgrim franchise, consisting of a series of graphic novels, feature film, and video game, from a transmedia storytelling perspective. By doing so, the author insists that the franchise constructs a globally networked vision of English-Canadian identity through a selective representation of Toronto that situates the city as a cultural filter for globally produced media. While arguing that transmedia storytelling presents a highly fractured fictional universe, with each form of media adding an additional layer of interpretation, the article calls attention to how the Scott Pilgrim franchise utilizes a narrative strategy commonly referred to as “magical realism,” which in the case of transmedia storytelling is perhaps better understood as a form of “virtual realism.” From this perspective, while admitting that the Scott Pilgrim fictional universe exhibits Canadian concerns over the role technologies play in the construction of identity, the author insists that the franchise also draws upon a broader internationally networked nostalgia for classic video games.

Résumé

L'auteur examine, par une analyse politico-économique et textuelle et du point de vue de la narration transmédia, la franchise Scott Pilgrim, qui comprend une série de romans graphiques, un long métrage et un jeu vidéo. Ce faisant, l'auteur met l'accent sur le fait que la franchise élabore en réseau international une image de l'identité anglo-canadienne reposant sur une représentation sélective de Toronto. Cette représentation situe de la ville comme un filtre culturel pour des médias dont la production est mondialisée. L'auteur soutient que la narration transmédia présente un monde fictionnel très fragmenté, chaque forme de médium ajoutant une strate supplémentaire d'interprétation. En même temps, il insiste sur le fait que la franchise Scott Pilgrim fait appel à une stratégie narrative couramment reliée au « réalisme magique » mais qu'il serait peut-être plus clair, dans le cas de la narration transmédia, de désigner comme une forme de « réalisme virtuel ». De ce point de vue, tout en reconnaissant que l'univers fictionnel de Scott Pilgrim illustre les préoccupations des Canadiens quant au rôle joué par les technologies dans la construction de l'identité, l'auteur souligne que la franchise tire également parti d'une nostalgie relayée plus largement par les réseaux mondiaux qui porte sur les jeux vidéos classiques.

When considering the increasing difficulty of identifying the national characteristics of globally produced media, the Scott Pilgrim franchise, consisting of a series of graphic novels, a film, and a video game, is a rare depiction of a Canadian locality represented within an internationally produced transmedia franchise. The basic premise of the *Scott Pilgrim* story revolves around the structure of unemployed video game playing Scott having to battle seven evil ex-boyfriends in order to win the love of Ramona Flowers, a roller-blading American ex-patriot. As Scott fights Ramona's evil exes, the streets of Toronto become comically infused with elements of digital media usually associated with the virtual worlds of video games in a manner reminiscent of magically realist narrative modes. From this perspective, the franchise serves as a useful example for investigating how globalized media production is working to reshape the production of Canadian identity.

In order to sift through the myriad ways in which the franchise speaks about the contemporary Canadian condition, this essay will provide both a political-economic and textual analysis of the Scott Pilgrim fictional universe. While there are certain drawbacks to mixing both approaches, as political-economic theoretical perspectives place a stronger emphasis on the role of capital, Henry Jenkins work on transmedia storytelling provides a useful theoretical window for drawing from both perspectives. Before beginning, it is important to note that the concept of transmedia storytelling is by no means perfect; the assertion that transmedia stories can provide more immersive experiences is an interpretation of the theory with which this article takes issue. However, Jenkins' concept does provide a useful framework for discussing how a film, video game, and graphic novel series intertextually construct a vision of English-Canada based on a selective interpretation of Toronto that poses the city as a cultural filter for internationally produced media.

The Political Economy of Transmedia Storytelling

The Scott Pilgrim concept was created by Canadian graphic novelist Brian Lee O'Malley in a series of graphic novels, brought to the big screen by British director Edgar Wright, and released as a downloadable video game by Ubisoft Montreal. While all three of these products can be discussed separately, the graphic novels, film, and game are rich with references to the other media, including alternative narrative scenarios found in each product. An interesting example of the franchise's intertextual playfulness occurs when the ending of the film *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* significantly alters the plot structure of the graphic novel *Scott Pilgrim's Finest Hour* prompting a character to insist that "the comic book is better than the movie." In addition, when Scott earns an extra life in the film, the 8-bit icon is a version of his avatar from the Ubisoft game. From this perspective, the Scott Pilgrim franchise can be productively analyzed as a form of transmedia storytelling that creates a fictional universe expanding beyond the confines of a single text. However, much like the cultural flows

currently shaping globalized multimedia production, this fictional universe is lacking narrative cohesion, which I will return to later.

In *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Henry Jenkins advances the concept of transmedia storytelling to describe how the development of new technologies coupled with an increased concentration of horizontally integrated media ownership has created an environment where stories “unfold across multiple media platforms” (95). This new approach emphasizes “the art of world making” where consumers “assume the role of hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels” (21) sustaining “a depth of experience that motivates more consumption” (96). There are certainly drawbacks to Jenkins’ concept, such as the possible assertion that the sum of separate and often disparate media products can be combined by the audience into a more immersive experience. In addition, the question of authorship arises, as the profit motive behind spinning a ‘high concept’ story through multiple media outlets creates situations where corporations are arguably the primary authors of transmedia stories. However, while such criticisms are certainly valid, Jenkins also calls attention to the fact that there is little “aesthetic criteria” for evaluating transmedia stories, insisting that many current franchises have yet to achieve the “full aesthetic potential” of the practice (96–97). From this perspective, at the time of writing, transmedia narrative universes are predominantly fractured with each new media product creating an additional layer of interpretation that often includes competing narrative outcomes. As a result, these narrative worlds are actually less immersive, consisting of conflicting plot points and characterizations. Instead of chasing down bits of a story, fans are experiencing multiple stories within continually evolving dynamic narrative universes, often quite schizophrenic in nature. In many respects, the narrative confusion created by these worlds makes them useful examples for a confusing world where neoliberal globalization is rapidly eroding traditional societal structures.

When considering the increased global dissemination that transmedia production allows, the *Scott Pilgrim* franchise is a rare representation of Canadian locality within an internationally produced multimedia franchise. At the graphic novel level, the use of local details is a distinctive aspect of Brian Lee O’Malley’s style, as mainstream comics are set predominantly in fictional locations with many artists preferring the visual flexibility of fantasy worlds. As a result, by incorporating local landmarks, like the CN tower, the *Scott Pilgrim* franchise constructs a sense of Toronto by incorporating urban landmarks, Canadian currency, and a slacker hero.

When considering the immense attention to local details found in the graphic novel series—right down to the type of fries served in Southwestern Ontario high schools—it is important to note that the novels were originally published by Oni Press, a U.S. company operating out of Portland, Oregon.

When the series developed a healthy fan base, it was optioned by Universal Pictures, which produced the film *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* outside of the United States as well. On the surface, this case has the odour of Canadian creative workers flooding into America, where O'Malley now resides, in order to work on larger projects the Canadian industry is unable to finance. However, when looked at more closely, the *Scott Pilgrim* franchise exhibits some interesting wrinkles, the most important being that fact that *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World: The Game* (2010), was published by Ubisoft Montreal, a Canadian branch of an international video game publisher originating in France, for distribution over the Microsoft Xbox and Sony PlayStation online networks. So while the components of the *Scott Pilgrim* franchise most traditionally associated with old media are produced in United States, the franchise eventually made its way back to Canada by way of a video game.

On the surface, it would be reasonable to insist that the decision to produce the game in Canada was culturally motivated, as Montreal has a reputation for being one of the most creative cities in North America. Interestingly, both the graphic novel and the film depict the city in this fashion as Scott's ex-girlfriend, Envy Adams, dumps Scott so she can move to Montreal to start a new band, The Clash at Demonhead, who become an independent sensation. However, while Montreal is depicted as a cultural centre, The Clash at Demonhead are all evil pretentious English-speaking hipsters, representing a long-standing cultural divide between Toronto and Montreal. In addition, both the film and graphic novel series reflect a Torontonians's stereotypical perception of pretentious Montrealers when Scott defeats Todd (Ramona's evil ex and Envy's current boyfriend) after the Vegan Police confiscate his superpowers for the hypocritical ingestion of animal by-product (*Scott Pilgrim and the Infinite Sadness* chapter 18).

From this perspective, while a cultural argument can certainly be made for the decision to produce the game in Montreal, the reasoning was likely financial, as the Quebec provincial government provides lucrative tax subsidies to the video game industry. According to *The New York Times*, Ubisoft has heavily invested in Montreal production facilities because they receive tax breaks equal to 37.5 percent of each employee's salary (Kocieniewski A1). As a result, critics like Jason Magder insist that despite being the third largest urban producer of video games in the world, the Montreal industry "lacks a homegrown quality" because it is supported by international companies that can quickly transfer production facilities to more lucrative areas if tax incentives are repealed (n.p.). When considering the problems of associating video game production with national culture, it becomes difficult to insist that *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World: The Game* was produced in Montreal for cultural reasons. It is also important to remember that video games are still a relatively young medium, making the insistence that the Montreal games industry lacks "a homegrown quality" premature.

In addition, there are tremendous difficulties associated with applying a nationalist discourse to video game aesthetics, as the industry has always been highly global in nature. However, as is often the case with the globalization of media production, localities do not simply disappear. As the focus of this paper shifts to textual analysis, it becomes necessary to explore how the Scott Pilgrim fictional universe constructs a highly selective interpretation of Toronto as a means of grounding the story through a narrative strategy reminiscent of “magical realism,” a highly contested literary term identified as a recurring theme in Canadian fiction.

Transmediated Toronto

As a generation of Canadians who grew up consuming both nationally and internationally produced media begin to tell their stories, local/global binaries no longer apply. From this perspective, instead of offering a conservative vision of an English Canadian identity steeped in hockey, beavers, and maple syrup, the Scott Pilgrim fictional universe presents the city of Toronto as a cultural filter for internationally produced media. When considering this depiction, it is important to recognize that Toronto is one of the most multicultural cities in the world. However, instead of sliding into a Trudeau-esque vision of Canada as a great cultural mosaic, it is important to recognize that Toronto is not a utopia. Multicultural arrangements do not encompass all cultures; people are always left out of any given mix. In many respects, Scott Pilgrim’s transmediated vision of Toronto is a mixture of white and Asian culture, highlighting localities from the city’s more affluent downtown neighborhoods, such as the Annex and Queen West, predominantly populated by students and young professionals. Areas on the outskirts of the city, like Jane and Finch, which have predominantly black populations, are noticeably absent from the series, reflecting Toronto’s economic divide spurred by young wealthy residents acquiring downtown property.

In addition, Scott Pilgrim is a white heterosexual male protagonist, which the franchise attempts to negotiate in similar, albeit slightly different ways. As mentioned previously, the basic premise of the *Scott Pilgrim* fictional universe revolves around a video game influenced plot structure of Scott battling seven evil ex-boyfriends to win the love of Ramona Flowers. On the surface, one can easily spot a familiar folk storyline that often appears within video games where a young man must struggle to grow up and conquer hostile forces within his environment in order to save the princess, win the love of a girl, or rescue his long lost sister who also happens to be a princess. However, what makes the Scott Pilgrim structure different is how this model has been tweaked. In both the graphic novels and film, Scott learns that Ramona’s fourth evil ex is actually a girl she experimented with in college (*Scott Pilgrim Gets it Together* 108–9). Furthermore, in the ending of the film and graphic novel series, Ramona must join Scott to help him defeat Gideon, her most powerful ex. In a manner

that goes against the familiar structure of the hero rescuing the princess, while simultaneously invoking a video game's replayability, the film has Scott fail in his first solo attempt to save Ramona, but he is lucky enough to have an extra life, which permits him to retry the final "level" and fight Gideon again. In the second battle, he must first admit to his infidelities in order to gain the support of Ramona and his previous girlfriend, Knives Chau (absent from the graphic novel ending), allowing all three of them to team up and defeat the smarmy record executive.

The idea of Scott not being able to save Ramona on his own also filters down into the formal aspects of *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World: The Game*. As critics like Billy O'Keefe have suggested, "like its influences, Pilgrim is a tough game even on its default setting" ("Scott Pilgrim a Blissful Hit" N17). In a manner similar to many side-scrolling fighting games, players are often swarmed by enemies, making it exceedingly difficult to complete the game in single player mode. To defeat the immensely difficult Gideon, the best strategy is to team up instead of playing solo. The game can also be played as Ramona rather than Scott, providing an alternative to the hegemonically masculine rescue the princess scenario.

Scott's Agency

In the graphic novels and film, contemporary relationships become a game space where Scott can accomplish specific goals and earn rewards, in contrast to the reality in which he lives. Outside of the "magically realistic" boss battles, Scott has very little agency. He is an unemployed university graduate taken in by Wallace Wells, his gay best friend who comically forces Scott to share a bed, even when one of his lovers is spending the evening. He plays in a band overshadowed by the musical success of Envy Adams, the girl who dumped him, he thinks, because of a bad haircut. To sum things up, in his real life Scott is emasculated; he only experiences agency in the "magical" boss battles.

Note that none of the characters within the franchise actually has a career-oriented job. Despite being university graduates, many work in the service industry selling phones (Wallace Wells), making coffee (Stacy Pilgrim), delivering CDs (Ramona Flowers), and preparing food (Stephen Stills). In a telling sequence from the film, Scott walks into a Second Cup to discover that Julie Powers, who also works part-time at No Account Video, is working the cash register there as well. As Julie unleashes a tirade of expletives over Scott's decision to pursue Ramona despite previous warnings, Scott asks if there is "anywhere you don't work"; to which she responds by saying "They're called jobs; something a #@%k ball like you wouldn't know anything about." While it may be easy to overlook this sequence, it adds a certain degree of depth to Julie's character; a university graduate working two part-time jobs definitely has reason to be bitchy. From this perspective, in contrast to popular media depictions of affluent youth, characters in the Scott Pilgrim franchise do not

have swanky new economy jobs running websites and blogs; they all are confined to service sector labour selling coffee, washing dishes, and working in retail. From this perspective, while the Scott Pilgrim franchise shows a Toronto that focuses on affluent neighborhoods, its young characters are by no means affluent.

Furthermore, while Scott is emasculated numerous times in the graphic novels and the film, white heteronormativity is not uniformly critiqued throughout the entire franchise. In many respects, the graphic novels are far more critical of Scott's character than the film and accompanying video game. In *Scott Pilgrim's Finest Hour*, the sixth and final edition of the graphic novel series, Scott finally realizes that his memories of previous relationships are selective and that he treated past partners far worse than he had believed (67–72). O'Malley thus presents an alternative depiction of Scott questioning whether his heroic victories over Ramona's exes were really nothing more than selfish acts of violence. In addition, Scott attempts to seduce Knives Chau, who refuses, insisting that she deserves someone who will treat her better (26–34). In the graphic novel version, Scott actually fights his evil alter ego from the past, the Negascott, in order to destroy his dark side metaphorically (73–87). In contrast, the film is far less critical of Scott's character, requiring him to simply apologize for cheating on both Knives Chau and Ramona, who in turn help him defeat Gideon. Scott's evil alter ego does show up at the end, but the two humorously decide to be friends when they realize they actually have a lot in common. *Scott Pilgrim's Finest Hour* is also more critical of heteronormativity, as Stephen Stills reveals he is gay by sharing a kiss with Joseph (229) in an ending that differs from the film, where it is assumed that Steven is straight. From this perspective, the graphic novel series is more progressive than the film and video game.

The various depictions of Wallace Wells, Scott's gay best friend, provide useful examples for interrogating the way each medium in the Scott Pilgrim franchise provides a different take on queer identity. In *Scott Pilgrim Get's it Together*, Scott actually walks in on Wallace having sex with a random partner. While the comic does not include a visual depiction of two gay men in a love scene, the incident prompts Wallace to kick Scott out of his apartment (128–30). This representation is complicated, as it reinforces stereotypes of promiscuous homosexuality while simultaneously challenging the mainstream media's asexualization of gay males. The comic does not visually depict gay sex, but at least Wallace gets to have sex. In the film version, Wallace Wells (Kieran Culkin) is shown in bed with Scott, and two presumed random sexual partners. When Scott admits to turning down Ramona's request for sex, the three men ironically criticize him for being gay. In this case, while Wallace is shown as being sexually active, the stereotype of promiscuous homosexuality is once again reinforced. However, since such a depiction occurs during a

joke, once could arguably suggest that the film is critiquing this stereotype in a satirical manner.

In comparison with both the film and graphic novels, *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World: The Game* contains the most stereotypical representation of Wallace Wells. Despite being one of the franchise's main characters, Wallace is not a playable avatar. Instead, he simply appears as the owner of a secret shop where players can purchase upgrades. From this perspective, Wallace's video game version conforms to the stereotype of asexual gay males acting as cheerleaders for heterosexual romance.

Considering this characterization of Wallace Wells, the game most dramatically departs from the rest of the series, despite being the only element of the franchise produced in Canada. As mentioned previously, the Scott Pilgrim graphic novels and film appear to be an example of magical realism, which critics have associated with emerging trends in Canadian fiction. However, when considering both the technical and cultural differences in media, describing *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World: The Game* as a form of magical realism is highly problematic because video game worlds are rarely associated with reality. In order to expand on this point, it becomes necessary to examine the concept of magical realism and how it can be applied productively to transmedia storytelling.

Virtual Canadian Realism

When considering the plot structure of the graphic novels and film, the Scott Pilgrim fictional universe mixes a conception of reality with virtuality in a manner similar to that often described as magical realism, an often-contested term where supernatural elements are blended into a realistic atmosphere. For Maggie Ann Bowers, magical realism is best understood as a narrative mode used to discuss "alternative approaches to reality to that of Western Philosophy, expressed in many post-colonial and non-Western works of contemporary fiction" (1). According to Bowers,

In Canada, as in the United States, where the dominant culture is based upon an Anglo-European tradition, writers wishing to express one or more cultural influences which do not coincide with the dominant pragmatic thinking often employ magical realism. As Canada is one of the most consciously multicultural nations in the world, and a nation marginalized by previous British Colonialism and current American Neo-Colonialism, magical realism becomes a useful narrative device for expressing views that oppose the dominant ways of thinking. There is space even for contradiction in a magical realist text and so it allows for the expression of multiple cultural perspectives. (52)

While insisting that the Scott Pilgrim franchise opposes dominant ways of thinking may be a bit hyperbolic due to the way the franchise conforms to

dominant production practices, the series does oppose dominant upper-class depictions of youth. In addition, what makes the Scott Pilgrim narrative different from the types of works usually described as magical realism are the fantastical elements penetrating Toronto, which are not derived from local folk tales. Instead, the virtual elements invading the city are steeped in an internationally networked video game culture. As a result, the Scott Pilgrim universe constructs a vision of Toronto as a cultural filter for globally produced media, which can be traced through the video game production network.

Hybrid Gaming Culture

In “Console Video Games and Global Corporations: Creating a Hybrid Culture,” Mia Consalvo describes the video game industry as “a hybrid composed of mostly Japanese and US firms that carefully intermix Japanese and US culture in their games” (118). This organization creates a situation where it is “difficult if not impossible to determine a singular national source for these cultural products (much less gauge their accuracy), given the transnational nature of corporations” (119). From this perspective, while “Japanese dominance in console manufacturing, combined with popular games make them an integral part of the video game industry in America—a part that informs, drives and often leads” (122), “the game industry is significant in that it has never been the product of one particular culture. Even in its ‘glocal’ instances, when translation will not work and games are country specific, evidence of the transcultural can be found” (123).

When considering Consalvo’s perspective, the difficulty of using nationalistic discourses to examine globally produced cultural products becomes apparent. Unfortunately, when dealing with transmedia productions where creative labour is divided into multiple teams of workers often operating out of different countries, relying on romantic artistic discourses as a means of nationalizing a particular work becomes difficult. This issue is especially problematic when dealing with the comics and video games that heavily influence the Scott Pilgrim fictional universe, as both forms of media have yet to spawn extensive canons of creative individuals recognized as artists of national importance.

However, as is often the case with globalization, localities do simply disappear. In “Video Game Production Networks: Value Capture, Power Relations and Embeddedness,” Jennifer Johns insists that “video games, despite their high-technology image, are cultural goods that are read in specific ways depending on the locality in which they are produced” (173). Mia Consalvo echoes a similar point, admitting that while the digital games industry has never been confined to a single country, “demands of the local still shape cultural products as they travel around the world” (120). Contrary to the belief that video games are completely lacking in local perspectives, *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World: The Game* incorporates the same Toronto locations that appear throughout the franchise with different game levels depicting Bloor Street,

Castle Loma, and Lee's Palace. However, while the game does incorporate Canadian locations in terms of digital games one should be wary of drawing essentialist notions of national identity because, as Mia Consalvo suggests, games "signify where the global flow finally arrives at local markets, and how it is understood, accepted, embraced, or perhaps rejected in that local" (127).

As many game critics have observed, in terms of both formal and artistic inspiration, *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World: The Game* borrows heavily from 8-bit side-scrolling "beat 'em ups" like *River City Ransom* (American Technos 1989) and *Double Dragon* (Technos Japan 1987) originally produced by Japanese companies influenced by post-war American culture. In addition, the game utilizes an overview map intermixing notable Toronto locations, like the CN tower, with selectable levels that nostalgic gamers will quickly recognize as paying homage to maps of the mushroom kingdom found in Shigeru Miyamoto's iconic *Super Mario Brothers Three*. From this perspective, in *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World: The Game*, Toronto is depicted virtually in a fashion reminiscent of previous Japanese depictions of fictional American cities.

When considering *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World: The Game* from a transmedia storytelling perspective, applying the concept of magical realism to a video game is highly problematic. In *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Video Games*, Ian Bogost insists that games can be understood as forms of procedural rhetoric that convey meaning by selectively modelling real systems. For Bogost, these games can be viewed as "a representation of a source system via a less complex system that informs the user's understanding of the source system in a subjective way" (98). From this perspective, *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World: The Game* cannot have a realistic atmosphere that magical elements can be blended into because video games simulate real systems in expressive ways. However, the opposite is actually true: the game actually has a magical atmosphere into which realistic elements can be blended.

Furthermore, when considering the Scott Pilgrim fictional universe in its entirety, it is useful to think about the franchise as a form of virtual realism that emphasizes a two-way street approach where elements often associated with the virtual domains of gaming, the Internet, and portable media devices are blended into a realistic atmosphere, while elements associated with real locations, such as the CN Tower, Casa Loma, and Sneaky Dee's, are blended into a virtual atmosphere. In addition, it is important to understand that the origins of these elements do not stem from a national folk culture, but rather from a global network of video game production.

Digitally Networked Nostalgia

In many respects, by drawing on the international cultural of video games, the Scott Pilgrim fictional universe can be seen as an important example exhibiting a broader shift in media demographics as generations who grew up playing

video games begin to tell their stories. From this perspective, by referencing classic 8-bit games, the franchise taps into a broader internationally networked nostalgia for early graphical formats commonly associated with the immensely popular Nintendo Entertainment System and Commodore 64 series of personal computers. Some notable examples of the plethora of video game references made throughout the franchise are found in the film's introduction. The familiar Universal Pictures logo is shown in an 8-bit graphic format accompanied by an 8-bit rendition of the studio's orchestral score, each graphic novel's title art, which mimic the fonts from classic video game boxes, and the art design of the video game, which incorporates blocky 8-bit influenced avatars.

While the franchise contains many more instances where video games are referenced, it is important to note that the graphic novel series is drawn in a style that bears a striking resemblance to Japanese manga. So while the *Scott Pilgrim* fictional universe is heavily steeped in hybrid culture, the franchise is not necessarily trying to pin down hybrid cultural forms through the process of localization as much as it is attempting to redefine Toronto's place within a broader post-national globally networked culture. In this, it is similar to what Scott Mackenzie has identified as a Canadian cinema obsessed with questioning "the hybrid image-space created in the Canadian imagescape" (14–15).

Furthermore, while the Scott Pilgrim franchise exhibits familiar paradoxes found within Canadian writing and film, the influence of a globally networked video game culture signals a new direction in which Canadian localities are defined as nodes within an international network of production extending beyond more traditional cultural relations with the British Commonwealth, France, and the United States to incorporate the increasing influence of Asian culture.

Conclusion

While the decision to produce *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World: The Game* in Montreal was an economic one, Ubisoft Montreal's decision to release the title in an 8-bit format was primarily cultural. The framework, however, was not reflective of nationalistic Canadian culture, as the franchise's many references to classic 8-bit games reflect the broader sense of digital nostalgia emerging within a globally networked gaming culture. In the introduction to *Playing the Past: History and Nostalgia in Video Games*, Zach Whalen and Laurie N. Taylor describe the emergence of digital nostalgia as the sign of a generational shift within media demographics:

As the so-called "Nintendo Generation" has matured, we have grown to associate video games with our early childhood and adolescence, and our memories of those iconic characters of those early games become a way of activating nostalgia for that period. In this way, video games themselves have become quotations of our shared past, referencing their role in a general experience of youth. (6)

From this perspective, while the Scott Pilgrim fictional universe is highly fractured, by invoking digital nostalgia, it draws from the globally networked shared experiences of early game play as a means of commenting on the contemporary reality that youth both within and beyond Canada's borders are facing. However, while nostalgia for early games transcends national boundaries, the Scott Pilgrim franchise also provides a selective depiction of Toronto, serving as a reminder that localities do not simply disappear, but are increasingly split within a larger networked structure that is actively reshaping the production of Canadian identity.

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