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Artur da Conceição Camargo

“ENTER THE SURVIVAL HORROR”:

a case study of narrativity, ergodics and flexi-narrative in *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* and *Resident Evil: Village*

PORTO ALEGRE
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Orientadora: Profª Drª Elaine Barros Indrusiak

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— Groovy!
— That is not groovy.
(Jack Baker to Ethan Winters, in reference to *Evil Dead 2*)

ABSTRACT

This Undergraduate thesis presents a comparative and qualitative case study on narrativity, ergodics, and the flexi-narrative structure in the electronic games *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* (2017) and *Resident Evil: Village* (2021). Taking into account the growing market and the need to expand the area of Game Studies in the Brazilian academic context — given its the multidisciplinary nature —, this research investigates how the two objects constitute an articulated duology within the transmedia franchise *Resident Evil* (1996-present), in the form of a flexi-narrative. To this end, the study analyzes the mechanical organization of cybertext and the concept of ergodic processing developed by Espen Aarseth (1997), with the concepts of fabula, sujet, narrative, narrativity, and the dynamic system of gaps, all of which are anchored in the perspective of Functionalist Narratology and the writings of Meir Sternberg (1978; 2006). Furthermore, the studies of flexi-narrative developed by Robin Nelson (1997) and the analyses of Colin Burnett (2024) assist in the mapping of episodic and self-sufficient narrative structures, which nevertheless fill expository gaps in a macrostructure, originating a serialized narrative — studies that, although dealing with media products such as soap operas and movie sagas, can also be applied to the context of electronic games through association with the concepts of cybertext and ergodics. To verify these concepts, a case study was carried out with the two objects, in addition to a comparative analysis, which sought to constitute the transmedia storyworld of the franchise, establishing its mythos, topos, and ethos, according to the studies of Klastrup and Tosca (2004) and Marie-Laure Ryan (2019), in addition to organizing the transtextual relations of the objects of study with other media internal and external to the franchise, making use of Thomas Leitch's (2007) adaptation-allusion gradient. Regarding the specifics of narrative and ergodic relations, it was necessary to revisit Jakobson’s (1978) Dominant, expanding his discussions through Aarseth's (2012) ontic model between the narrative-ludic axes and the ergodic-narrative gradient proposed by Lopes (2023), when evaluating the importance of certain elements of the ergodic narratives in question, besides reworking Gérard Genette's (1971) concept of paratext. The research results demonstrate the validity of the hypothesis, since both narrative-games operate in a self-contained manner, while also revitalizing the franchise and allowing integration into the macro-sujet of the serialized narrative, through influenceable narrative satellites, both by player actions and by the peritextual nature of certain items that

populate the ludic space. Beyond that, the mapping of the transtextual relations results in a mosaic of pastiches, colonizations, revisions and allusions (*cf.* Leitch, 2007) to media products external and internal to the franchise. Finally, despite the introduction of choices that have consequences in the narrative cores of the seventh game, generating multiple sujets, the need for integration into a serialized narrative imposes a dominance over ergodics, favoring one narrative core to the detriment of the other to determine the continuity of the franchise through a direct sequel and subduing the ergodic impact.

Keywords: Cybertext; Ergodics; Flexi-narrative; Functionalist Narratology; *Resident Evil*.

RESUMO

Este Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso apresenta um estudo de caso comparativo e qualitativo sobre a narratividade, a ergodicidade e a estrutura flexi-narrativa nos jogos eletrônicos *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* (2017) e *Resident Evil: Village* (2021). Levando em consideração a crescente expansão do mercado e a necessidade de expandir a área de Estudo de Jogos (*Game Studies*) no contexto acadêmico brasileiro — dado seu caráter multidisciplinar —, esta pesquisa investiga como os dois objetos constituem uma duologia articulada dentro da franquia transmídia *Resident Evil* (1996-atualidade), na forma de uma flexi-narrativa. Para tal, o estudo analisa a organização mecânica do cibertexto e o conceito de processamento ergódico elaborados por Espen Aarseth (1997), associados aos conceitos de fabula, sujet, narrativa, narratividade e o sistema dinâmico de lacunas, ancorados na perspectiva da Narratologia Funcionalista e os escritos de Meir Sternberg (1978; 2006). Além disso, os estudos de flexi-narrativa de Robin Nelson (1997) e as análises de Colin Burnett (2024) auxiliam no mapeamento de estruturas narrativas episódicas e autossuficientes, mas que preenchem lacunas expositivas em uma macroestrutura, originando uma narrativa seriada — estudos que, embora tratem de produtos midiáticos como novelas e sagas de filmes, também podem ser aplicados ao contexto de jogos eletrônicos por meio da associação com os conceitos de cibertexto e ergodicidade. Para verificar estes conceitos, foi realizado um estudo de caso com os dois objetos, além de uma análise comparativa, que buscou constituir o *storyworld* transmídia da franquia e seu *mythos, topos* e *ethos*, conforme os estudos de Klastrup e Tosca (2004) e Marie-Laure Ryan (2019), além de organizar as relações transtextuais dos objetos de estudo com outras mídias internas e externas à franquia, fazendo uso do gradiente adaptação-alusão de Thomas Leitch (2007). Quanto aos específicos das relações narrativa e ergodicidade, foi necessário revisitar o Dominante de Jakobson (1978), ampliando-o por meio do modelo ôntico de Aarseth (2012) entre os eixos narrativo-lúdico e do gradiente ergódico-narrativo proposto por Lopes (2023), ao se avaliar a importância de determinados elementos dos jogos-narrativos em questão, além de retrabalhar o conceito de paratexto de Gérard Genette (1971). Os resultados da pesquisa demonstram a validade da hipótese, uma vez que ambos os jogos-narrativos operam de maneira autocontida, ao mesmo tempo que revitalizam a franquia e permitem uma integração ao macro-sujet seriado, por meio de satélites narrativos

influenciáveis, tanto por ações do/da jogador/a quanto pelo caráter peritextual de determinados itens do espaço lúdico. Além disso, o mapeamento das relações transtextuais resulta em um mosaico de pastiches, colonizações, revisões e alusões (*cf.* Leitch, 2007) com relação a produtos midiáticos externos e internos à franquia. Por fim, apesar da introdução de escolhas que possuem consequências significativas nos núcleos narrativos do sétimo jogo, gerando múltiplos sujets, a necessidade de integração a uma narrativa seriada impõe uma dominância sobre a ergodicidade, favorecendo um núcleo narrativo em detrimento do outro para determinar a continuidade da franquia por meio de uma sequência direta.

Palavras-chave: Cibertexto; Ergodicidade; Flexi-narrativa; Narratologia Funcionalista; *Resident Evil*.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BSAA — Bioterrorism Security Assessment Alliance

CGI(s) — Computer Generated Image(s)

DLC(s) — Downloadable Content(s)

E3 — Electronic Entertainment Expo

IP(s) — Intellectual Property/Properties

PC(s) — Personal Computer(s)

RE — Resident Evil

RE4 — Resident Evil 4

RE7 — Resident Evil 7: Biohazard

RE8 — Resident Evil: Village

PSVR — Sony's Playstation Virtual Reality Headset

VR — Virtual Reality

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1. INTRODUCTION

The industry of video games is a growing phenomenon, especially when compared to those of other, more consolidated media products. The moving picture, for instance, was taking its first steps at the latter half of the 19th century — with some of its oldest records, such as *The Horse in Motion,* dating back to 1878 — and comic magazines such as *The Glasgow Looking Glass* (1825) date even further back in time. Video games, in comparison, have had a more recent outburst since their inception, and this, combined with their rapid changing nature, results in a lack of a consolidated tradition in regards to its critical and theoretical studies.

While some prototypical computer games were first created to exhibit the computing power of their respective machines, gaming would only become a mainstream activity in the 1970s, with the release of *Pong* (1972) and the novelty of home consoles. Even so, while these entries featured a new form of interaction with media products, it was still a rudimentary example of what the industry would create. Similar to experimentations in other fields, video games soon evolved into multiple different forms, encompassing narrativity (or lack of it) alongside different pictorial, audio and mechanical constructions. These changes, all impactful for gameplay, rendered a multitude of different experiences for the user(s), allowing for a different form of relationship between them and the media.

Considering the concept of cybertext, established by Espen Aarseth (1997) as a text that is mechanically organized in a way that requires non-trivial effort from its user — effectuating a semiotic sequence that the concepts of "reading" cannot account for — video games are, in essence, a new form of textuality, and the merging of language, audio, image and user input vastly differ from what the reader may consider the elementary traits of a literary text. Not only that, but as narrativity becomes an optional trait to qualify a video game, a clear difference from the literary medium is created. Taking that into consideration, the field of Literary Studies is not sufficient to the analysis of video games, as viewing them only through this lens can render a vain effort. Nonetheless, the evolution of the industry and the creation of narrative media products brings them closer to narrative literature, and considering the infancy of Game Studies as an area, the use of theoretical references from Literature and other media studies assisted by

the concepts of cybertext and ergodics can help investigate and contrast the workings of these media products.

As game narratives have evolved into serial forms, the development of sagas and transmedial franchises with specific storyworlds reinforced the similarities with other narrative media, while also allowing for experimentation with the mechanics and the sequencing of the works. This study, then, aims to analyze two games that use the medium to constitute a narrative, but whose narrativity is deeply interlinked with the ergodic processing of the cybertext (that is, the extranoematic actions made by the user). The objects of study here are *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* (2017) *(RE7,* also stylized as *RESIDENT E**VII**.: biohazard)* and *Resident Evil: Village* (2021) *(RE8,* also stylized as *RESIDENT EVIL: **VII**.**I**.AGE)*, two titles of the *Resident Evil* franchise, which, as of today, includes vastly different media products, such as movies, comic books and mainly video games.

The choice for these two objects of study comes from the perception that they can demonstrate some important aspects of narrativity and ergodics in video games. Considering that both texts constitute a "duology" within the fabula and sujet of their franchise, their relation to previous installments operates within a different framework to most video game — and general media — sequels. The hypothesis of this comparative case study is that both *Resident Evil 7* and *Resident Evil: Village* present the user with a broader flexi-narrative (Nelson, 1997) that can be further expanded to the overall franchise: being episodic and self-contained, while filling in the expositional gaps with a connected serial narration. This, however, is enacted differently from other media, such as film and literature, since the change in ergodics impacts the perception of these texts by the users and their integration within the franchise.

Beyond the constitution of a duology, the insertion of both of these texts into the canon of *Resident Evil* sets precedent for a series of remakes and retcons of the previous iterations: with the release of *Resident Evil: Village* (the eighth numbered game of the franchise), Capcom has since released remakes for *Resident Evil 2* (1998/2019), *Resident Evil 3* (1999/2020) and *Resident Evil 4* (2005/2023), as well as a brand new entry to the series, *Resident Evil: Requiem* (2026) (also stylized as *Resident Evil: Re9uiem*).

Furthermore, while taking into account only these two central texts, they present many possible transtextual relations that position them within the franchise, maintaining a coherent storyworld while proposing different ergodics from the previous entries. Some of these

mechanisms, however, can be relegated to a paratextual level due to the specifics of the ergodics, as will be discussed later.

The relevance of this study within the course of Languages and Literature is, then, to advance the discussions regarding Game Studies as a multidisciplinary field that still needs to enlarge its dimension in the Brazilian academic spaces. As mapped out by Fragoso *et al.* (2017), the dissertations and theses focusing on this area became very prevalent in Communication studies between 2009 and 2013, with a slight decline the following year, and the small sample size also reveals a lack of a dedicated community for this theme in Brazil.

Moreover, this study also aims to advance the discussions on game narratives by enlarging concepts of narratology such as sujet, fabula, narrativity and narrative (Sternberg, 1978) and the studies of paratext (Genette, 1971) into a transmedial field, by applying these concepts to a non-literary medium through an association with cybertext studies (Aarseth, 1997; 2012). This study can also serve to shed light on narrative structures that might influence new readers and writers due to the great popularity of video games as a media format, by discussing different forms of experimentation with narrative sequencing, such as the flexi-narrative (Burnett, 2024; Nelson, 1997), the construction of storyworlds (Klastrup, Tosca, 2004; Ryan, 2019) and the different degrees of Dominance between narrativity and ergodics — as the repurposing of Jakobson's (1978) seminal work within the field of cybertext studies (Aarseth, 1997; 2012) can help build upon an ergodic-narrative gradient (Lopes, 2023).

To further develop these discussions, this work aims to establish a common mythos, ethos and topos of the *Resident Evil* franchise, formulating a common transmedial storyworld (Klastrup, Tosca, 2004; Ryan, 2019), and using Leitch's (2007) adaptation-allusion gradient to map the transtextual relations established by the main objects of study and other media. Methodologically, a qualitative comparative case study is deployed, as this method deepens the relation between the researcher and the object(s) of study, while also providing concrete examples of the concepts proposed and allowing for a further expansion within the fields of Narratology and Game Studies.

2. THEORETICAL RATIONALE

2.1 NARRATIVE, NARRATIVITY AND CYBERTEXT

When discussing the temporal ordering of the exposition in a narrative, Meir Sternberg (1978) expands the concept of *fabula* and *sujet* originally proposed by the Russian Formalists Boris Tomashevsky and Tzvetan Todorov. Reviewing their definitions, Sternberg establishes that:

> The *fabula* of the work is the chronological or chronological-causal sequence into which the reader, progressively and retrospectively, reassembles [the narrative's] motifs. [...] The *sujet*, in contrast, is the actual disposition and articulation of these narrative motifs in the particular finished product, as their order and interrelation, shaping and coloring, was finally decided on by the author. (Sternberg, 1978, p.8, author's highlights)

Thus, the experience that the author intends with the sujet creates generally unambiguous fabulas when it comes to Literature, as the reader reconstructs the order of the events with the facts that are presented. When applying this method of temporal organization to video games, the branching nature of the ergodic narrative can present multiple sujets, and, therefore, multiple fabulas as the user interprets the different possible narrative arrangements. The sequence of events is then organized by what Sternberg names a *dynamic system of gaps*: as the pieces are put into place, certain gaps between the sujet information and the reconstruction of the fabula stimulate the construction of different hypotheses, with degrees of importance and effort required from each gap. While some can be automatic, others can require conscious effort; some can be definite, while others merely partial; some can be filled in by a single hypothesis, others by many. As the reading/playing continues, these hypotheses are either confirmed, discarded or contradicted by the reader/user (Sternberg, 1978).

Regarding narrativity, Sternberg says that the concept is tied to the dynamics between the told and the telling, what is represented and the communicative event-sequence. From this definition, he dissects three effects present in narrative texts that have different degrees of dominance: *suspense*, which relates to the future entailments of the narrative; *curiosity*, which connects what has happened with what lies forward; and *surprise*, in which the recognition of a closed gap impels a reassembling of the fabula. The narrative process is controlled by these three mechanisms, and they move the story and orient the reader in the mental retelling of the narrative (Sternberg, 2006).

The discussion about the narrativity (or the lack thereof) of video games has, since its inception, sparked controversy and debate among scholars of Narratology and Ludology. The

narrativity of a game can have varied degrees of dominance when juxtaposed with its mechanical aspects, that involves different goals and modes of pictorial representation. An initial consideration would be that, if a game presents characters, actions, events and a setting, arranged in a story-like order, the game possesses narrativity (Neitzel, 2014).

For this study, taking into account that the *Resident Evil* franchise is composed of games that have a specific narrative design, it is relevant to consider that players often manipulate avatars to impact the diegesis, modifying the status quo of those specific storyworlds, which often draw from different media products and reflect concrete characters, events and settings that are similar to those seen in other forms of media. As Marie-Laure Ryan (2006) posits:

> For a game to inspire *specific* retellings, to be *narratively designed*, it must involve actions whose purpose is not just winning or losing but fulfilling a concrete goal. [...] While retellings should not be confused with the live game experience [...] they suggest that a mental act with narrative content takes place during the playing of the game.
> (p. 193, author's highlights)

Espen Aarseth (1997) settles the focus of the *cybertext* on the mechanical organization of the text, as its user needs to make an extranoematic effort (external to human consciousness) in order to traverse it. In the case of video games, that includes all sorts of mechanical interactions with the text and its objects, that can be either external/internal and attached/not attached to a set of rules (Ryan, 2006). These interactions can vary between navigating the menus through a set of button prompts (external/not attached to a set of rules) to moving a puzzle object to a correct position using the physics engine (internal/attached to a set of rules). All these efforts consist of what Aarseth (1997) names the ergodics of a given cybertext, and the presence of narrativity — going back to Sternberg (1978; 2006) and Neitzel (2014) —, then, would allow for the constitution of an ergodic narrative.

However, it is necessary to point out a critique that Aarseth (2012) discusses in his writings. In this text, the author debates the use of the term "game" as a metonym for multiple forms of entertainment software, of which not all are designed with a narrative perspective in mind. The nature of cybertext is also different from linear narratives in other media, as the author posits that story-games are entertainment software, and due to their nature can emulate all kinds of semiotic genres, including, but not limited to, traditional narratives (Aarseth, 2012).

From all the aspects that operate within an entertainment software, it is important to differentiate their relevance within the gameplay and the narrative: a series of cutscenes

comprised of Computer Generated Images (CGI) may be crucial for the narrative development of a certain game, but it is not, in itself, part of its ludic (i.e. interactable, ergodic) components. So, to further develop the categories comprised by this metonym, the author suggests a difference in the degrees of influence within narrative and ergodic aspects, discussing the main aspects of narratology in favor of a refinement of the narrative theory when applied to video games, with a gradient that analyzes the possible influences in the discourse of the cybertext, through an analysis of its world, objects, agents and events. While the first line details a "pure" narrative, with no ergodic elements, the further the reader delves into the diagram, the closer they are to a "pure" ergodic experience.

Chart 1: Aarseth's model for narrative/game amalgams.

<table>
<tr><td>Ontic level:</td><td>World</td><td>Objects</td><td>Agents</td><td>Events</td></tr>
<tr><td>Narrative pole</td><td>Inaccessible</td><td>Noninteractable</td><td rowspan="3">Deep, rich, round characters</td><td>Fully plotted</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4"></td><td>Single room</td><td>Static, usable</td><td rowspan="2">Dynamic satellites/playable story</td></tr>
<tr><td>Linear corridor</td><td>Modifiable</td></tr>
<tr><td>Multicursal labyrinth</td><td>Destructible</td><td rowspan="2">Flat characters</td><td rowspan="2">Dynamic kernels</td></tr>
<tr><td>Hubshaped quest landscape</td><td>Creatable</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ludic pole</td><td>Open landscape</td><td>Inventable</td><td>Bots, no individual identity</td><td>No kernels (pure game)</td></tr>
</table>

Source: Aarseth (2012).

To classify the different possible game worlds, the author establishes that their measurable, concrete existence opens the possibility of two types of space, the ludic and the extra-ludic. From those types, he develops different degrees of linearity, from the single rooms and linear corridors, all through open explorable landscapes.

The objects, although multiple in categories, are not mutually exclusive, appearing simultaneously within the same game, regardless of their other classifications within the model.

The difference lies in the degrees of interactivity that they propose, with different means of usage, modification, destruction, creation and invention.

The agents, then, are organized through the round/flat character dichotomy — round characters are impacted by the narrative events, while flat characters stay the same throughout —, further expanded with an added category for bots, with no individual identity and no accessible inner world.

Finally, by dividing the occurrences in a game through the possible influence on its kernels (central narrative events) and satellites (events that dictate its discourse, but are not central to the narrative) Aarseth (2012) comes up with five different event categories: linear stories (no possible influence on either the kernels or the satellites); linear games (no possible influence on the kernels, dynamic satellites); nonlinear stories[1] (alternative choices on the kernels, no possible influence on the satellites); multipath/quest games (alternative choices for the kernels and dynamic satellites); and lastly, the "pure" game (fully dynamic kernels and satellites).

With this in mind, it is necessary to reevaluate Roman Jakobson's (1978) Dominant, characterized as what specifies the work, its main component that results in its classification within its literary genre. While the original text focuses on the different formal aspects that concerned the study of poetry — such as the rhythm, the rhyme and the metric of the verse —, the aim here is to compare this proposal with the model presented by Aarseth (2012), as his work offers a gradient from the exclusively narrative to the exclusively ludic. This discussion can also be further developed with the ergodic-narrative gradient presented in Eduardo Lopes' (2023) analysis, in which the author states that:

> [beyond the games of this analysis] there are other [...] that rely on the combination of ergodic and narrativity to create an immersive experience where one might be more (or less) meaningful than the other, and the presence of such elements might vary from game to game, which suggests that the balance between these two driving mechanisms of cybertext ranges from exclusively ergodic to narrativity-driven games. (Lopes, 2023, p. 25)

Due to these critiques, this study will opt for the term narrative game, or ergodic narrative, to define a particular narrative design of a cybertext. Beyond that, it is important to highlight that Aarseth also questions the use of the term "reader", for the cybertext, as an interactive medium, "puts the would-be reader at risk: the risk of rejection" (Aarseth, 1997, p. 4).

[1] This category is usually reserved for hypertextual fiction, not games.

The personal relation of the user with the cybertext is different due to the effective manipulation of the state of things, be it physically or through the narrative impact. The user can and likely will fail at some point when playing most video games, but the pleasure lies exactly at this pressure point, to see to which point the ergodics can be bent and shaped according to the intent of the user. Contrasted to the Literary text, the difference is clear: the structure of a cybertext allows for different means of exploration and narrative control, while the novel only allows for one course of action, constrained to the noematic plane. As discussed by Professor Suely Fragoso (2013), the interactivity of these new media products implies the possibility, or rather, the need for interference by the user, as the player is an effective participant in the creation of that fictional world.

The objects of this study, consequently, will be defined as two instances of ergodic narrative, constituting two different sujets and fabulas, that are interconnected and integrated to the larger scope of a transmedial franchise. For further exploration, the concept of the *flexi-narrative* will be discussed in sequence.

2.1.1 The flexi-narrative in the context of narrative games

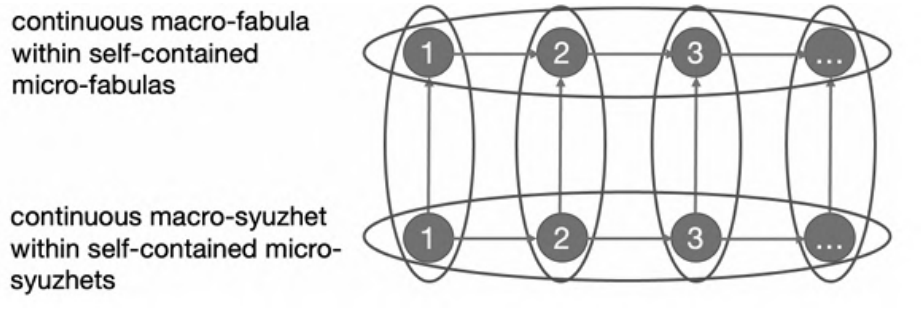
Robin Nelson (1997) examines the narrative structure of soap operas and how their stories, although serialized, consist of mostly episodic, self-contained narratives, defining the narrative functions of a *flexi-narrative* as such:

> A number of stories involving familiar characters in familiar settings are broken down into narrative bytes and rapidly intercut. Any lack of interest of an audience segment in one set of characters or story-line is thus not allowed to last long as another story with a different group of characters is swiftly taken up, only in turn to give way to another before taking up again the first narrative, and so on in a series of interwoven narrative strands. (Nelson, 1997, p. 32-33)

The author then expands this concept to other serial narratives, claiming that this structure is often used to test audience responses to certain narrative nuclei. Examining the *James Bond* films, Colin Burnett (2024) claims this concept to analyze the franchise as a series of self-contained storylines, that amount to a continuous, overarching sujet and fabula. In the case of the *007* films, their isolated storytelling provides micro-sujets that are reassembled by the viewer into micro-fabulas; however, some connections can only be established when they come in contact with other films from the franchise. As can be seen on Figure 1, the micro-sujets and micro-fabulas establish a continuous macro-sujet and macro-fabula. Burnett's study, then, divides

the franchise between the movies featuring Daniel Craig and those with a rotating roster of main actors — the latter with a rather loose narrative sequence and no explicit temporal markers — as a way to merge the character of James Bond with all its iterations.

Figure 1: a schematic detailing the fabula and sujet of a flexi-narrative.



Source: Burnett, 2024.

To transpose this concept to a narrative game series, it is important to note that these franchises can spur multiple macro-sujets and fabulas, as the canon status of certain events is altered by the creation of cybertexts that explore them in different ergodic manners — as can be said of the *Resident Evil Survivor* series, that reframe the first three games as on-rails shooters, or the constant wave of new remakes that have been released since *Resident Evil: Village*, that greatly differ from their original counterparts. Not only that, but the flexi-narratives presented for film and serial audiovisual content only present changes that are passive to the reader, while the self contained micro-sujets and fabulas of cybertexts also offer a field for ergodic experimentation, as will be discussed in the analysis of this study.

2.1.2 Storyworlds and cybertext

To discuss certain aspects pertinent to the construction of the *Resident Evil* franchise, it is necessary to explicit the concept of storyworld. Beyond the mere construction of a fictional world, Marie-Laurie Ryan (2019) argues that this concept describes a world in which space, time and the entities that inhabit that space undergo transformations by the occurrence of events, interconnecting different entities by the process of change and constituting the basic conditions for narrativity. Within these storyworlds, three outcomes are possible: a text that allows for different, conflicting outcomes, creating multiple possible worlds within the narrative; a text that connects different stories through causal links between the narrative entities; and many texts that contribute to the establishment of a greater storyworld.

Adding to this concept, the writings of Klastrup and Tosca (2004) related to the core elements of transmedial storyworlds can prove to be an effective form of analysis of the narrative aspects prevalent in the *Resident Evil* franchise. For this, the study will take into account the concepts of *mythos*, *topos* and *ethos*. Mythos, by its definition, relates to all the stories that help shape that world, the central knowledge necessary for interaction with the narrative; topos, on the other hand, regards the spatial and temporal markers specific to the world, as well as its geography, organizing the events and the recurrent transformations in a set of physical, concrete rules; lastly, the ethos relate to the ethics specific to that world and its entities, classifying the morality of certain actions and events, as well as attributing what can be accepted or rejected regarding character behavior.

These three concepts, originally introduced as strategies of cataloguing interactions within cyberworlds — in which online social interaction between players is a determining factor — can be reinterpreted through the lens of single-player narrative games and their integration within a franchise, determined by specific mythos, topos and ethos and regulated by its public reception.

2.1.3 Cybertext and the Paratext

The specifics of this study also require the dissection of a concept proposed by the French author Gérard Genette, the *paratext.* Defined by the author as "the means by which a text makes a book of itself and proposes itself to such to its readers" (Genette, 1991, p. 261), the paratext encompasses everything that can surround a given work of Literature, living within its borders. As such, the paratext can encompass the physical nature of the book as an object — its cover, the preface, the book flap —, the *peritext,* as well as the messages that circulate outside the bounds of the book, the *epitext*.

While Genette is concerned with the physicality of the book and the concrete temporal and spatial relations it constitutes with the text itself, this work will transpose this idea to the cybertext in a different manner: beyond the physical realm of the peritext, this analysis will discuss the possibility of a virtual peritext, that exists only within the realm of the ergodics, but does not manifest itself into the real world. While the user's main interaction with the cybertext advances the narrative by perpetuating irreversible narrative change, this virtual peritext exists in the form of optional, interactable elements, that contribute to the narrative design of the cybertext, but can be relegated as completely optional readings. These virtual objects, in the case

of this study, appear as imitations of real life: newspapers, written notes, photographs and even audiovisual elements, such as Video Home System (VHS) tapes, that populate the world of *Resident Evil 7* and *Village*, and will be properly discussed with the narrative analysis.

2.2 TRANSTEXTUALITY AND THE ADAPTATION-ALLUSION GRADIENT

Debating the concept of transtextuality proposed by Gérard Genette, Thomas Leitch (2007) disputes the lack of proper analytical tools to discuss the relations between a text and other texts. Within this framework, Genette establishes five modes of possible relations between texts: *intertextuality*, *paratextuality*, *metatextuality*, *hypertextuality* and *architextuality*. These concepts however useful they may be — paratextuality, especially, is a central concept to this present study — are still considered insufficient by Leitch, who, in an attempt to "demarcate the frontiers of adaptation" (p. 94), establishes ten different degrees of transtextuality: *celebration; adjustment; neoclassical imitation; revision; colonization; (meta)commentary; analogy; parody/pastiche; secondary/tertiary/quaternary imitation;* and, finally, *allusion*. While this progression was originally meant as a means to compare different movie adaptations to their original text, it can be utilized to map out transtextual relations between the two objects of this study and other media products, independent of format. For this study, the most relevant concepts and their definitions are as follows:

- A *revision* seeks to recontextualize certain aspects of the original material, commenting on its historical/cultural contexts, creating pieces that are both reinterpretations and interventions to the original text.
- A *colonization* revolves around reusing the text imbuing it with a different purpose or a different theme, developing new meanings relevant only through the interaction with the adapted material.
- An *analogue,* either intentional or not, deals with intertextual relations that arise between similar materials, created due to narrative conventions or similarities in genre. These range from very shy echos to specific inspirations mentioned in the material.
- A *parody* and a *pastiche* both deal with mimicking specific traits and visuals of the original material, but while the parody does it for comedic purposes, the pastiche offers a more serious approach.

- *Allusion*, as the last category, deals with all references that are not directly comprised by the other strategies, with narrative and thematic consequences. While not to be confused with foundational, generic conventions, the concept of allusion often deals with explicit nods to other materials that came before the text.

While these range from most to least "faithful" — i.e., the celebration often repurposes the original text to an audiovisual format, while the further one strays from the first category, the more blurry the intertextual relation becomes —, they are often fluid, becoming strategies rather than mere categories, and are applied in multiple manners, often simultaneously, on a range of different medias. For this study, these concepts will be transposed to discuss narrative games, and the specific intertextual relations made between the various materials that transpire in the objects of study as constituents of new texts.

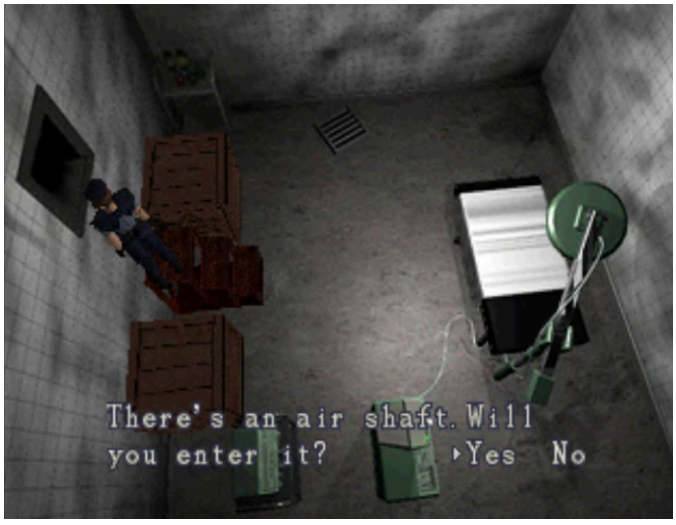
3. *RESIDENT EVIL*: CREATING A HORROR FRANCHISE

First released on March 22nd, 1996, the original *Resident Evil* game was led by a team of eighty developers at Japanese developer Capcom, with director Shinji Mikami in its lead. Initially created to repurpose the mechanics of the horror role-playing game (RPG) *Sweet Home* (1989) — released for Nintendo's Famicom, the Japanese equivalent of the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) —, the game was developed to display the new capabilities of Sony's *Playstation* system, while maintaining some of the core RPG elements of its predecessor and garnering influence by an emergent genre of video games at the time: the *survival horror*. It was the release of *Resident Evil* (1996), however, that truly shaped and popularized it in the industry. When interviewed about the conception of the franchise in its 20-year celebration, Shinji Mikami stated that:

> Well horror movies were obviously around, and there was also a lot of pure horror stuff in the gaming world at the time—when I mention that I was worried that the game wouldn't sell, I mean that it felt like just making a normal game wouldn't cut it.
> So I decided to try to think freely, without being tied down by traditional genres. I also thought that the sense of despair that you generally get in horror wasn't really that well-suited to games. So that was the jumping-off point. Not of a new genre, but of the creation of a game that wasn't tied down by traditional genres.
> At one point during development, I thought about how exhilarating it was to take down a zombie and about how that was a feeling that you just couldn't get from watching a movie. That was the first time that I really sensed that we had a new genre on our hands (Ampo; Mikami, 2016)

Through this quote, it's visible that the ergodic aspects were central to the consolidation of this new genre, as the instillment of horror and action were different when tied to the interactivity of the medium: beyond being led by the story, the player guided the actions and the possible outcomes of the cybertext. Marked by the need of resource management (due to limited ammunition and inventory space), a gameplay experience that encouraged fleeing from most enemies instead of fighting, and the constant backtracking over same areas of the game in new contexts (Taylor, 2009), *Resident Evil* was a big influence in the *survival horror* genre. The constant need to backtrack while managing the items with a limited inventory space also draws many similarities with the *metroidvania* (or search-action) genre, which is inspired by the level design in *Metroid* (1986) and *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest* (1986). In these games, the player is invited into a seemingly multicursal labyrinth, with paths that are unlocked as they develop new abilities to traverse the world.

Figure 2: a screen capture of the first *Resident Evil* game.



Source: Capcom, 1996.

Figure 3: a screen capture of the User Interface (UI) in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*.



Source: Capcom, 1999.

Narratively, the franchise often pulls inspiration from B-horror movies and uses the narrative motifs attached to the zombie as a monster — the fear of infection, the end of civilization and the hordes of the dead (Hunt, 2015), to name a few —, while also delving into critiques related to the ties between governments, militias and pharmaceutical industries, specifically within the United States. It is relevant here to note the different titles for the franchise, as in Japan, the game's country of development, the games are titled *Biohazard,* reinforcing the human agency in all the events that ensue. At the same time, the American title concerns itself with the physical spaces that the franchise explores: most of the time, confinement is a central aspect of *Resident Evil*, as the trope of the "haunted house" is used in multiple games to establish an initially supernatural reasoning for the events. As the locations are expanded in further entries, the haunted element also expands: the games position the player in mansions, abandoned police departments, cities ravaged by the zombie pandemic, isolated villages and castles, bringing in a plethora of possible environments.

Figure 4: the various "haunted houses" of the franchise.[2]



Source: Capcom, 2015; 2017; 2021; 2026.

The protagonists, in turn, are mostly represented by police agents, who face corruption within the institution as they are antagonized by their superiors and paramilitary organizations. This choice, however, brings some particular issues for the establishment of a horror franchise. As the characters became more experienced, the horror elements needed to fade in order to show their evolution within the narrative, creating a genre shift in the subsequent years and a need for fresh protagonists. While the games feature many longstanding characters, such as Jill Valentine, Chris and Claire Redfield, and Leon Kennedy, all of these characters alternate their roles as protagonists, and sometimes the franchise also introduces new faces to the roster.

As Mikami (Ampo, Mikami, 2016) stated in his interview, he was worried that the creation of a game series would exhaust the narrative options of the franchise, as the strong patterns of horror could lead to a fatigue from the players. This personal concern is reflected in a broader view of the games, as they would start to shift to more action-focused elements in *Resident Evil 4* (2005). The ergodic aspects would also reflect this change to action-horror: gone were the static camera angles and the pre-rendered backgrounds, in favor of an over-the-shoulder, third-person shooter view, with more abundant enemies, a larger scale and a Heads Up Display (HUD) that was visible at all times.

[2]Left to right, top to bottom: the Spencer Mansion, from *Resident Evil* (2015), the Baker's family home, from *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* (2017), Castle Dimitrescu, from *Resident Evil: Village* (2021) and Rhodes Hill Chronic Care Center, from *Resident Evil: Requiem* (2026).

Figure 5: a screen capture of *Resident Evil 2*.



Source: Capcom, 1998.

Figure 6: a screen capture of *Resident Evil 4*.



Source: Capcom, 2005.

Then, with *Resident Evil 5* (2009) and *Resident Evil 6* (2012), the shift to action elements was completed: with little to no inventory management, the gameplay focused on large action set pieces, filled with Quick Time Events (QTEs) sequences, in which the player had to quickly press a series of buttons to avoid a failure state[3]. The protagonists, now fully-fledged action heroes,

[3] Although this was first presented in the fourth entry, the fifth and sixth entries further developed this mechanic and made its appearance more frequent.

completed their initial arcs and now either led organizations focused on fighting bioterrorism, worked as US government officials or were double agents working for their own goals.

This genre-shift, however, greatly affected the acceptance of the franchise, as the public perception was that the new entries were often uneven, distanced from the survival horror aspects of the previous games with its adrenaline-fueled action sequences. Reviewers of the sixth game, for instance, mentioned “confused ideas that turn into gameplay elements that give players some bitter-sweet sensations” (Eurogamer Italy, 2012) and that “as a survival horror game, *Resident Evil 6* fails on almost every count. As an action game, it could be considered mediocre, and as a combination of the two it's little more than acceptable.” (Gameplanet, 2012, my highlights)[4]. This would push the main franchise into a long hiatus, with a few sparse spin-off games, such as *Resident Evil: Revelations 2* (2015) and *Umbrella Corps* (2016), before the next main entry.

3.1 STORYWORLD DESIGN AND IMPACTS ON THE CYBERTEXT

Resuming the discussion regarding storyworld design posited by Klastrup and Tosca (2004), it is possible to construct a common mythos, topos and ethos for the franchise, with certain key aspects that are reiterated multiple times throughout the many products of the transmedial world. This discussion can also be useful to define certain key aspects of the world, objects, characters and events of the franchise according to the variable model proposed by Aarseth (2012).

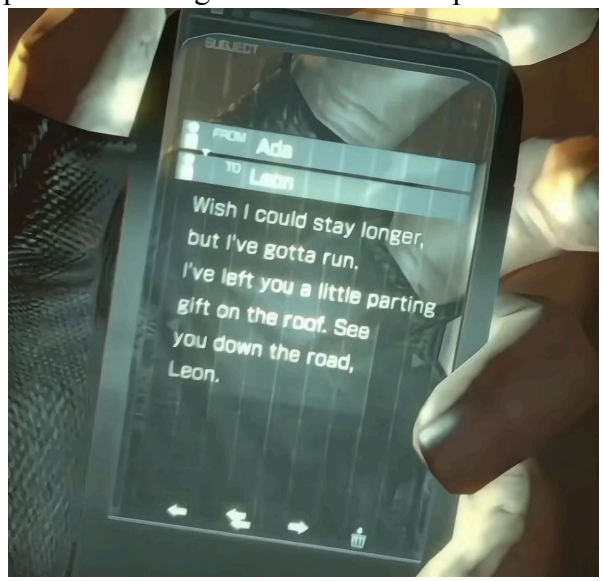
The mythos of *Resident Evil* is built by multiple, focal narratives that delve into the dangers of bioterrorism and its relations to corrupt government and organizations, demonstrating the different facets of US imperialism. With this in mind, a narrative maximum that can be considered for the franchise, and that is a subjacent theme to most of its micro-sujets, is that, although the existence of monsters and the infections seem supernatural and inexplicable, they have very concrete human agents behind their executions. The zombie, its central monster, is perceived mostly through a “permanent aesthetics of an apocalypse”, as described by Nathan Hunt (2015), since the stories present contained spreadings of disease, echoing the fear of epidemic contagion that permeates more contemporary zombie narratives — a clear contrast from

[4] The excerpts of these reviews were only available through the website Metacritic, which aggregates multiple reviews of different media critics to compose an overall score. Due to the ephemeral nature of these texts, only certain parts are available to access as of the present day. Available at: https://www.metacritic.com/game/resident-evil-6/. Accessed on: 15 May 2026.

its origins, that dealt with supernatural intervention. As the author summarizes: "[…] the zombie is the most postmodern of phenomena, a cultural artefact increasingly cut adrift in a sea of intertextual meanings and dynamics, constantly reused and recycled" (Hunt, 2015, p. 108). *Resident Evil*, as a franchise, is one of the best examples to examine the zombie and its constant shifts and dynamics over the span of the last three decades.

Regarding the topos of the franchise, it is important to specify the two possible definitions discussed by Klastrup and Tosca (2004): the specific space and time of a singular actualization, and the general, usually unchangeable space and time of the storyworld. While the specific topos of *Resident Evil* varies throughout the franchise's development and the multiple perspectives that enact those geographies/temporalities, the general topos is mostly similar to our own world, following time markers close to the release dates of each of the games, although with some intentionally incongruent temporal markers, mostly related to the aesthetics and technologies employed by the characters and the world around them — the specifics of these incongruencies and their relevance for this study will be further discussed in the analysis of the seventh and eighth entries.

Figure 7: one example of an incongruent aesthetic/temporal marker in *Resident Evil 6*.



Source: Capcom, 2012.

The space, in turn, often calls back to the "haunted house" trope mentioned earlier, while varying the scale of the spaces presented to the player. The first main trilogy, *Resident Evil*

(1996), *Resident Evil 2* (1998) and *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* (1999), all explore an initial outbreak in the outskirts of Raccoon City, a fictional suburban town in the American Midwest, contrasting the initial setting (either the Spencer mansion or the city) with a highly technological ambiance by the end of their runs, as the true agents behind the events are revealed.

The next three numbered entries all vary their locations to further expand the scale and the possibilities of the games, as the technological limitations were leveraged with the different hardware at the developers' disposal. *Resident Evil 4* (2005) is divided in three main sections: a Spanish *villa*, with hostile infected peasants and an architecture that recalls 18th century Spain; a medieval castle, home to the leader of the cult that worships the *plagas*, the parasites that cause these infections; and an island close to the village, where the antagonists execute their experiments against the village's inhabitants. Here, the backtracking is still heavily influenced, but the constant interludes between chapters and main sections create virtual points of no return, which also affect the influence of the user upon the kernels of the narrative: with a more linear approach to the storytelling and the geography, the kernels are static, and only the satellites can be actively influenced.

The topos of *Resident Evil 5* (2009) often echoes the same aesthetic ideas of the previous entry, although with some issues that arise from its conception. Set in Kijuju, a fictional city in West Africa, the game further explores the concept of the "intelligent infected" — as the enemies of *Resident Evil 4* (2005) could manipulate melee weapons and some could even use firearms —, but the actual representation of these zombies and the locations offers a stereotyped and oftentimes prejudiced view of African people and their native identities. The areas around Kijuju are seen as impoverished and ruinous, while the installations of mega pharmaceutical Tricell (the game's institutional, depersonalized antagonist) are seen as sanitized, hyper-industrial settings. In relation to the software, gone are the backtracking elements of the previous games, as the game sections are big, open areas, intercut with interludes, and the use of key items to unlock certain spaces is completely discarded for a fully linear exploration of the virtual world.

The sixth entry, *Resident Evil 6* (2012) is perhaps the most varied in its locations out of all these entries (although, as public reception would see it, much to its detriment). Split into three separate campaigns, each with its own duo of protagonists, as well as a secret, fourth campaign with a singular protagonist, the game tries to spread the narrative across different parts of the globe to create a single, interwoven story, featuring a returning cast as well as a plethora of new

characters. To accommodate all of these campaigns, each one of these environments offer a different perspective, trying to reallocate and allude to the many different tropes and genres that molded the franchise up until that point. The game world is, conversely, deeply linear, and while there are some instances where the topos is shared between campaigns, there is no way to directly influence the kernels or the satellites, abandoning some of the core aspects of the first games.

Lastly, the ethos of the franchise has a very clear circumscription: the (in)human body. The zombie narrative lends its themes to the games and becomes its spine as the biological differences create the Others, the antagonists in the narrative discourse. Whilst the protagonists are, for the most part, acting against the modified human body, few games in the *Resident Evil* franchise properly delve into the human aspect of the zombie. The killing of the infected is almost a given in nearly all the games, as the undead are seen as savages beyond the point of no return, regardless of their displays of intelligence. The antagonists, sentient for the most part, are represented as megalomaniacal villains, who descend into madness in the search of something they lack, usually a body that never decays — which ironically results in the most grotesque transmutations. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996) puts it when describing the monster as a cultural body and symbol, "the monster prevents mobility (intellectual, geographical, or sexual), delimiting the social spaces through which private bodies may move. To step outside of this official geography is to risk attack by some monstrous border patrol or (worse) to become monstrous oneself" (p. 12).

Having mapped out the general mythos, topos and ethos of the franchise by discussing the initial six numbered entries, this study will begin the comparative analysis of the duology comprised by *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* (2017) and *Resident Evil: Village* (2021), as they signify meaningful actualizations to the transmedial storyworld and the shaping of the saga as a constituent of multiple ergodic narratives.

4. *RESIDENT EVIL 7: BIOHAZARD* (2017)

The long interval between releases of main title *Resident Evil* games after the sixth entry in 2012 froze the franchise for a few years as Capcom decided to focus on its other, more prevalent intellectual properties (IPs) at the time, such as the *Devil May Cry* reboot in 2013 (a franchise that shares, in itself, a lot of *Resident Evil's* gothic aesthetic) and the *Street Fighter* series. With sales that were below the expected mark for *Resident Evil 6* (2012), the following

years would see only the release of spin-off games *Resident Evil: Revelations 2* (2015) and *Umbrella Corps* (2016), with lower budgets, which resulted in niche success. At that point in time, it seemed that the franchise needed a proper reintroduction into the cultural zeitgeist, or it would slowly decline in popularity.

4.1 CONTEXTUALIZING A REVIVAL

The moment of release for the seventh entry is very interesting given the cultural resurgence that horror as a game genre had in the 2010s, due to the initial popularity of the "walking simulators", originated from subtractive design practices (Fernandes; Neves; Lopes, 2024). Although this design perspective seemed new, it echoed much of the original survival horror ergodic and narrative tropes. Three games stand out as their great commercial success and rather small development teams made a big impact in the horror landscape: *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* (2010); *Slender: The Eight Pages* (2012); and *Outlast* (2013). All of these games focused the horror element as an inescapable ergodic element, and to traverse these worlds, the player had only the option of surviving, without the means of fighting back, while also doing constant backtracking through the environments in new settings. And although resource management was not a main focus of these games, it still played a significant role in the horror atmosphere: the sanity of the avatar in *Amnesia* (2010) can decrease, and both the flashlight in *Slender: The Eight Pages* (2012) and the videocamera in *Outlast* (2013) rely on batteries to help the player navigate dark environments.

Another choice worth noting is that all of these games opt for a first-person view of the game, placing the camera in the same position as the eyes of the avatar being controlled. This mechanical choice is not neutral, of course, as it reflects the needs of the horror genre as an experience of tension and aversion. The proximity of the player with the actions being enacted through the avatar instills uncertainty of their surroundings, as the exploration must always consider what is happening around the character being controlled. This is also amplified by the use of enemies that chase the player, and whose invincible nature proves an obstacle to the proper navigation of the gameworld.

Figure 8: a screenshot from the game *Amnesia: The Dark Descent.*



Source: Frictional Games, 2010.

The commercial and critical appraisal garnered by these small independent games would later be translated to broader, triple-A games — with high production value and budget —, with the release of games such as *Alien: Isolation* (2014), developed by Creative Assembly and published by legacy company Sega Corporation, and the game demonstration titled *P.T.* (2014), developed by Kojima Productions and published by Konami Digital Entertainment. Both of these games sought to revive two intellectual properties that had lost their momentum, at least in the gaming sphere: the *Alien* saga, which faced criticism and low commercial appeal with its movie prequels released at the time and previous games that focused on action, first-person shooting; and the *Silent Hill* gaming series, another survival horror classic that had suffered with a dwindling fanbase. As defined by Proctor (2023) in his book "Reboot Culture":

> The term 'revival' is also pervasive in entertainment discourse, most frequently associated with television or film series that are resuscitated from an industrially mandated coma, either following cancellation or when purported to have been 'completed.' I would extend this statement to cover media production in general, whether in film, TV, comics, video-games and so on, each of which are underwritten by strategies of regeneration as a symptom or 'by-product of capitalism' (Proctor, 2023, p. 47)

The act of reviving a franchise is not, thus, an exclusive practice to television or film, as the creation of long, sequenced ergodic narratives also affect the way the public interacts with these media products and reflect the needs and tropes of their time of production. Although just a singular demonstration, *P.T.* (2014) — short for Playable Teaser — is the most relevant

encapsulation of all that horror as a game genre was aiming for in this period of time, both in narrative and ergodics, and heavily influenced the initial marketing release for *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard*.

Released only for the Playstation 4[5] and with a short gameplay loop, *P.T.* (2014) had the player walking around a house in a linear corridor that would constantly repeat itself as the avatar tried to advance. Within each loop, however, the environment would present minor changes, with new messages and sounds, the unlocking of doors, a diversity of interactable objects and a haunting figure that stalks the player throughout the whole experience. The completion of the demo uncovered the tragedy of Lisa, murdered by her husband while pregnant, and the aftermath as the protagonist of the demo is haunted by her ghost and the baby that she was carrying.

Figure 9: a screenshot from the *P.T.* demo.



Source: Kojima Productions, 2014.

With a cryptic nature and a perspective that served great potential for the psychological horror of the *Silent Hill* franchise, the demo had great success at garnering a cult following and was a great indicator for the revival of the series. However, the tension between the appointed game director, Hideo Kojima, creator of Kojima Productions, and the main studio responsible for the IP led to the eventual cancellation of the main game teased at the end of *P.T.* (2014), putting *Silent Hill* in a long hiatus. Capcom, on the other hand, had just started production for its own

[5] The demo was delisted from the Playstation Store on April 29th, 2015, making the software available only to those who had previously downloaded it.

revival, and their initial campaign would follow many similar steps to what was first proposed by this short demo.

4.2 RETURN TO SURVIVAL HORROR: THE FIRST STEPS

The first signs for the *Resident Evil* revival were teased at the now extinct Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3), a convention held in Los Angeles that gathered all the major video game developers and publishers to introduce their new upcoming projects. In the year of 2015, Capcom unveiled their technical demo titled *KITCHEN*, meant to be their first attempt at the Virtual Reality (VR) market. This tech demo was only available to a small public that attended the event at first, meant to show the capabilities of Project Morpheus, which would later become Sony's Playstation Virtual Reality Headset (PSVR). With a yearly report that detailed their attempt at a new *Resident Evil* IP, Capcom also discussed this new market trend by saying that:

> In this terrifying world, you can twist and turn as you like, but there's no escaping the creatures closing in on you…until you remove your VR headset and return to reality, that is. We delivered this very experienced [*sic*] with our "KITCHEN" VR technical demo at E3 2015. The response was excellent. Currently, we are building a new game development engine able to support VR, which is the hottest market right now, while simultaneously developing titles for current game consoles. We have just set sail on our latest voyage. (Capcom, 2015)

The choice for a first-person camera to enhance player's experience, then, gains a new perspective when allied to marketing strategies and a higher budget for the development: while the ergodic choice was justified for the indie games mentioned before as a means to enhance the immersion, the possibilities of VR at the time were restricted to already established companies, mostly due to the costly process of providing a player experience. Beyond an ergodic reason, there is also a very coherent marketing choice for the new *Resident Evil* IP at the time to be the first main title to use the first-person perspective — which would result in the launch of *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* with an option to toggle in VR for the Playstation 4.

While *KITCHEN* was a short tech demo that offered little to no interactivity for the users, 2016 would see the launch for a more in-depth, non-VR demo for *Resident Evil's* seventh entry, *Resident Evil 7: Beginning Hour*. This second demo was available to the larger public as a downloadable software for home consoles and Personal Computers (PCs), and started with a recording of *KITCHEN*, now a feature film for the introduction of the demo, while the gameplay loop was very similar to *P.T.* (2014). Stuck in a seemingly abandoned house in Louisiana, an

unnamed protagonist controlled by the user had to find the means to escape by solving multiple puzzles, while also dealing with the isolating and haunting atmosphere of the place. The gameplay, very much aligned with the horror games from the start of the 2010s, focused more on atmospheric horror and scares, with few enemy appearances and an incentive to run away rather than fighting back, while also exploring the space and interacting with multiple objects in different contexts.

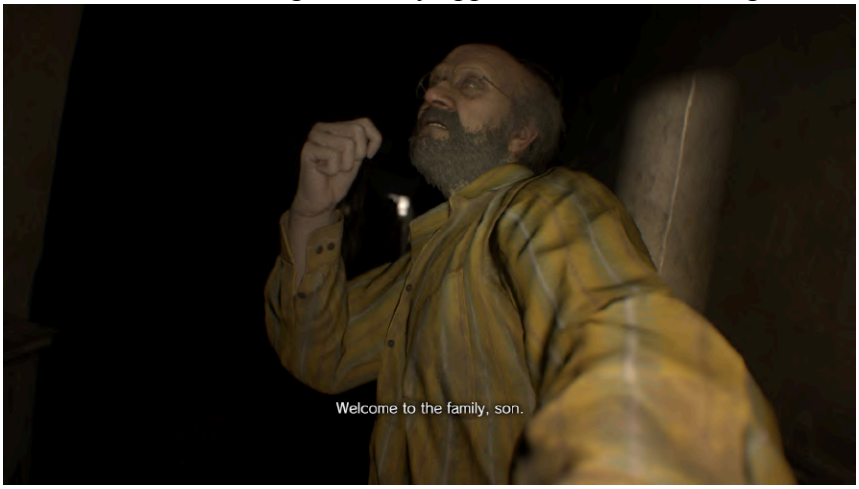
Here, the first instances of peritext (Genette, 1991) are introduced: as the interactable objects of the game world can be missed or ignored, they are relegated as secondary elements in the user's traversion through the game world. This, consequently, results in multiple ways to interact with the events that occur within the demo. With both dynamic satellites and kernels, the user's actions can impact the ending of the demonstration, for a total of five different event kernels at the end. The space, while small in scale, offers opportunities for backtracking and to skip certain parts once the replayability of the stage becomes available. Still, the model proposed by Aarseth (2012) would classify it as a mixture of a single room and a linear corridor for player exploration. And while the user controls an avatar, it has no individual identity, and neither does the infected enemy that appears, a "molded" figure that is merely a bot. The only glimpse of a character with a defined identity comes at the end of the game, when the player is knocked out by a so far unnamed antagonist.

Figure 10: the "molded" enemy is seen attacking the player.



Source: Capcom, 2016.

Figure 11: the unnamed antagonist only appears in certain endings of the demo.



Source: Capcom, 2016.

4.3 THE MAIN RELEASE

The full release of *Resident Evil 7* occurred on January 24th, 2017, for Playstation 4, Xbox One and PC. Receiving large commercial and critical acclaim, the game was praised for its return to the survival horror formula, and both its narrative and ergodic elements contributed to this success. Set with a new protagonist, Ethan Winters, who the player controls in a first-person camera view, the story follows him as he tries to rescue his missing girlfriend in a remote area of Louisiana, in the United States. In his arrival, Ethan initially retraces the steps of the *Beginning Hour* (2016) demo, confined to the same guest house as the previous character, with a few alterations. Depending on the user's previous knowledge of the environment, there are multiple ways to approach this small space, either by retracing the steps of the game demo, or by exploring the peritextual elements, such as the notes, photographs and the VHS tape present in the house.

As the game advances, the user encounters Mia, now fully fledged in the ludic space, and one of its main round characters. While initially friendly, her demeanor changes and she becomes aggressive towards Ethan, as if by supernatural possession. This alternating behavior, which is prevalent through the whole game, establishes the main antagonists as well: the Baker family, composed of Jack, Marguerite, Lucas and Zoe. Infected by spores of mold, Jack, Marguerite and Mia are controlled by Eveline, who disguises herself as an old lady at first, but later reveals her true form as a child, made to be a human bioweapon that uses her appearance to infiltrate among and infect innocent people. Being escorted by Mia on a ship controlled by the bioterrorist

organization The Connections, Eveline causes a shipwreck that results in the boat landing in the bayous of Louisiana, where the Baker family resides. There, she takes control of the family in order to get one of her own, and permeates their minds so that they kidnap more victims to infect. These victims, however, do not gain resistance to the mold, and become standard infected bots, similar to the one present in *Beginning Hour* (2016). The ending sees Ethan — and possibly Mia — being rescued after the defeat of Eveline, with the help of series veteran Chris Redfield, protagonist of the first and fifth *Resident Evil* games.

Received with positive reviews and aggregating an overall score of 86/100 on the website Metacritic for console platforms and an 83/100 for PCs[6], the seventh installment initially failed to reach the estimated sales goal from developer/publisher Capcom, established at 4 million units[7]. The game's critical acclaim and success as a revival, however, resulted in good sales during its lifespan, as its longevity and release on multiple platforms after its release turned *Resident Evil 7* into one of the highest selling games of the franchise (Capcom, 2026), and a foundation for the next era of the company's IP, with the release of remakes that repurposed the original engine created for this entry. It would be a few years, however, until the next game protagonized by Ethan Winters.

5. *RESIDENT EVIL: VILLAGE* (2021)

Released four years after *RE7* (2017), the next direct sequel of the gaming franchise would come after a large sequence of remakes/reboots, with the release of *Resident Evil 2* (2019) and *Resident Evil 3* (2020). *Resident Evil: Village* would see the return of Ethan Winters as the protagonist, but with a very distinct setting: now in a village in Eastern Europe, Ethan is haunted by lycans, vampires and other seemingly supernatural monsters while he tries to rescue his daughter, Rose, after Mia is murdered by Chris Redfield and he and Rose are taken by a rogue team of the Bioterrorism Security Assessment Alliance (BSAA). Dismembered in four parts, baby Rose is distributed among the Four Lords of the village: Alcina Dimitrescu, Donna Beneviento, Salvatore Moreau and Karl Heisenberg. All of them are commanded by Mother Miranda, who was driven to insanity in an attempt to resurrect her daughter, and one of the first

[6] Available at: https://www.metacritic.com/game/resident-evil-7-biohazard/. Accessed on: June 22 2026.
[7] Available at: https://www.gamespot.com/articles/resident-evil-7-expected-to-ship-10-million-units/1100-6450098/. Accessed on: June 22 2026.

biologists to study the Mold, experimenting on the villagers to build her own cult through the genetic engineering of the Cadou parasite — a nematode exposed to the bioweapon.

Defeating each of the Lords, Ethan then recovers the parts that make up Rose and manages to stop the cult and resurrect his own daughter. By the end, it is revealed that Mia is actually alive and well, and Miranda was disguised as her and had infiltrated their home while trying to kidnap Rose. Fatally wounded by Miranda in their encounter, Ethan discovers that he was actually dead during the events of *RE7* and *Village*, being killed by Jack Baker in their first confrontation. Now contaminated by the Mold, Ethan is in a state of undeadiness that likens him to those he has been fighting against, and to destroy the Mold's Megamycete — the origin of the infection and the main hub for the hive mind — he sacrifices himself and explodes the village with its contaminated inhabitants, effectively ending his character arc.

Garnering an aggregated score of 83/100 for the PC and Xbox Series X, as well as an 84/100 for the PS5 on Metacritic[8], the eighth installment saw the end of Ethan Winters' character arc, while also paying a great homage to all the *Resident Evil* games that came before it. The Downloadable Content (DLC) that came after the initial release would then wrap up the story and set precedent for the next main entry of the franchise, *Requiem* (2026).

5.1 WRAPPING UP THE STORY: "SHADOWS OF ROSE" AND "RESIDENT EVIL: REQUIEM"

Released in 2022, the DLC *Shadows of Rose* served as an epilogue for Ethan Winters' story. Set sixteen years after the events of *Village*, the player now controls Rose Winters, as she tries to get rid of her powers, earned due to the contact with the Megamycete and her heritage. Traversing many dream scenarios, the player revisits environments from the original game, now with another, less skilled avatar, and in a third-person camera view. The narrative has a shorter playtime, and ends with a confrontation with Mother Miranda, as Rose chooses to maintain her powers after realizing they are the only bond she has left with her father.

In 2026, the franchise saw the release of *Resident Evil: Requiem* (also stylized as *Resident Evil: Re9uiem* in the launch trailers). This new narrative-game does not feature any strict relation to the stories presented in the seventh and eighth entry, now protagonized by veteran protagonist Leon S. Kennedy, and a new character, named Grace Ashcroft. Returning to Raccoon City after

[8] Available at: https://www.metacritic.com/game/resident-evil-village/. Accessed on: June 22 2026.

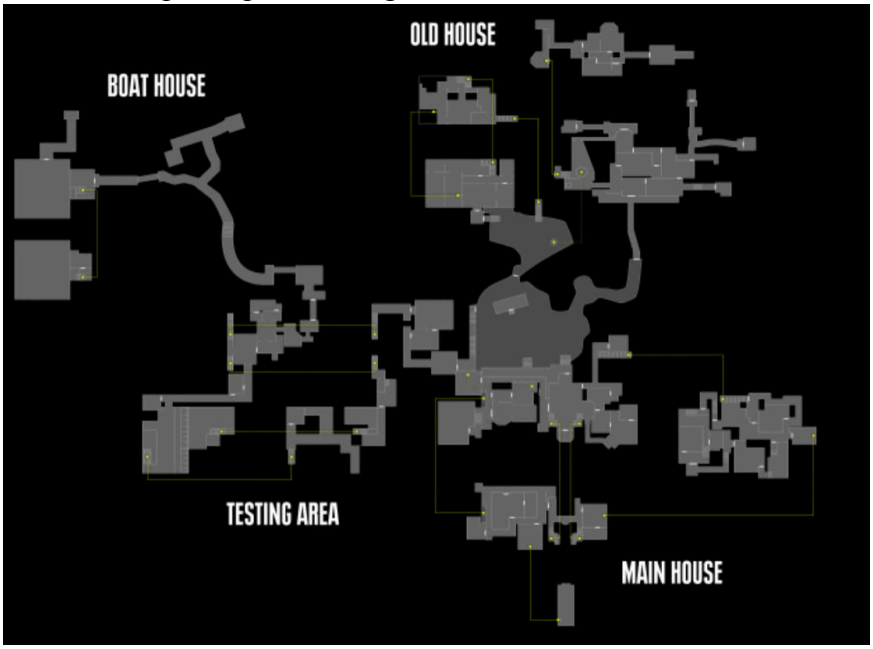
its destruction, the game is set in the year 2026 — five years after *Village* and eleven years prior to *Shadows of Rose* (2022). The change in focus for other events and characters, although set in the same storyworld, signal a change in perspective from developer and publisher Capcom, as during the development of *RE7* and *Village*, Leon was a primary force of action for the remakes, being the coprotagonist of *Resident Evil 2* (1998; 2019) and main character of *Resident Evil 4* (2005; 2023), a remake that was released two years after *Village*. To further discuss the integration of the seventh and eighth chapters within the franchise's storyworld, the next section will try to map them out as a duology.

6. THE DUOLOGY: STORYTELLING AND FRANCHISE INTEGRATION

6.1 AARSETH'S (2012) ONTIC MODEL

Initially, the ludic worlds of *Resident Evil 7* (2017) and *Resident Evil: Village* (2021) can be interpreted merely as linear corridors, with segmented spaces that connect into each other but are locked once the player advances the ergodic narrative. The use of the *metroidvania* style of level design and the influence of *survival horror* as an ergodic genre, however, stimulate backtracking and further exploration of the environments, and that requires that certain sections still be available after an initial traversal. Because of that, both games offer hubs for the player to backtrack into other main areas: the backyard of the Baker estate on *RE7* and the titular village in *RE8*. This characteristic benefits from the branching nature of the cybertextual process, and allows for different interventions on the satellites of the events: in both games, backtracking can lead to the unlocking of new weapons (interactable, usable objects), consumable items and confrontations with different enemies. In this sense, both gameworlds, although not entirely multicursal, offer different lines of action for the players to act out the ludic fiction.

Figure 12: a map of a part of the gameworld in *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard*.



Source: mapgenie.io, 2026[9].

Figure 13: a map of a part of the gameworld in *Resident Evil: Village*.



Source: mapgenie.io, 2026[10].

[9] Available at: https://mapgenie.io/resident-evil-7-biohazard/maps/baker-ranch Accessed on: 24 jun. 2026.
[10] Available at: https://mapgenie.io/resident-evil-village/maps/the-village Accessed on: 24 jun. 2026.

Regarding the objects, the games offer different levels of interaction with a plethora of items. While some items are noninteractive — used just to populate the game world — those that are fall into one of these four categories: usable, modifiable, destructible and creatable. Usable items include many miscellaneous simulacra, such as consumables, keys, puzzle pieces, cranks, levers, valves, notes, photographs, VHS tapes, among others. Many boxes that contain consumables inside the ludic world are also destructible. Meanwhile, combining different puzzle pieces often allows for the creation of new items.

The main difference between the games, however, arises when comparing weapons in both installments, as while weapons are merely usable and offer little option for modification in the seventh game — save repairing certain broken firearms — the eighth game has various options for customization for the weapons, and a range of upgrades for each usable firearm. This allows a different range of modifiable objects, as few allow these transformations on *RE7* as they do on *RE8*.

The peritextual element of these objects is also crucial to the constitution of the games' macro and micro-sujets and fabulas. Most of the documents that populate these game worlds offer a rich reading of the events that occurred prior to the ergodic narrative at play, and connect them to the franchise at large. These textual elements, while very important to the constitution of a macro-narrative, are completely optional, and the player can choose to not actively interact with most, if any, of them and still progress. As Genette (1991) writes, the paratext is a vestibule, it is an invitation for entry or exit (in this case, of the game-narrative hybrid).

In *Resident Evil 7*, the notes found on the Baker estate chronicle their interactions before and after Eveline's arrival, as well as their descent into madness due to contact with the Mold. Other important documents found in the surrounding areas discuss Eveline's relation to The Connections and how Mia was involved in the bioweapons program of the paramilitary group. Another important type of interactable item in the seventh game is the VHS tape, which acts as short tutorials and gives the user control of the character that is recording the tape, retracing their steps over the same environment, while using important items and discovering hidden passages. The first tape, for instance, is found in the Guest House and reveals the disappearance of a group of paranormal reporters that went missing when entering the location. Being a completely optional segment, the user can either play the tape or find the hidden passage by sheer exploration

or previous knowledge, effectively modifying the construction of the fabula and leaving an open gap in the exposition (Sternberg, 1978; 2006).

While *Resident Evil: Village* does not have a similar flashback mechanic as the VHS tapes of its previous entry, the many documents laid out in the areas of the game discuss the rise of Mother Miranda and the Four Lords, as well as her relationship with the Umbrella Corporation as a biologist that studied the Mold and the Megamycete. If a player chooses to interact with some, all or none of these documents, the reconstruction of the fabula leaves many combinations of hypotheses and gaps (Sternberg, 1978), reinforcing the branching structure of the cybertext and the ergodic processing (Aarseth, 1997). The use of these peritextual elements in both games also help situate the narrative in a specific time period, as the use of purposefully dislocated elements helps to blur the time markers of the ergodic narrative in favor of the aesthetics and the creation of a flexi-narrative — akin to what Burnett (2024) observed about the pre-Craig era of James Bond films.

On the subject of agents, they are evenly distributed between round/flat characters and bots with no personality traits in both games. While the seventh offers a roster of round characters and a few minor, flat characters that have no transformation during the process of the ergodic narrative, the "molded" act as the main bots of the game, devoid of any personality traits as characters — besides some peritextual documents that shortly describe their appearances and livelihoods before the infection. In *Village*, however, there is a greater roster of bots, with enemy types that act in distinct ways, with specific attack patterns and behaviors, although no individual personality is given to any of them.

Lastly, the events and their dynamics are perhaps the most contrasting between both games. While many games of the *Resident Evil* saga offer different possible endings to their ergodic narratives, as the player can enact their influence on both satellites and kernels of the ergodic narratives, most of them are based on the user's overall performance. Meanwhile, the dynamic kernels and satellites of *RE7* are tied to a singular explicit choice made by the player, which significantly alters the sujet of the narrative. After defeating Jack Baker's mutated form, Ethan Winters gathers a cure for the Mold infection that spread around the estate. He is then confronted by both Zoe Baker and Mia, and while both are infected, only one can be saved. In

this circumstance, the player then must ask themself: “should I save Zoe, who helped me[11] through my journey, or Mia, who is the reason for it to happen in the first place?”.

The results of this choice, however, are very constrained, and as the narrative continues, the choice has minimal ergodic impact. If the user chooses to save Zoe, she dies shortly after, and Mia, infected with the Mold, confronts the player in a boss fight, perishing by Ethan’s hands — and thus, she is absent in the game’s finale. If the player chooses Mia, however, Zoe is left alone with an undisclosed fate, and Mia fights the infection so as not to hurt Ethan, being present in the finale and reunited with him as they flee Louisiana. The latter ending is canonized in multiple ways: the DLC *The End of Zoe* (2017), discloses what happens to the character after she’s separated from Ethan when he saves Mia, and this choice is fundamental for the continuity of the narrative in the next entry, making it the only viable alternative for the construction of the macro-fabula. Prioritizing the integrity of the serial narrative, the decision is suppressed with the institution of the sequel. In *Village*, the kernels are totally static, following a linear storytelling in the broader sense, with a few dynamic satellites due to the nature of the gameworld, that stimulates exploration and backtracking for the acquisition of new items and a few optional encounters with hostile bots.

Given the categorization of the games according to the ontic levels discussed by Aarseth (2012), the next segment will will map out the aesthetic allusions of the duology according to Leitch’s (2007) proposed gradient, contrasting the two game-narratives with other media and the *Resident Evil* gaming saga at large.

6.2 AESTHETICS AND THE ADAPTATION-ALLUSION GRADIENT

6.2.1 *RE7* and other media

The aesthetics of *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* borrow from a lot of different sources, and this is perhaps the hardest part to map out, as most of these elements act as more blurry classifications, according to Leitch’s (2007) proposal. Namely, the main tropes of the game borrow from the “hillbilly horror” genre (Taylor, 2020), creating both a pastiche and a colonization of some central elements prevalent in these narratives: isolation in rural areas, an unwelcoming Southern family and the tensions related to class and race of these places within the sociohistorical context of the United States. It is also relevant to note the influence of the

[11]Zoe acts as a guide for Ethan during most of the game, because even though she is infected, she is not seen as a protective figure by Eveline, who discards her.

Southern Gothic genre in hillbilly horror[12], as their origins stem from the same tension: the contrast between the rural and the urban. The choice of a stranded house in the Louisiana bayous proves a great addition to the "haunted" estates from the previous games, with the added element of the landscape, which in itself serves as a threat within the rural gothic genres. From all the narratives that explore hillbilly horror (and the horror *of* the hillbilly), the most relevant and perhaps most clear allusion is to the cannibal family from *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), and Ethan suffers the same fate as Sally, the lead character of the movie, as both are stuck in a chair and forced to witness the horrible actions of the antagonists when they are first introduced.

Figure 14: the dinner scene in *RE7,* featuring the Baker family.



Source: Capcom, 2017.

Figure 15: the dinner scene in Texas Chainsaw Massacre, featuring the Sawyer family.



Bryanston Distributing Company, 1974.

[12] These concepts of horror actually result in many different terminologies, often confusing Southern Gothic with Hillbilly Horror or Rural Gothic. The scope of this work does not include these terminological differences, although they are relevant enough to earn a disclaimer.

Beyond that, the seemingly supernatural acts and abilities of the antagonists also serve for other horror allusions in both visual and tone. The game is riddled with subtle nods to the *Evil Dead* franchise, with lines being mentioned through the ergodic narrative — such as Jack Baker's "groovy", echoing a line from the protagonist of *Evil Dead 2* (1987) — and Mia's alternating behavior between friendly and hostile, very similar to the acts of the *deadites*, demons that possess the victims of the film saga. Her very name can be traced to the name of the final girl in the movie saga's revival, *Evil Dead*, released in 2013. Eveline, on the other hand, acts in two very distinct tropes: while initially disguised as the senile grandmother of the Baker family, she transports herself to haunt the player in different parts of the estate; afterwards, as her child form, she alludes to the idea of creepy or villainous children (Hutchings, 2008), with her design and abilities being very similar to those of Alma, for example, one of the antagonists of the video game *F.E.A.R.* (2005).

Figure 16: Eveline's appearance as her true form.



Source: Capcom, 2017.

Figure 17: the cover for the game F.E.A.R., featuring Alma, the main antagonist.



Source: Monolith Productions, 2005.

The interactable VHS tapes allude to other horror movies, namely to the *found footage* genre, in which amateur recordings made by the characters serve as the means to convey the audiovisual narrative. As discussed by Sayad (2016), “With the found-footage horror film, the interpenetration of reality and fiction that was traditionally discussed in terms of allegory or topical references has found a new locus: the film's form” (p. 43). Two very relevant media products for this analysis include *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *REC* (2007). While influences of the former can be seen in the setting and the way the image is presented — the movie investigates the history of The Blair Witch in the forests of the Maryland state, and includes footage that is often grainy, shaky and with muffled sound quality — a very clear homage is done to the latter, as the ending scene is recreated at the end of one of the tapes.

Figure 18: Mia being dragged by Marguerite at the end of a playable VHS tape segment.



Source: Capcom, 2017.

Figure 19: the ending scene of the movie *REC*.



Source: Castelao Producciones, 2007.

Other allusions can be seen by analyzing the Baker family individually as antagonists. Jack Baker's constant taunting and manic behavior, as well as his figure as the father of the family, can draw comparisons to Jack Torrance, the main character from Stephen King's novel *The Shining* (1977) and its homonymous movie adaptation (1980), itself a classic film of the horror genre. Marguerite's disfigurement and affinity for insects can draw many influences to *body* and *insect horror* (Hutchings, 2008), as she slowly starts to resemble an arachnid and control other arthropods. Lucas, although infected, is not a part of the Mold hive mind, and his immunity to Eveline's control only serves to reinforce his sadic behavior. When he becomes the main antagonist for a segment of the game, Ethan must solve a puzzle that can result in his death, with many nods to the movie franchise *Saw* (2004-2023), such as the use of a creepy doll-animatronic, a recording of the puzzle done by a previous victim and the imagery of the

level, labeled “Testing Area”, with messages written on the walls in the same way as the film saga.

Figure 20: Jack Baker wielding an axe during a scripted fight segment.



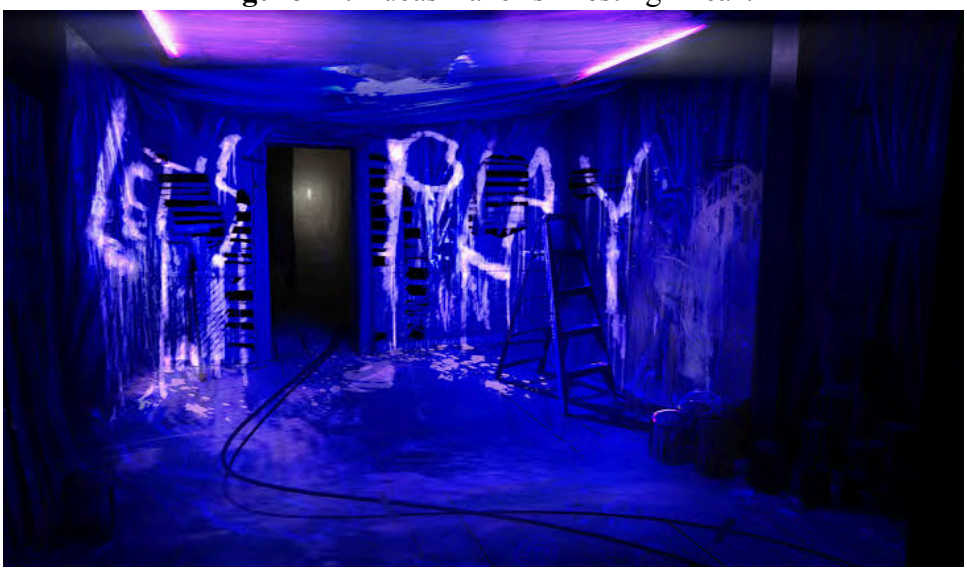
Source: Capcom, 2017.

Figure 21: Marguerite Baker at her final stage of infection.



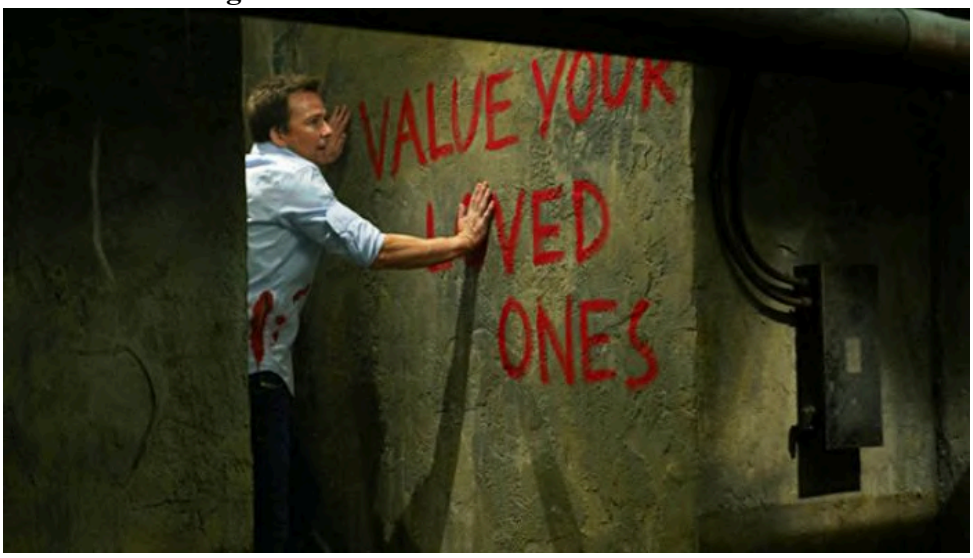
Source: Capcom, 2017.

Figure 22: Lucas Baker's "Testing Area".



Source: Capcom, 2017.

Figure 23: a scene from the movie SAW 3D.



Source: Lionsgate, 2010.

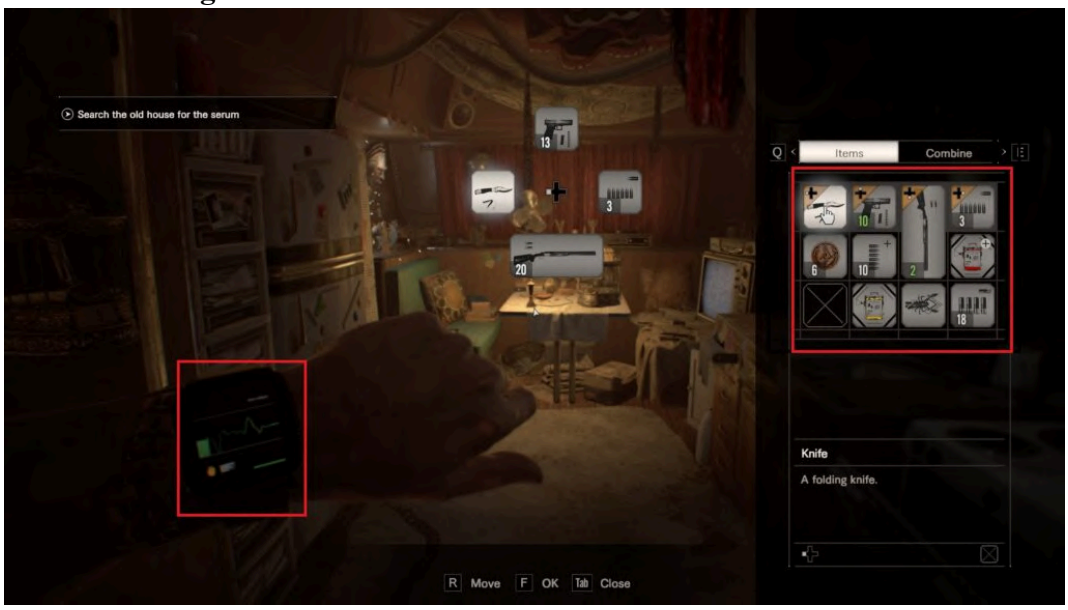
6.2.2 *RE7* and the franchise

Of course, beyond all of these influences, the previous entries of the franchise also serve as models for the game's narrative, ergodic and aesthetic motifs. The haunted house is, perhaps, the central element that alludes to previous games, as referred previously in this study. The seemingly supernatural events that occur all have reasonable in-world explanations that further

cement the bioweapons narrative that the games align with, turning otherworldly horrors into sci-fi hybrids.

In the ergodics, many elements are taken from previous games and *revised* (Leitch, 2007), such as the User Interface (UI), which is very similar to the original trilogy, but does not offer a break from the action, as the game keeps running in the background while the user controls the menus. The health status, represented by an electrocardiogram (ECG) in the first games, now appears in a smartwatch used by the avatar in the diegetic UI. The behavior of certain enemies is also very similar to previous titles, with Jack Baker having specific segments where he stalks the player and is impossible to defeat, very much in line with *Mr. X* and *Nemesis* — from the second (1998) and third (1999) entries of the saga, respectively.

Figure 24: a screenshot of the *UI* in *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard.*



Source: Capcom, 2017.

6.2.3 *RE8* and other media

The external influences of *Village* transport the ludic world to Eastern Europe, which was a fervent scenery for Gothic fiction during the 18th and 19th century, with the rise of Romanticism as a Literary movement. Victorian Gothic has, therefore, the greatest impact in the ergodic narrative of the game and its allusions, with the use of imagery such as the lycanthropes, vampires and the Romanian phantom moroi. Not only that, but the repurposing of the themes

prevalent in these narratives also serve as grounds for a colonization, as put by Leitch (2007), imbuing these narratives with new themes. While *RE7* presents the Louisiana bayous with great influence of American horror movies from the 1970s, the setting of the village establishes a temporal marker that is alike to its influences, branching into four other areas: Castle Dimitrescu, House Beneviento, Moreau's Reservoir and Heisenberg's Factory, each named after one of the Four Lords.

Alcina Dimitrescu, the first main antagonist, is a tall, elegant woman with three sadistic daughters, Bela, Cassandra and Daniela. Set in the castle after Mother Miranda took control of the village, Alcina oversees the vineyard and prizes herself in the production of Sanguis Virginis, the wine that her family made for centuries. Her image and background is a clear reference to the Gothic vampire, as her failed aristocratic lineage and the pride in her eternal beauty presents similar tropes to seminal novels such as *Carmilla* (Le Fanu, 1872/2003) — the first Gothic novel to present a female vampire — and *Dracula* (Stoker, 1897/1995). The three daughters also draw a parallel with Dracula's brides in the novel, three beautiful women that try to seduce the protagonist Jonathan Harker in an attempt to drink his blood and turn him into one of the undead (Stoker, 1995). With a decadent, putrid aspect, Bela, Cassandra and Daniela seek to do the same to Ethan, who defeats them by exposing them to the exterior wind of the castle, turning their ghostly apparitions into corporeal reality.

Figure 25: Alcina Dimitrescu (in white) surrounded by her three daughters (in black)



Source: Capcom, 2021.

Donna Beneviento, the second antagonist, alludes to the psychological horror of ghost stories such as *The Turn of the Screw* (James, 1898/1995), that deals with a governess uncertainty of a haunting in Bly Manor, while she takes care of the family's two children. Donna's section disarms the player of any means of fighting back against the threats that haunt Ethan, as he is lured inside House Beneviento by a hallucination pretending to be Mia. While inside the house, Ethan must solve a puzzle similar to an autopsy on a wooden doll, and afterwards escape a giant mutated fetus, representing his own conflicts with fatherhood and grief. Donna also acts as a possessed doll during most of this section, assuming a childish and irritative behavior as she taunts Ethan about the loss of his child and wife. It's the uncertainty of the terror being experienced — and the reason behind it — that resemble James' (1898/1995) novel, as the domestic ambiance becomes a horror of its own. Not only that, but the lack of weapons and the psychological approach allude to many of the ergodic narratives mentioned previously as turning points for horror gaming, such as *Amnesia* (2010), *Slender: The Eight Pages* (2012), *Outlast* (2013) and, of course, *P.T.* (2014), as the *Silent Hill* franchise was always a close competitor to *Resident Evil* in the *survival horror* niche.

Figure 26: a portrait of Donna Beneviento with her ventriloquist doll, Angie.



Source: Capcom, 2021.

Perhaps the most direct reference to literature is Salvatore Moreau, named after H.G. Wells' sci-fi novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896/1994). Mutated into a frog-human hybrid, Salvatore was infected with the Cadou and deemed a failure by Mother Miranda due to his grotesque appearance. Secluding himself in a swamp outside the village, he acts as one of the main responsibles for the parasite, and executes his own experiments with the Cadou and the lycans, eventually creating the Vârcolac, a more aggressive and resistant variant of the regular lycanthropes. The parallels between in-game Moreau and Wells' character are clear: both characters perform the trope of the neglected mad scientist, whose experiments question human ethics and have unconventional means. Salvatore Moreau, however, is not the only mad scientist in the game, and his short segment when compared to the others does not favor a deeper analysis of his transtextual relations.

Figure 27: Salvatore Moreau on the forefront.



Source: Capcom, 2021.

Karl Heisenberg, the last of the Four Lords, is a mutated human with the ability to manipulate metal, who has an underground factory in which he experiments with cyborg augmentations for the victims infected with the Cadou. Here, the transtextuality lends itself to the mad scientist trope (Hutchings, 2008) even more, as Heisenberg is clearly likened to Victor Frankenstein, in Mary Shelley's titular novel *Frankenstein; or, the modern Prometheus* (1818/1993). Creating an assembly line of his gruesome creations, Heisenberg's zombie-cyborgs are mass produced, without individual identities and treated as bots not only by the game, but by the character himself. Not only that, but both Karl and Victor share similar ambitions, trying to

conquer life through the manipulation of science, and effectively subduing their own moralities to do so, blinded by desire.

Finally, Mother Miranda, the final enemy, draws many allusions to Biblical imagery and folk tales. In the beginning of the narrative, she presents herself disguised as an old hag, who warns Ethan of the dangers lurking in the village. This first appearance reinforces the folk horror aspects of *Village,* as the witch is a central part of various fairy tales, such as the Grimm brothers' *Hansel and Gretel* (1812/2021) and *Rapunzel* (1812/2021). The old, wicked witch serves as a representation of the horror of old age, while her image is contrasted with Ethan, a young father in search of his daughter. When revealing her true form, Miranda's design is much younger, with four pair of wings and a Catholic mantle, alluding to the images of Catholic saints and the Seraphs, guardians of Heaven described "with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying." (Bible, 2011, Is 6, 2). Driven to madness due to the loss of her daughter after the Spanish Flu, Miranda contrasts with Ethan as she wishes to use Rose to resurrect her lost child, and her religious veil similar to the one worn by many representations of the Virgin Mary likens her to the Biblical figure in her mourning.

Figure 28: A concept art of Miranda's form as an old witch.



Source: Capcom, 2021.

Figure 29: Miranda's true form in concept art for the game.



Source: Capcom, 2021.

6.2.4 *RE8* and the franchise

Regarding references to other games in the franchise, *Village* can be best classified as analogue (Leitch, 2007), especially when compared to *Resident Evil 4* (2005). Featuring a very similar progression in its gameworld, with a village, a castle and a factory area, the eighth installment is not shy of references to the game protagonized by Leon Kennedy. Beyond the gameworld construction, the ergodic narrative has an initial segment that pays an homage to the first big opening sequence in the fourth game: as the village is taken over by enemy bots, the player has to survive for a predetermined amount of time before a cutscene, in which the enemies are dispersed. The UI is also rebuilt, with the player now having to organize a virtual briefcase with all their objects, very similar to the inventory system of *RE4* (2005).

Figure 30: the inventory's UI in *Resident Evil:Village.*



Source: Capcom, 2021.

Figure 31: the inventory's UI in the original *Resident Evil 4.*



Source: Capcom, 2005

The modifiable nature of the firearms as objects is also a comparable trait of both titles, as the upgrade system with unique traits to each weapon is a system that was first introduced in *RE4* (2005), revised in *Resident Evil 5* (2009) and would only come back in *Village*. The buying and selling of items is another key aspect of both entries, and the characters of the Duke in *Village*

and the Merchant in *RE4* (2005) have similar narrative attributes: due to their unspecified backstory, both characters are flat, only interactable for the acts of trade and upgrading weapons.

Figure 32: the menu for firearms upgrades in *Resident Evil:Village.*



Source: Capcom, 2021.

Figure 33: the menu for firearms upgrades in *Resident Evil 4*.



Source: Capcom, 2005.

These transtextual relations that classify the analogous relationship between these two media products becomes even more explicit considering the release of the reboot/remake of *Resident Evil 4* just two years after *Village*, in 2023. Considering the repurposing of the mechanical elements from the eighth title, it could be acknowledged that it served as a testing ground for the future remake/reboot that would be released by the developer, acting out possible

interactions that could not be viable or well received in the next product, considering it was not a completely new IP, but rather a revision of the game from 2005.

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It is viable to say that the objects of this study serve as prime examples of a flexi-narrative (Burnett, 2024; Nelson, 1997), with a very pertinent relation to the sujet/fabula dichotomy and the dynamic system of gaps (Sternberg, 1978; 2006). With the introduction of a new group of characters and a novel protagonist, *Resident Evil 7* (2017) serves the purpose of reviving (Proctor, 2023) the franchise, while at the same time building upon a micro-sujet that is carefully integrated into the storyworld (Klastrup; Tosca, 2004; Ryan, 2019) by the use of elements that can be relegated to the peritextual level (Genette, 1971) and, sometimes, affect the construction of the storytelling. *Resident Evil: Village* (2021), in turn, ends the narrative by bringing closure to Ethan's story and provides an epilogue as well as grounds for a future installment. The two ergodic narratives act as micro-sujets, that can be reconstructed as micro-fabula either combined or individually, given the players' choice to play one or both, while the macro-sujet is built upon the peritextual layers of the interactable objects, helping the player reconstruct the macro-fabula in their act of ergodic processing — and integrating their knowledge with the other micro-sujets of the franchise, effectively affecting the closure of certain narrative gaps (Sternberg, 1978; 2006). As Taylor (2009) writes:

> The frequent use of books, paintings, pictures, vases, sculptures, and other elements populate the game world to show that it is already inhabited by the past. Like Gothic literature's use of lost letters and hidden stories, games drawing on the Gothic tradition rely on the same elements for the game narratives and then extend those elements into the gameplay […] (p. 53)

Beyond that, the player's previous knowledge of the mythos, topos and ethos (Klastrup; Tosca, 2004) of the *Resident Evil* storyworld can affect their perception of both games and the elements of *suspense*, *curiosity* and *surprise* (cf. Sternberg, 2006). The seemingly supernatural reasoning of the events in both games, for instance, can have different effects on players that are already familiar with that storyworld and those that are not, as the mythos of the franchise already establishes scientific grounds for the horror motifs. The *suspense* of what lies forward and the *curiosity* of relating the present events with the unraveling of the storytelling, then, is heavily dependent on the player's reassembling and previous awareness of the macro-fabula of the

franchise, as well as their assessment of what is considered in-line with the morality and intents of the characters that inhabit it and the ways of traversing the ludic world, and all that impacts the intentions for *surprise* with the reveal of a gap closer.

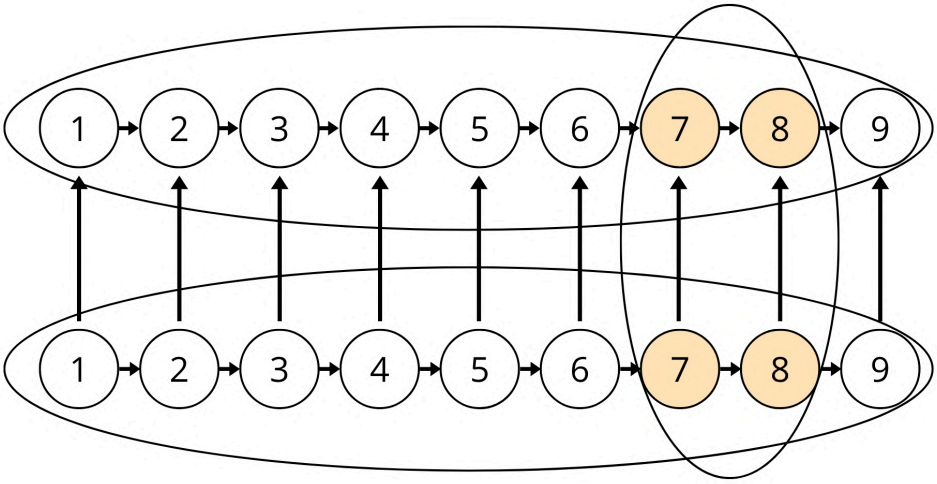
When discussing the ergodics, the changes in the way the storyworld is perceived are also significant, as *RE7* and *RE8* are the first main installments to feature a first-person camera view and draw heavy inspiration from many *survival horror* titles from the 2010s. These different transtextual relations, mainly mapped as colonizations, pastiches, revisions and allusions(Leitch, 2007), offer a variety of different tropes that are common to other texts of the horror genre, beyond the zombie stories and into narratives that have the Gothic as their main driving force, be it in the figure of the hillbilly, the witch or the vampire. Not only that, but the games also serve as direct homages to other titles in the franchise, blending narrative and ergodic references to previous entries and introducing these aspects to new players, while also maintaining a recognizable structure for those that are already familiar with the franchise. These many direct and indirect transtextual references allow the user to assess their own knowledge of these other, various products, and integrate them in the construction of hypotheses while interacting with the ludic fiction, while also evaluating the means of interacting with the world and its objects. At the same time, the combination of unstable temporal markers (Burnett, 2024) with these different references also help shape the individual identity of these ergodic narratives and supplement them as flexi-narratives.

Using the classifications proposed by Aarseth's (2012) variable model of narrative-ludic levels, it is also possible to classify the two gameworlds as rather linear corridors, with specific hubs for backtracking given some influences of the *metroidvania* genre. The objects, varied and applicable to most categories, except inventable — the most volatile classification, as they are a consequence of the player constructing an object themself that acts upon the gameworld — are spread across the environments and allow for different interactions with the world, its agents (round/flat characters and bots) and the events that happen during the ergodic processing.

The classification of the events in both ergodic narratives is perhaps the most relevant aspect for the use of this model, as it exemplifies the need to repurpose the discussions about Jakobson's Dominant (1987) and expands upon the work of Lopes (2023) in the construction of an ergodic-narrative gradient. As both titles present the user with dynamic satellites, only *RE7* has two dynamic kernels in the storytelling, dependent on each other and a direct result of player

interaction. However, due to the imposition of canon and the need to construct a serial narrative, one of these kernels is favored over the other, which is discarded in the construction of the macro-sujet. The balance between narrativity and ergodics presented here, clearly instates the dominance of narrativity, as the need to establish a direct sequel surpasses the viability of allowing consequential events of this ergodic choice in new installments. The constant balance of this gradient, then, is crucial for the creation of an ergodic serial narrative, and the use of the flexi-narrative can be explained by the schematic below, inspired by the one created by Burnett (2024).

Figure 34: a schematic detailing the fabula and sujet of the *Resident Evil* gaming saga.



Source: author, 2026.

The model above details the fabula and sujet of the Resident Evil gaming saga, featuring only the main installments. With a continuous macro-sujet (above) and a macro-fabula (below), the seventh and eighth games serve as a prime example of a flexi-narrative revival, introducing a micro-sujet and micro-fabula that act independently (circled), but integrate themselves to the serial storytelling of the ergodic narratives. In conclusion, all three different outcomes proposed by Ryan (2019) are met: the creation of multiple possible worlds through conflicting outcomes; the connection of different texts by causal links; the many texts that contribute to a greater storyworld foundation.

Overall, it is possible to attest that this analysis validates the initial hypothesis of this study, that both *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* (2017) and *Resident Evil: Village* (2021) formulate a flexi-narrative within the *Resident Evil* franchise, and the release of new entries to the series after the conclusion of Ethan Winter's narrative proves that Capcom as a developer has the freedom to isolate certain sujets into their own serial storytelling, while also shaping a coherent storyworld through the macro-sujet. Given the relevance of these ergodic narratives and their mainstream commercial success, it is also important to highlight the need for a consolidated means of researching narrative games with the proper analytical tools, and the necessity of a strengthened academic community for Game Studies in Brazil.

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