Monsters and the Mall: Videogames and the Scopic Regimes of Shopping

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ABSTRACT

George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* is a film which has been criticised for its violence, but which also contains insights into our consumer society. In this paper I argue that videogames, which are similarly criticised for being violent, also tell us about one trajectory of consumer culture. Drawing from recent re-evaluations of the flâneur-shopper I consider the temporal, spatial and panoptic scopic regimes of shopping and tourism consumption, and compare these with the experience of playing first person shooters. In doing so I also consider the development of consumer 'ways of seeing' in shopping and videogames that construct the consumer as an imagining and desiring user of commercial images. Using reviews of first person shooters that have been promoted for their visual spectacle (*Doom 3* and *Halo*) I argue that the active and speculative nature of videogame play allows for something like the flâneur-shopper's stroll through a commercially constructed space, but unlike shopping spaces which may be becoming increasingly similar, videogames re-enchant the consumer gaze with their spectacular vistas and constantly changing environments. The result however, is that Romero's criticism of the alienating effect of a consumption-orientated life may also be applied to videogames.

Author Keywords

Videogame, shopping, flaneur, scopic regime

INTRODUCTION

George Romero's film *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) contains scenes of graphic violence: stomachs being ripped open; heads being decapitated; flesh being bitten from limbs. Not surprisingly it was caught up in the video nasty witch-hunt in the UK in the 1980s [39]. However Romero's apparent purpose with this film was not to incite violence in viewers, but to critique by parody a growing consumer society. Hence most of the action takes place in a shopping mall. The punch line to *Dawn of the Dead* is that the zombies are consumers. Ironically though Loudermilk [28] acknowledges that far from getting viewers to question their consuming lives, the film may induce a daydream of what a viewer might do should they find themselves free-range in

their local mall. Harper [21] also notes how a mall may be re-enchanted as shoppers imagine their mall as zombie-infested. And the film was a commercial success as a popular consumer spectacle, even inspiring a number of videogames [39]. *Dawn of the Dead* is not then primarily a 'video nasty' about monsters, violence and murderous intent, but is about our consuming lives. Romero used graphic violence to argue *against* the mundane, one-dimensional 'false security' of consumption, but a more sympathetic reading of consumption is as an aesthetic activity where consumers use the resources of the media and the marketplace to stimulate their imagination. This highlights that when it comes to critiquing consumer culture, there is a tension between a discourse of pleasure and one of alienation. Maybe concerns about video game 'nasties' also fail to acknowledge a consumer aesthetic at their heart? Perhaps we might be less concerned by videogames' 'superficial' violence and more interested in the specific trajectory of consumer culture that they represent?

I want to consider aspects of consumer culture as a way to understand videogames in the hope that doing so provides an insight into the experience of play. So here I am not interested in consumption as the rational acquisition of goods, but as an experience based on the gaze and the imagination: a story of shopping that has roots in Benjamin's flâneur and is now intertwined with tourism to produce specific cultural 'ways of seeing', [38]. Unlike Simon [34], who sees the 'cyber spatial' flâneur/ game-player as remote and elite, I will argue that the flâneur-like experience of game playing might be familiar to any Western shopper or tourist. I hope to demonstrate a relationship between recreational shopping and playing videogames, based on the trajectory of the 'scopic regimes' of the shopper that opens up new arguments for both celebrating and criticising games based on similar approaches used to attack and defend shopping.

CONSUMER AESTHETICS AND THE GAZE

Let's start with shopping. Recreational shopping and the related activities of the tourist may be seen as aesthetic experiences that use the resources of the environment to provide stimulation for the imagination in order to create a

pleasurable dream-space [15,12,38,19]. This view of consumption includes a consideration of what Falk [13] has referred to as the 'scopic regimes of shopping' and what Urry [36] has termed 'the tourist gaze'.

A basis for much of the debate about the shopper's gaze is Benjamin's review of the flâneur. Featherstone [14] suggests that "the flâneur seeks an immersion in the sensations of the city, he seeks to 'bathe in the crowd', to become lost in feelings, to succumb to the pull of random desires and the pleasures of scopophila". So this is a visual experience that stimulates the imagination of a flâneur as they move through space. The flâneur-shopper drifts through urban spaces absorbing images, floating on the sea of new imaginings to maintain a dream like, flow like state. Occasionally they stop as an important item literally captures their imagination. They gaze on this, a shift in their way of looking. They ask themselves about its future purpose and consider what such an item might 'mean'. This may or may not result in purchase. In any case the shopper will likely continue on their way. Alternatively the flâneur as tourist-consumer may consider a specific tourist site. Again they stop, positioning themselves to get the best view (often a view given to them in a tourist guide, or marked with a sign). Once captured they move through space to the next thing to see.

This suggests two modes of looking and two associated types of engagement when it comes to our leisure pursuits, which I will, argue, also applied to digital games. Urry [37] refers to this distinction as the 'romantic' gaze and the 'spectorial' gaze (which is more like a glance). Or to put it another way, we might make a distinction between temporal looking (a glance) and spatial looking (a gaze), [33]. Scenery is ideal for gazing upon [13] and this constitutes the main way of seeing for the sight-seeing tourist, and also perhaps for the cinema viewer who gazes upon the images moving in front of them as they remain fixed in space [18]. The temporal glance, on the other hand, better captures the experience of moving through urban spaces, soaking up the atmosphere and this turns out to be a far more 'dangerous' pursuit. It is not just the store windows and shop displays that provide resources for a glancing shopper. Much of the attraction is other shoppers. However other shoppers also observe the flâneur-shopper and an unwritten rule is that you may only glimpse each other. Shields refers to the 'street gaze' (from Lacan's analysis of Benjamin) where a gaze is bounced back and forth like 'a projectile propelled from one subject to another and then defected back again' [33]. A consequence of this activity is that shoppers become self-consciously aware that they too are on display. They are also under the gaze of imagined security forces. As Falk [13] points out, the shopper should not hang around too long, loitering is strongly discouraged. This results a third sort of gaze - a 'panoptic' gaze - consistent with Foucault's explanation of self-surveillance which results in self-regulated behaviour, based on an imagined gaze of another. However, a shopper *is* permitted to retire to a 'private' space, a café or a bench, to observe others in more detail and without such high risk of extended eye contact.

Designers of shopping environments exploit these three types of 'looking'. They design and construct shopping spaces to encourage shoppers to remain lost in a consumption-related dream world of endless novelty and expectation. They provide the right temperature and lighting, the right spaces to move in, food to eat and even themes to help the shopper loose a sense of reality and to allow their imagination to take over [19]. The result is that the behaviour of the shopper/tourist is influenced by an imagined gaze of others that prevents complacency and lethargy; the promise of novelty which motivates them forward, and occasional spectacles that require detailed reflection and thought. Could it be that because this experience is culturally desirable, the designers of digital games have learnt the same tricks when constructing virtual space? It might make sense if playing games somehow 'tapped into' a familiar, pleasurable activity, but also added something new.

THE PLEASURES AND PROBLEMS OF SHOPPING

Before I consider games specifically, I want to critically develop this conceptualisation of shopping. A consequence of these ways of seeing and being seen is that consumers inwardly direct emotion towards their imagination 'where the play proper takes place' [27]. In other words, when shopping we ignore people, but actively speculate about them as just one more visual stimulus. The mall is a crowd of strangers. Recreational shoppers quickly look and then imagine things about what they have seen. As Shields puts it, the glance 'might serve to remind us of the strange quality of visualicity which always attempts to surmount the present and empirically visible to see forward into the future…' [33]. The glance anticipates things. It brings recognition and imagination into the current moment so that what comes next is as important as what is glanced now.

This interaction between novel visual stimulus and the imagination is therefore a key aspect of the recreational shopping experience. As Lehtonen and Maenpaa [27] put it: 'shopping is about moving in the city, in malls, in shops…where the plurality of possibilities are fundamental'. Novelty is always sought, but in a controlled and predictable way, so that we have 'predictable' chance. The mall offers 'a controlled degree of novelty and controlled adventures of taste with a predictably happy ending', [27]. Consumers have leant to crave for 'safe' adventure. For Featherstone [14] the flâneur is also Romantic, actively seeking to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange. This removal of the individual from the ordinary is a key aspect of entering this play space and so we might note similarities between the tourist/shopping aesthetic and Huizinga's [22] magic circle, or play. Featherstone confirms that the experience of shopping is carnival-like involving a controlled de-controlling of the emotions and he suggests that this process becomes more important the more

everyday life itself is controlled, made safe, and made predictable. That which is increasingly excluded from culture escapes through carnival because it becomes an object of desire. In effect controlled decontrolling allows the ever more regulated adult to become child-like again, to see the world afresh and enchanted. This describes shopping, but could the same be true of videogames? Do they offer a similarly controlled, dangerous, 'other world' to stimulate the imagination? If we accept this narrative of the shopper, then the step to digital virtual worlds is a small one: consumers enjoy video games because they combine familiar ways of seeing with spectacular new things to stimulate the imagination.

As a game, the enjoyable experience of shopping is learnt and is therefore not so much related to wealth, but rather to the skill of the shopper, [27] It is cultivated from youth and reinforced by life's experiences. As we grow up as shoppers and tourists we learn to privilege the visible, to seek endless novelty and to imagine and desire what that novelty might bring. The 'risk' of shopping is enjoyed as a game of chance; the pleasure based on the idea that something unexpected and special might happen but under a shelter of anonymity [27]. Mary Douglas [11] sees it as more agonistic, claiming 'so far from being mindless, shopping demands infinite attention. Pressed hard by enemy forces, it calls for constant vigilance, subtlety and resource'. A skilful pursuit is emphasised. For Featherstone [14] the flâneur is also described as a detective, trying to 'read' the city and to understand it. He may take notes 'everything may be significant'. The result is that the individual develops an aesthetic sensibility that swings between involvement and detachment, between decontrolled pleasure and moments of careful recording and analysis. This is a socialised, cultivated, learnt pleasure: a product of a commercial landscape. As consumers we expect the shopping environment to be strange and enchanting, a space of adventure that is always spectacular, but it requires skill and practice to get the most from it. Again, is this combination of skilful agon and calculated alea against a spectacular backdrop, something found in videogames? And if it is, should we celebrate games' ability to provide this enchantment for consumers?

The pleasurable enchantment of space may seem like a good thing, but there may be consequences to this retreat to fantasy. In discussing Urry and the postmodern tourist, Rojek [30] concludes that "the tourist's gaze turns to tourist experiences to provide contrast rather than 'truth' and momentary engagement instead of 'everlasting meaning'". Featherstone also highlights a danger that this produces individuals who are mere gapers, who are so intoxicated by the urban scene that they loose themselves. Narrative becomes lost and the badaud merely gawps zombie-like at an incomprehensible volume of spectacle. This hints that all might not be well with the aesthetic shopping gaze and was the thrust of Romero's parody. And as a commercial space the mall's purpose is quite different from simply creating

free pleasure: 'experiential freeware' as Falk & Campbell [12] call it. These spaces seek to seduce the consumer into ways of seeing that perpetuate a life-focus on consumption. Shopping socialises people to want to shop further [18]. One result is that those who cannot buy (the socially disadvantaged) might find little welcome in the security-patrolled mall that emphasises the controlling gaze of commercial forces. For consumers, the pleasures of consumption block out other social concerns too, and this retreat from social responsibility in favour of spectacular commodity forms presents us with possible grounds for criticism of the shopping experience. If videogame play and shopping are similar, then these criticisms might also be applied to videogames.

SHOPPING AND VIDEO GAME AESTHETICS

Those who have played videogames might already note similarities between the playing experience and my description of shopping. Videogames have been frequently criticised for violent content [3,5], but in focusing on the effect of violence these criticisms may ignore other aesthetics in games, just as *Dawn of the Dead* is more than just a video nasty. I don't want to deny the violence in games or deal directly with the merits and limitations of the various 'effects' debates, but for most video game players I suspect the emotions experienced are possibly not murderous anger and hate, but a desire to endlessly experience thrilling new visual stimulus: the same aesthetic that drives consumption and produces recreational shopping and tourism, and that Romero wanted to criticise. I now want to explore in more detail the similarities and differences between shopping and videogames. My focus is on popular FPSs because they are most easily 'mistaken' for violent, but also illustrate well the scopic regimes I have identified. But these ways of seeing could be applied to a wide range of games and it might be possible to 'map' games according to their emphasis on each scopic regime (temporal, spatial and panoptic). Some games are actually set in a mall (for example *State of Emergency*, or the *Dawn of the Dead* inspired *Dead Rising*), and I have avoided these because their use of shopping as a context may confuse the broader analysis about ways of seeing and their consequences. It might also be interesting to consider my arguments in the context of MMORPGs such as *World of Warcraft*, in terms the degree to which other players are 'known subjects', versus visual resources, for example. But for now my examples are simply illustrative of my general themes.

Something like the scopic regimes of videogames has been considered before when Atkins [4] touched on a potential source of critics' miss-reading of violence in games. When we analyse a video game we might be tempted to focus on what is on the screen. The image may be of violence. It may show corpses. It may even foreground these and this seems terrible. But Atkins points out that images in a game do not always try to capture us in a gaze in the same way as a fixed image, or even cinema. In a game the player is actively and

endlessly trying to dismiss the image in favour of the next stimulus. The play, as Atkins points out, has a future orientation based on imagining what is yet to happen, and acting on the basis of this speculation. This is much as I have described for the temporal glance of the flâneur-shopper. The design of many games, and especially FPSs generally encourages a constant, steady movement through the environment and therefore the primary mode of looking seems to be a temporal glance. As Grieb [20] observes of *Tombraider*, "Exploring the simulated places staged in a video game is initially likely to take the shape of an aimless 'stroll', …not unlike the Dadaist excursions through the urban landscape of Paris". And consider Accardo's review of *Doom 3*: "It's simultaneously innovative and derivative…. After you land, you're given some time to wander around and soak in the surroundings…. There's an amazing amount of detail in these opening areas, and it's worth taking your time to explore…." [1]. Even when the action starts in a game there is a focus on moving through a virtual space whilst reacting to the stimulus in the environment. So Fielder, reviewing *Halo* states: "One of the best things about *Halo* is that it manages to attain that perfect level of difficulty that provides you with plenty of challenge but little or no frustration…, its levels are huge and your goals shift from moment to moment as events happen around you." [16].

Like the shopper an individual is drawn through space by desire for novelty: the next room; the next weapon; and in particular the next foe. Adams review for *Doom 3* includes: "… the art actually kept getting better than it was at the beginning and the pacing was very good. The action was fairly repetitive and AI was not the most impressive…, but by the end of the game, I just didn't care. I was having a great time being in that environment while mindlessly blasting mindless creatures." [2]. The focus is on visual novelty and a known set of behaviours. Foes in FPSs might also be seen as resource for the imagination in a similar way that the flâneur-shopper views other people. Like other shoppers, they are objectified. They are thought about (when is the next one, what will it do, what will it look like), but they are not thought of as subjects. Like the shopper a player generally makes no attempt to interact other than instrumentally. Once their visual novelty is experienced, they are 'dismissed'. Of course the mere eye contact of the shopper is not enough to dismiss a glance in the virtual world of a video game, so rather than 'metaphorical projectiles' described by Shields [33], games use simulated weapon-fire. The result is similar however. A player moves through space, 'glancing' at foes, but quickly dismissing them for fear that they themselves might be caught by a damaging projectile gaze. These descriptions and Atkin's 'future orientation' of the image articulate the importance of the temporal glance during game-play. Where there are negative comments about a game these are often based on a lack of novelty, or a failure of the temporal glance to stimulate the imagination: a feeling that the player has 'done it all before'. For example Adams writes of *Doom 3*:

"I still had fun running from room to room killing these monsters, I just wish there was more variety to it - like the escort mission halfway through. Small puzzle solving instances, of which there weren't many, would have been nice as well. Getting past areas by finding PDAs with a new security code got old quick." [2].

This suggests an additional need for something that invites a more considered imagination by capturing the player's gaze. And like the shopper, specific objects, or commodities may serve this role. In a game these are occasionally gazed upon special items PDAs, weapons, power-ups, armor, health icons and puzzles. They occasionally arrest attention and ask a player to consider their benefits. If collected, some may become markers of the experience: souvenirs of the trip into another world, and 'physical' evidence of accomplishment and skill. Fielder's review of *Halo* again illustrates this consumer-like choice in a game: "There are also many choices available to you in the parts of the game where vehicles appear. At some points you even have the opportunity to pick from multiple vehicles, such as the Warthog jeep, the Ghost hovercraft, the Scorpion tank, or the Banshee attack craft. ", [16]. And there may be other opportunities for spatial ways of seeing in games. I have noted that the agon and alea driven movement through the street is a tiring exercise that occasionally invites the shopper to seek the refuge of a café, from where they may gaze at the street scene safely. Without such a mechanism in games a player may easy become fatigued and reduced to a mere 'gawper', lost without narrative necessary to experience performance (*Tetris*? *Space Invaders*?). There may be several in-game mechanisms to overcome this. Firstly the between-level cut scene, for example: "Occasional cut scenes (rendered within the game's engine) help round out the story, and are presented at a perfect pace. When all is said and done, it's still a pretty basic sci-fi story, but in Doom 3, presentation is everything." [1]. The cut scene allows the player to 'sit back' and simply gaze. There may also be times during a game where the player is still in control, but invited to look around, to explore without the risk of enemy engagement. In these circumstances dramatic, even tourist-like scenery is often employed: "Halo's a stunning-looking game, full of huge environments that are packed with eye candy." [16]. As King [25] points out, the spectacle is a key aspect of the attraction of games with each new game required to offer something new (a new vista, or at the very least new detail or effects). And there are even mechanisms to capture these memories. The screen shot serves like a photo-souvenir (or perhaps when presented as part of a review they are more like a tourist brochure). Another technique used in *Halo* to produce a café-like spatial gaze is the sniper rifle. With this weapon a player may observe from a safe distance without the risk of being seen and may therefore gaze upon the enemy at length.

For the most part however, just like the shopper, loitering is not an option in videogames where there is always the

possibly of an enemy appearing and the knowledge that the computer that controls the monsters knows exactly what you are doing too. In *Doom 3* for example a player soon learns that their actions and inactions may trigger a monster attack. Avoiding street loitering because of the panoptic gaze of security forces is akin to avoiding loitering in a game to avoid the imagined gaze of the computer controlled foes. As in the modern city, there is little escape from disciplinary gazes in a game. As King [25] puts it: "Too much idle enjoyment of spectacular environments can be bad for the health of the avatar who is liable to be shot, eaten or to face some other unpleasant fate in many games if attention is directed solely to the quality of surroundings."

These excerpts from consumer and scholarly reviews don't just illustrate the scopic regimes I have articulated, but also highlight that they are the very things that players want to know about, the aspects of a game that result in a decision to invest time and money. FPSs are designed to take the player out of the ordinary: to a future, a past, or another world. They are inherently imaginative but never entirely new – not even in terms of the game worlds they create. As Kasvin [23] highlights in his review of *Doom 3*, part of the pleasure for players of the original game will be in seeing familiar foes recreated in higher resolution. We tend to know these places already. So the ordinary or familiar become something worth seeing because they are seen anew. Just like shopping in its ideal form, games are both reassuringly familiar and yet hold a promise of novelty, surprise and thrill.

Balancing the novelty of encounters to sustain a pace, a feeling that remaining in one place is not acceptable, and yet occasionally allowing opportunity for the romantic gaze which encourages reflection and therefore a narrative: to therefore balance the temporal, panoptic and spatial gazes becomes an art of game design, and game designers may have more to learn from the experiences of those who have created compelling and seductive shopping and tourist experiences (and vice versa). But would such collaboration be a 'good' thing?

A CRITIQUE OF VIDEOGAMES AS VIRTUAL FLÂNERIE
A focus on the importance of the image has resulted in discussions about parallels between games and cinema [9,24]. Many games undoubtedly draw from cinema techniques in order to create visual spectacle, but they add the experience of interaction and in particular (and increasingly) an open-ended narrative. Like shopping, the experience is therefore one of being part of the spectacle rather than on the outside looking on. As Lehtonen and Maenpaa [27] put it: 'the difference between watching television or films and the activities of shopping and walking about in the city is in the possibility of joining in the bustle of moving images' and Grieb [20] explains: "…the experience of the videogame is an excursion that invites interaction rather than observation". The temptation

to see games as a development of the cinema experience may come from visual and narrative similarities, but although games follow cinema, it may be more useful to see both as technologically enhanced developments of an older set of practices and as alternative solutions for 'jaded' individuals who desire to be removed from the mundane and the ordinary. With this technological trend however there is also a persistent move to commodification where any cultivated pleasurable experience is captured by and subject to the market. Urry [38] highlights that tourist gazes are now constructed by professionals and through a market and media system become 'authorised'; Kline, Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter [26] similarly see videogames as part of a market system. Marketers must constantly stimulate the consumer imagination in new ways. This is no easy task, and we have witnessed a move away from satisfaction through commodities themselves and towards novel experiences. Ironically for Romero, his attempt to 'reveal' the pointlessness of consumption as a way of life, ended up reinvigorating it. But even experiential marketing has its limits as consumers increasingly find that they have 'done everything' that the material world has to offer [32], or worse, that the market place has become both too complex to ever know with any certainty, yet offers little real novelty and thrill, resulting in a desperate unknowable sameness [31]. One potential remedy this is the digitally virtual. Games may be comforting as a form of consumer spectacle because they are in some ways safe and predictable (based on familiar ways of seeing and experiencing) and in other ways new and exciting: a sort of knowable difference, and therefore a perfect consumer adventure.

This might sound like a celebration of games as a form of virtual consumption that re-enchants life by re-engaging jaded consumers with their imagination. But to leave things there would be to avoid the standing critique of consumption as a mode of being (and of seeing) which includes that intended by Romero and which might also be applied to the spectacular virtualised consumption that is video game play.

Given that I have been writing about *Dawn of the Dead* and *Doom 3* it is perhaps fitting that Buck Morss (cited in Miller, [29]) notes that Benjamin constantly alludes to the arcades, the home of the flâneur, as hell. This is because commodities are fetishised and reality removed in 'a dream world of mass culture that hides the failure of political progress in the image of progress as material abundance', [29] or in this case the image of progress as endlessly more spectacular videogames. By presenting the stimulus for an imagined future, Benjamin's arcades were an important political tool of the present. Flâneur-shoppers are distanced from their 'real' lives and reduced to 'mere consumers', or 'mere game-players'. This is to assume a superficiality to shopping that hides some other mode of being that is more meaningful (and in Benjamin's case, that people might be awakened to). Featherstone [14] also identifies a decay of

the principles of the flâneur as they become mere consumers in everything. Yet for Miller [29] the surface of shopping might be reality. Campbell [8] has made a similar point about shopping as a meaningful experience of 'who we are'. He sees consumption as an opportunity for the development of skills that have meaning to the 'craft consumer' who gains achievement through the creative act of consumption. We might see such creative and meaningful achievement in game-play too, and if shopping 'matters' to people because it has meaning to them [29], so might digital, playful experience. So is the 'meaningless consumption' line of criticism just nostalgia for an imagined less commercial age, or an elitist call for more worthy activities? From these perspectives both shopping and videogames suffer the double negative of not having the purpose of the work, but being a poor form of its opposite (artistic play), because of their commercial focus. Playing games has too little point to be praised as art, and is not pointless enough to offer a critique of the consumer ethic.

This criticism of shopping and also of games hinges on their 'artificiality' and their commercially constructed nature. Best and Kellner [6] argue that the concept of the spectacle has become normalised, or expected and that interactive media (the web in their case) provides just one more commercial stage for the spectacle which individuals are socialised into preferring. Drawing from Debord, they highlight that the society of the spectacle is a commodity society ultimately rooted in production. Debord [10] also saw the spectacle as a tool of pacification, deploiticisation and therefore control. The passive consumption of spectacle prevents the individual from actively producing ones own life in ways capable of challenging existing political structures. Instead even the craft consumer only reproduces the consumption act in all their activities. So the problem is that 'Rather than vent anger against exploitation and injustice, the working class is distracted and mollified by new cultural productions.' [6]. The focus here is on the ability of the individual to create, beyond what a market offers. Creative praxis has been reduced to having a thing - the fetishism of commodities - and later for Debord (and for experiential marketing including tourism) the appearance of things. Debord's situationalist call that individuals create their own existential events is lost in the re-enactment of someone else's (commercial) spectacle: as Debord puts it, 'his own gestures are no longer his but those of another who represents them to him'[10]. This may be an easy criticism to level at single player FPS games, but what about game modders or MMORPG players? Modders use the resources of games to create their own play and this behaviour is also invited in MMORPGS. Taylor [35] has even illustrated that some of the situations created in MMORPGs are not at all what the designers have intended because they have criticised the game and its commercial owners. But as a form of critique this is still within the marketplace. Actions are restricted to tactical battles over the 'rights' of players rather than anything aimed more substantially at the system

that produces them. An in-game protest is an ineffective critique of the market system that produces games. The final claim Best and Kellner make for the web is that there is a potential balance between further alienation and an opportunity for transformation. This might also be claimed for videogames, but in the case of FPSs that balance may sway to the former. Most players are excluded even from participation in the creation of games, let alone access to political power that might challenge the structures of the game industry, or capitalism itself.

Featherstone [14] has questioned whether the increasing commercialisation of spaces (and now digital virtual spaces) leaves room for the original spirit of the flâneur, or rather he asks how new 'versions' of the flâneur experience may differ from the traditional model. He asks that we might imagine that the contemporary city contains considerable diversity (more so than the Paris which Benjamin described). This might be a good thing. The result could be an extension of the material and imaginary resources, 'for a new more complicated game of experiencing, reading and representation' [14], where diversity results in an experience of the exotic. But he also compares models of the city that actively represent community (shared values) with a more recent model of 'Babylon', 'where diversity is such that individuals tolerate each other but do not interact' [14]. This highlights ethical and not just aesthetic issues. Individual pleasure of the new might be compared with a need to engage with others, to build trust and consensus and to take responsibility for actions. Rojek [30] too is dissatisfied with the inability of the 'postmodern tourist' to consider moral responsibility. And engagement with single player games might be seen as a retreat from social engagement that is narcissistic, selfish and a further extension of the object-orientated, flâneur-shopper. FPSs are therefore a form of hyper-consumerism. The move to the commercial interior of the mall de-emphasised the experience of others and placed more emphasis on the commodity object as the source of consideration and pleasure. A broader trajectory seems to have been from wilderness, to street exterior, to mall interior, and finally to digital game interior in a commercialised home. For Featherstone the mall resulted in more control of the individual. Only those with economic means are permitted to experience its pleasures and rowdy, dangerous behaviour is not permitted. Control may extend further still when politicised action is reduced to in-home, in-game play. For example the game *State of Emergency* makes a superficial spectacle out of anti-corporate demonstrations. The result is that far from the new producerly 'theatre of consumption' hoped for by Firat and Dholakia [17], videogames may represent further low participation, passive, individualised, alienated consumption that reinforces a consumer way of seeing and experiencing.

CONCLUSIONS

The film *Dawn of the Dead*, like many apparently violent videogames, may tell us more about being a consumer than about violence. The film attempts to provide a critique of consumption, but in its spectacle and it is ability to re-enchant shopping spaces (and even to inspire re-mediation in the form of videogames) it seems to confirm consumption as a thrilling activity based on a negotiation between the gaze, the imagination, and action.

Much video game play may also be seen as re-enchanted shopping and may be understood in terms of the construction of similar scopic regimes: the disciplinary, panoptic gaze of the machine; the flâneur's gaze as a player moves through virtual space and a romantic gaze as the player takes in a cut scene, scenery or considers which commodities to collect. Games may borrow from cinema techniques [24] but their primacy aesthetic may be more similar to the flâneur-shopper. And as an enchanting and thrilling experience with a level of potential novelty and diversity that a mall may never achieve, they may be celebrated.

But there is also room for criticism in such a development of consumer culture. Despite evidence that some players may use the resources of games to create their own 'situations', even these are inward looking (they relate to the game experience rather than to any material social issue). And for the most part players, especially of FPSs do not even achieve this level of participation. They remain seduced by a fantastic and spectacular form of commercialised flânerie where the virtual is fetishised at the expense of actual social experience. I wonder if an attempt to critique consumption through a game would be more successful than *Dawn of the Dead*. But then I remember that *The Sims* and *Grand Theft Auto* (both which may be seen as including criticisms of consumer lifestyles) are best selling commodities in a $20 billion industry.

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