CHAPTER ELEVEN: 
FILM, ADAPTATION AND COMPUTER GAMES 
Diane Carr with Diarmid Campbell and Katie Ellwood

In John Carpenter’s 1982 film The Thing an isolated Antarctic research community is infiltrated and gradually annihilated by a voracious shape-shifting alien. The film was based on ‘Who Goes There?’ - a short story by John W. Campbell published in 1938, and filmed as The Thing From Another World in 1951. The scientists discover an apparently dead alien frozen in ice. Once defrosted, the alien goes on the rampage. The creature has the ability to mimic other life forms. This enables it to infiltrate the research team. Unable to tell which of their companions are still human, the team begins to disintegrate.

In 2002 a computer game sequel to Carpenter’s film, also titled The Thing, was released by the London based Computer Artworks. Computer games have rules and chance, and they are played - the player plots events and interacts with objects in the game world. This means that even if a game shares a title, a setting, a villain, and generic features with a movie, there will be marked differences in the experience offered by each. As this implies, considering the adaptation of The Thing from film to game, involves revisiting questions of genre (horror, in this case), and looking again at the relationship between the ludic and the representational within a particular game. In this chapter this relationship is examined from the perspective of game development and design, rather than the player. This is was made possible through the involvement of Diarmid Campbell, The Thing’s Lead Game Programmer, and Katie Ellwood, a games producer and writer with a professional interest in cinematic and story-driven computer games.

Computer games based on feature films (and filmed versions of computer games) have become common over the past two decades. Some games, such as Star Wars (1983) make no attempt to add to the narrative of their source. Instead, the game is ‘a three-dimensional space shoot-‘em-up which abstracted elements from certain battle scenes in the film and turned them into simple game objectives’ (Poole 2000: 88). Other games, such as Enter the Matrix (2003) arguably prioritise the source material (the Matrix film franchise, in this case), at the expense of playability, with uneven results (Carr 2005). As this implies, movie and game tie-ins are diverse in approach. They also vary a great deal in quality. In this chapter the discussion will be limited to one particular adaptation, rather than the phenomenon in general.

Horror - from film to game
As Patrick Crogan (2000) has pointed out, Carpenter’s film is a generic hybrid (science fiction and horror), and it stars a monster that is the ultimate hybrid - an endlessly adaptive and apparently indiscriminate consumer. The game is also a generic amalgam - it is an adaptation of a film (that itself incorporates material from a previous film and an earlier short story). Additionally, *The Thing* borrows characteristics from a range of different computer game genres. It incorporates elements of First Person Shooters and RPGs, and fuses these varied parts into an action adventure style ‘horror-survival’ whole.

Prior to discussing the production of *The Thing*, it would be pertinent to investigate the relationship between horror movies and computer games in general. As Tanya Krzywinska writes in ‘Hands-On Horror’, the ‘horror genre has made the transition to videogames for a number of reasons. Horror offers death as spectacle and actively promises transgression; it has to power to promote physical sensation, and the genre appeals to the youth market that is central to the games industry’ (2002: 207). For Krzywinska, the interactive nature of game-play amplifies the dynamics of generic horror, including patterns of passivity, peril, attack and flight. By switching between game-play and cut-scene, games are able to ‘intensify an awareness of the dynamic between being in control and out of control’ (2004:215, emphasis in original).

Both the game and the film of *The Thing* are horror, and both feature monstrous ‘things’ that blur the divide between human flesh and alien otherness. Transgressive, all-consuming monsters are common in horror. The allure of these fearsome hybrids has been analysed using the notion of ‘abjection’, a concept developed by psychoanalytic philosopher Julia Kristeva. According to Kristeva, abjection involves disturbing phenomena that crosses or threatens the borders that are necessary to our sense of self. The abject evades categorisation, thwarts clarity, undermines order and undoes differentiation. A corpse, for instance, is ‘the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which...one cannot protect oneself as from an object’ (1982: 4).

Film theorists have used the notion of the abject to probe horror and science fiction cinema. Barbara Creed (1990), for instance, applied it to the ‘Monstrous-Feminine’ in the 1979 film, *Alien*. Films including *The Thing*, or *Shivers* (1976) offer viewers repellent monsters that skip and lurch over the border from one form to another, from one sex or species to another; aliens that are sticky, who leak profusely, who reduce human beings to snacks, or egg incubators. These horrific creations are compelling and repulsive by turn, thanks to their power to disregard the divisions between the internal and the external, between the self and others, between life and death.

Carol Clover has written about the ways that horror movies and their rowdy audiences hark back to pre-cinematic forms of entertainment. Generic horror relies on its viewers’ ‘knowing consumption’. These films make a virtue out of a formula. As such, horror movies have strong ties to folkloric practices. Generic horror bears ‘all the hallmarks of oral narrative: the free exchange of themes and motifs, the archetypal characters and situations, the accumulation of sequels, remakes and imitations. This is a field where
there is in some sense no original, no real or right text, but only variants’ (Clover 1992: 11). What this reiteration suggests, argues Clover, is that the rendition or performance of the formula (who gets killed where, in what order, and by what means, for instance) is more important than innovation for its own sake. This emphasis on performance, constraint and repetition is reminiscent of gaming, and avatars, as we argued in Chapter 6, in some ways resemble the heroes of oral narrative.

For *The Thing’s* developers, showing humans turning into thing-monsters involved using computer animation techniques. As Diarmid Campbell explained, ‘our people were built up out of skinned components (arms, legs heads etc.). So we used a combination of changing the underlying bone hierarchy, and scaling different bones, particle effects and swapping components in and out to create the transformation’. In the 50’s film version, ‘the alien is finally revealed to be nothing more than (an actor) dressed up in a monster suit and rampaging through the camp as only a man in a monster suit can do’ (Billson 1997:16). The monster-thing in Carpenter’s movie is made up of ‘clay, foam latex, metal machinery, cabling, heated Bubble Yum gum, strawberry jelly, mayonnaise, cream corn, melted crayons and food thickener’ (Crogan 2000: 3). The horror of Carpenter’s film is loud, visceral and gooey. Despite the comparative cleanliness of the digital processes that underlie monstrous transformation in the game, it is still possible to find parallels between horror films and gaming that involve the body.

The ability of Carpenter’s movie to produce sensations of shock, revulsion or fear in the viewer has been analysed by film theorists, including Linda Williams (1999). Williams, in fact, singled out three film genres with a propensity for evoking physical sensations and embodied responses. Porn, horror and ‘weepies’ are associated with low cultural status, youth, women, marginality or deviance. Sensory rather than cerebral, these films promise their audiences quite specific embodied experiences, and they will be judged successful according to whether they deliver, respectively, sexual arousal, fear or tears.

These ‘body genres’ involve excesses that are gratuitous, that go beyond any narrative function. Yet, as Williams argues, to describe these excesses as gratuitous is actually to miss the point, because overflow and sensation are the stated purpose of these films. The reactive and physical nature of game-play (and the lowly cultural status of computer games themselves) suggests affinities between film horror as a body genre, and certain computer games. Computer gaming is physical, on a number of levels. Scary games provoke sensations of fear. The player must manipulate the avatar gestures and movements, and guide them through space, which implies a particular, embodied symbiosis – plus there is the player’s tactile manipulation of the game controls.

Williams argues that ‘fantasies are not, as is sometimes thought, wish-fulfilling linear narratives of mastery and control leading to closure and the attainment of desire. They are marked, rather, by the prolongation of desire, and by the lack of fixed positions with respect to the objects and events fantasised.’ (1991: 711). The continuing salience of these fantasies explains their enduring popularity – they are ‘a cultural form of problem solving’ (1991: 710). Williams attributes various temporalities to the three forms of fantasy associated with body genres. While pornography is described as ‘on time’, and
melodrama is cast as ‘too late’, the temporality of horror is ‘too early!’ This anxiety is characteristic of (but not limited to) adolescence, and corresponds to fantasies of being caught out, exposed, or ambushed.

The idea that horror fantasies involve the compulsive reworking of a ‘problem’ recalls computer games’ capacity for repetition. Repetition in *The Thing* occurs at the level of task and mission (opening doors, locating keys and codes, accessing rooms), as well as in confrontations with the various monster-things. The things in the game are an array of variations on a theme. Toothy, tentacled, bi-pedal or quadruped, the monsters spawn in dark corners and wait behind doors; they burst out of live team-mates, or bubble out of corpses. They are a host, to be repeatedly dispatched, rather than a singular enemy locked into a relationship with the hero protagonist. If anxiety around readiness is pivotal to horror, it has found its perfect match in computer games. Ambush is frequent in games, as is the need to identify and load the appropriate weapon without hesitation. Failing to expect the former, or carry out the latter, will result in injury or death. Walkthroughs are marked by this anxiety – they are distinctly cautionary:

The (alien) will thrash the room a bit and if it breaks the wall next to you, it will reveal a scuttler pod. If you edge out, you can burn it from around the corner of the box (Use your first person view). Take care of it and you won’t have scuttlers pester you. However, if it doesn’t destroy that wall early, expect some scuttlers to have spawned and (they) will begin attacking. (Morgan 2002)

**Adaptation and *The Thing***

The developers of the computer game were faithful to the 80’s film, but it is a game and, of course, games are played. This means that even when content is borrowed from a film and faithfully reproduced within a game, its meaning will change. As Patrick Crogan argues in reference to *The Thing* (film) and *The Thing* (game):

the modelling of a situation to explore its parameters and methods for controlling it interactively describes a computer game’s response to cultural themes or content in contrast to a filmic one that is based on a narrative procedure of retrospective configuration of event-elements, a procedure that serves an interpretive function (Crogan 2004: 16).

In other words, when playing a game, the player is exploring the limits, choices and the strategies inherent to a situation. The protagonist, the environment and the monster(s) entail variables that are manipulated or experimented on. In this case, the situation involves a military unit, in the Antarctic, who must survive an infestation of homicidal aliens. To function as a game, *The Thing* must confront the player with challenges, but it must also be winnable. This distinguishes the game from the film. In the game ‘the threat of an unpredictable and sometimes unidentifiable enemy and the paranoia it engenders are replayed as precisely playable challenges able to be overcome at the end of a training process’ (Crogan 2004: 16). The thing(s) that lurk in the game are killed by the player, once he or she has acquired sufficient skills, and generally only
after the protagonist has been injured or killed a number of times. The viewer of the film cannot kill or outwit the monster, and the film’s hero will not die repeatedly because of the viewer’s lack of dexterity. The game does represent material from the film, yet in the move from film to game, its function and meaning is altered.

As noted in Chapter 3, the player has influence over the arrangement, frequency or duration of events in a game. This is one of the major differences between temporality in game-play, and time in conventional narratives. There are also significant and associated spatial differences. The term ‘space’ here refers to the setting, to distance and proximity, and to the potential for exploration and navigation. The design of space and the arrangement or manipulation of existents within it, are central to gaming. It does not follow, however, that the spaces in the game should be seen as irrevocably divorced from those of the film. As this online, player-authored walkthrough of *The Thing* shows, for some the appeal of these rooms is due to their prior appearance in the film: ‘Access the CCTV camera station. This will switch you to a view of the room behind the door…Fans of the movie will instantly recognize this room’. The author adds that once the room has been accessed, ‘I'm sure movie fans will want to nose around’ (Morgan, 2002).

Playing *The Thing* means crossing dangerous terrain, accessing particular zones, disarming barriers and unlocking doors. Death by exposure is possible because the game characters are susceptible to the extreme weather. They are only safe outside for a short amount of time, after which their health will begin to degrade. Inside spaces might be warmer, but this is also where the monsters tend to be waiting in ambush (according to the film’s famous tag line 'Man is the warmest place to hide'). Doors, insides, and exteriors form arrangements to be negotiated by the player.

Close the doors behind to each room once you are done with a wave. This keeps the next wave from pouring into the room while you are fighting the previous one. You can also open the door, pitch in a grenade and kill several since they are so bunched up (…) You have just enough time to get into the recreation room, however, you can also use the door to corral your enemies to avoid being surrounded (…) If you're lazy and don't want to figure the doors to open out for yourself, open 9, 8, 6, 3 and then 2. There be monsters behind the other doors… may as well make this easy, right? (Morgan 2002)

It is hardly surprising then, that the arrangement of space, and ‘things’ in space, is fundamental to the design process. The developers selected a few core themes (such as infection, isolation and trust) from the film, to develop into dynamics within their game. The next step was to begin the design of the game itself. Designing a game level entails making decisions about ‘balance’. It is important to align the degree of difficulty, with the amount of resources on offer: the number and variety of weapons, the frequency of confrontations, the strength and resilience of the enemy. After arriving at a few ‘ballpark figures’, the level was planned out on paper. As Diarmid said:
Someone might propose, ‘right, so the player is going to come here. We’re going to plant a key here, then we’re going to have these monsters here, or here…and these weapons hidden here’. This rough design is reviewed by the designers and they play the level through in their heads, thinking ‘Ok, I’m going to walk this way, and now I’m going to go over here’. They have to try and imagine what it’s like to play it, which is quite difficult to do. It is one thing to design an additional level for an existing game, but trying to imagine playing a level of a game that does not yet exist, is much more difficult.

As well as mapping-out the level on paper, the development team found it useful to physically perform the various happenings. When developing the whole idea of distrust, for example, and the idea that a character can turn and become the enemy, it was useful to act it out. Using these methods they arrived at a rough design of a game level. At that point, the process moved onto a computer. The developers planted weapons and monsters in a terrain mesh-style environment, and began to actually play it, testing out the timing, getting a feel for the space, and moving things around to the point where it began to ‘feel right’. Diarmid explained that:

Various controls are on the screen, and the user would select from these variables, changing or adding the objects to the game, or moving the camera. So, you could decide, ‘right, I’m going to add this kind of monster here but, let’s see, he’s just going to stay there until…’ and then you could place something called a ‘position trigger’ somewhere on the level. Once the player’s character trips the trigger, the monster will begin to approach them. The level editor could set this up in a few minutes, and then they will just play through it and see how it feels.

This stage of the process should be seen as editing rather than composing, and it should not replace the earlier, paper based stage of design. There is a danger, for one thing, that when the designer plays out the new level, he or she may experience it as satisfying due to an intimate prior knowledge of the terrain. In order that the level works just as well for other gamers, it is important to ensure that the level’s logic is sound, prior to playing it through. There is another reason to work on paper. It is possible that the assets and tools needed to realise a new game level are not initially available to the designer. They might be working with new technology or with new software developed specifically for the game. This means that tools and applications must be defined prior to or concurrent with the construction of the level. If there is no ‘blueprint’, it is possible that the technology developed will work against, rather than for, the designer.

**Characterisation and cut-scenes**

The developers viewed the Carpenter film, and identified features that could be adapted meaningfully into a game. This does not mean merely replicating imagery. It means selecting features from the film, such as infection, the setting and the extreme weather, or the attributes of the alien, and converting these elements into game mechanics. A game mechanic is ‘simply any part of the rule system of a game that covers one, and only one, possible kind of interaction…A game may consist of several mechanics, and a
mechanic may be part of many games. The mechanic trading, for example, simply states that during the game, players have the possibility to trade’ (Lundgren and Bjork, 2003).

In the film the team disintegrates as they realise that any of their number may be infected, and might no longer be human. The game developers elaborated on this dynamic. Each team member has a ‘trust meter’ that shows the level of confidence that he has in the protagonist. A high level of trust will mean that he will obey without question. A very low level of trust might mean that he turns on the protagonist in self-defense. Certain actions will result in a loss of trust, while other acts will result in its increase. Similarly, when members of the team are afraid, their performance deteriorates. According to the game manual ‘Your Squad-Mates are entirely aware of the circumstances they’re in. You’ll have to manage their fear in order to keep them stable’ (p 11) and to prevent them from becoming a liability. Infection, trust and fear in the game are interconnected, as Diarmid explained:

Adapting the standard action game rules to reflect this change (infection) was a logical step in creating the game of The Thing. Having a trust system as a mechanics might not seem such an obvious step. However, while in standard action games, the baddies are the baddies and the goodies are the goodies and everyone know who is whom, as soon as you introduce the idea of Infection this distinction becomes much more complex and dynamic. An NPC does not know which side another character is on. While the introduction of trust as a mechanic was something we wanted to do anyway, I think that even if we hadn’t wanted to, we would have had to do it in some form to allow the A.I. (Artificial Intelligence) to cope with the infection mechanic.

As game designers Salen and Zimmerman have explained, compelling play relies on the player being offered meaningful choices, with discernable outcomes (2004: 61-66). In The Thing Narrative elements (including characterisation) function to contextualise goals, missions and obstacles. In this way suspense is heightened, and in-game events are made meaningful - granted validity and coherence. As Diarmid reported,

Characterisation in the game was important. We wanted the player to get attached to their characters and so be more disturbed when they got infected and not want to shoot them. Each character had a set of generic speech that could be triggered in certain types of situation (e.g. seeing someone burst out, getting scared, finding a friend). All generic speech was said in a manner appropriate to that character. The idea was that you could put any of the characters in any of the situations in the game and they would say things appropriate to the situation. They then also had a set of character-specific speech that would be triggered at specific points in the game to tell you something about their background and lead the story along. Then some characters would appear in cut-scenes. We also tweaked some of the A.I. parameters to make some characters more likely to get scared or go mad.
The characters in *The Thing* are less athletically mobile than the avatars in other action adventure games – they do not jump, roll or climb, for example. There were various reasons for this. For one, the developers saw the gritty realism of Carpenter’s film as one of its strengths. This informed the realistically human (or limited) abilities of the characters in the game. Secondly, as Diarmid explained ‘People get scared when you take away their freedom. Stopping the character being able to look up and down and stopping him jumping confines the player in his environment much more and intensifies the suspense’ (see Krzywinska 2002 for a discussion of control in horror games). A third reason involved ease of use. As Diarmid pointed out, ‘the more movements you can do, the more buttons you need to do it. We already had loads of buttons taken up with squad communication and weapons operation. We didn’t want to make movement any more complicated than it needed to be’.

As noted, the 80’s version of *The Thing* was a remake of a 1951 film titled *The Thing From Another World*. This black and white feature differed from the original short story and the later film in several ways. For one thing, its cast included a number of women. Carpenter and *The Thing’s* scriptwriter Bill Lancaster toyed with the idea of admitting women, but decided against it on the grounds that this was, in Carpenter’s words, ‘more realistic’ (Billson 1997: 35). For Lancaster, including women would have been ‘gratuitous’ (quoted in Billson 1997:35), and would have necessitated adding ‘obligatory love scenes’ (*ibid*). Notions of realism are, of course, relative. The film does, after all, revolve around the antics of a hideous monster from outer space\(^8\). As Diarmid reports, women were left out of *The Thing* (game) for less odd and more prosaic reasons:

> As far as I am aware, it was simply a question of economics. All the male characters shared a skeleton and an animation set. The animation set consisted of approx 120 different animations (‘run’, ‘walk’, ‘sidestep’, ‘throw grenade’). To introduce one woman would have meant a new skeleton and redoing most of the animations. Given our limited number of animators and the limited memory on the PS2, we decided not to.

Like many other 3D console games, *The Thing* contains cut-scenes. In one sense these real-time animated sequences show the debt owed by computer games to cinema. For some designers and game writers, cut-scenes are functional (rather than merely decorative), because they re-establish continuity, plot and characterisation – features that tend to become lost during the played levels. Associating cut-scenes with narrative, and levels with game-play is an oversimplification. However it is true that traditionally in action adventure games the levels are associated with play and interactivity, while cut-scenes are equated with non-interactive storytelling.

Actually there are various degrees of interactivity in a game like *The Thing*. There are, for instance, points where the player’s avatar might be approached or spoken to by a non-player character. This would involve a minor animation, and the player might not necessarily lose control entirely. At other times, there may be a need to relay more complex information in a particular sequence, or there could be details that need to be
related to the player without interruption. At these points control is taken away from the player, and animations are used.

For game developers the creation and insertion of animated segments into a game raises several problems. During a cut-scene the player has no control over onscreen events, so it is necessary to ensure, first of all, that nothing else in the game will move during it. As Diarmid pointed out, ‘you don’t want the player going into a cut-scene while a monster is mauling them, especially if the attack continues while its going on!’ For the developers of *The Thing*, finding ways to effectively and efficiently integrate cut-scenes into the game was a process in itself, not least because it was crucial to avoid situations where glaring inconsistencies emerged between a played level and a subsequent cut-scene. The more complicated or elaborate the cut-scene is, the more likely it is that there will be obvious discrepancies between it and the game level. The environment is the same during both, so it is noticeable if blood splatter or dead bodies, for instance, disappear and reappear. Diarmid said that these ramifications only became fully apparent during the development process:

It was only after we had completed quite a lot of the cut-scenes that we realised we might have problems. Eventually we developed a system whereby we would look at each individual cut-scene and decide which characters are essential to it, and which are not. The essential people (a character who says or does something important, for example) must still be alive at the point that the cut-scene starts. On quite a few occasions we ended up having to make squad members ‘mission critical’ - they needed to survive, because they turned up in the cut-scene a bit later!

Cut-scenes fall into two categories: pre-rendered, and real-time. The definition of a pre-rendered cut-scene is an animation that is rendered into a piece of pre-edited, pre-recorded, pre-defined movie file that is stored on the game disc and played when it is triggered by a level completion. The characters, set and props may all be derived from the game, and perhaps even rendered through the game engine, but the animation has been created, captured and saved before the game left the development studio: it is inherently unchangeable. As Diarmid’s comments suggest, games with pre-rendered cut-scenes must be elaborately pre-planned, in order to avoid undermining the continued ‘reality’ of the game world.

Levels are unpredictable, variable sections of real-time game-play, manic button pressing, repetition, exploration and experimentation. The game is a designed experience involving certain constraints, but a player’s moves cannot be predicted. Careful planning will help to eradicate a percentage of errors in continuity during the move from played level, to cut-scene, but it is almost impossible to predict all of the possible outcomes, especially as, due to tight production schedules, the cut-sequences are often compiled at the same time as the levels. It might be argued that clever design should render inconsistencies impossible, but this involves a level of over-determination that is detrimental to game-play.
Unlike pre-rendered scenes, real-time cut-scenes are loaded through the game itself. There is little difference between these scenes and the level - they are the same characters moving and speaking within the same locale. These events will have the exact ‘look’ of the rest of the game, because everything, from the characters, to the lighting, is rendered as it happens. For some game designers, real-time cut-scenes will only be used to maximum potential when they become seamlessly integrated into the levels. This, suggests Diarmid, might entail focusing on scenario creation rather than action,

By specifying the story in terms of the emotional situations we want the player to find themselves in, we give more freedom to the game to determine the exact nature of the event (who is involved, where it happens, how it happens etc.). To do this though we will need to have our characters able to respond to different events in realistic ways and algorithms for writing realistic dialog. These are challenges we are some way from addressing.

This is a technical issue, and it is expected that integrated scenes (and, by extension, storytelling within games) will become less scripted and far more code / A.I. driven. As a result, cut-scenes may become less rigid, to the point where they become as flexible as the levels themselves. This is where, some predict, we would see representational factors (such as narrative, for instance) and game-play, collide. In such a case, the challenge would be to maintain the freedom, agency and unpredictability of game-play. The danger would be that the capacity for narrative to create mood or generate emotion, would be lost.

Adaptation – game to game

There are other elements of adaptation and genre that might be less apparent to users than those discussed above. Underneath the onscreen action, which may differ significantly from one game to another even within a single genre, there are different layers of programming. Some of this programming will be specific to a particular game, but much of it will be more general. This is because there is a great deal of functionality in similarly structured games that is actually shared. Many games will, for example, take user input, play recorded sound samples and vary their pitch, and position objects in 3D space. Games have moving entities in their worlds with collision volumes. These elements are common across many games; they are just differently adapted, in different instances.

The physics simulations, the entities in the world, control systems, user control - the game engine will allow for these fundamentals. On top of the game engine will sit the various, specific games. For instance, in The Thing there are mechanics of infection, trust and fear - and the relevant code is situated at this more specific level. The real challenge for developers is calculating what might be considered generic across all of their games, and what must be regarded as ‘game specific’. Diarmid estimates that 20 or 30% of The Thing is actually specific, and the other 70 or 80% is re-usable. Given the
cost of creating a game from scratch, it is not difficult to see the value in creating general and transferable computer code.

One of the challenges faced by Computer Artworks when developing *The Thing*, was that the team were developing a game engine, and a game title at the same time.

We had the game engine in part from when we developed a previous game, *Evolva*, but there was definitely a big jump when we went from this game, to doing *The Thing*. Now, however, we find that we can do much higher quality games for much lower cost, because we have several different products that are all contributing to the game engine - and they all benefit from each other's technology.

The goal, then, is to make the game engine generic enough to allow the developer to build a series of games with it. Of course, there are limits - the engine for *The Thing* it is very much tuned to doing 3D graphically rendered games, rather than text-based RPGs for example. Apart from that, however, it is very open-ended. As Diarmid explained, ‘The trick is to make your game engine as flexible as possible, so that there’s very little the games designer could come up with that the game engine couldn’t do - and if it can’t do it, we would alter it so that it could’.

**Conclusion**

*The Thing* combines original game-mechanics with borrowed monsters. As Crogan has suggested (2000: 4) the alien thing-monster itself

is arguably the most profound attempt ever conceived to represent visually the paradox of genre: like ‘genre’ the thing has no identity in itself but must always rely upon exemplifying its attributes from specific incidences. Each new form it manages to assimilate becomes another attribute of set of attributes it adopts as proper to it, so that it has no independent or stable identity but mutates each time a new example of it appears.

Examining links between horror movies and horror gaming allows for the identification of continuities. Both, for instance, are associated with formula, performance and repetition. Both are popularly associated with youth. Horror films recall oral or folkloric narratives and embodied sensations, as do computer games. *The Thing* (film) and *The Thing* (game) share a monster and themes of transformation - the alien’s own parasitic mutations, as well as the shifting between trust and fear within the team.

The depiction of distrust and infection within the film re-emerges in the game at a narrative level (within non-interactive, plotted cut-scenes) and as a game mechanic (as a variable that impacts on play, that the player must respond to or otherwise manage). Similarly, the creation of tension and suspense within the game relies on both representational and ludic factors: the isolated setting, for example, is atmospheric, eerie. It also has game-play ramifications, in that the characters’ health will degrade if
they remain exposed to the extreme cold for any length of time. The characters are granted personality traits, in the hope that this will amplify the player’s investment in their wellbeing. These character traits also involve ludic variables, in that different characters are more or less susceptible to fear, and possess different necessary skills.

For some within the games industry, developments in console capacity and A.I will lead to the existing distinctions between story-telling and game-play being further eroded. However, as production of The Thing demonstrates, during development (as well as during play), it is already the case that ludic and representational features operate in tandem. They are mutually informing. Each plays a part in establishing the constraints and allowances that will eventually structure the experience that is playing The Thing.

Notes

1 The magazine was Astounding Science Fiction (1997:Bilson)
2 The game was published by Black Label Games/Vivendi Universal Games
3. We interviewed Katie Ellwood and Diarmid Campbell first in person, and again by email. Both then responded to an early draft of this chapter, and their comments were incorporated into this chapter. Katie was Co.Writer and Assistant Producer of The Getaway (SCEE 2002) and the writer of Black Monday; Getaway 2 (SCEE 2004)
4 The abject is fascinating and repellent. It shapes ‘the struggle each subject must wage during the entire length of his personal history in order to become separate, that is to say, to become a speaking subject’. (Kristeva 1982: 94). Accordingly many cultures have developed taboos and rituals in relation to phenomena (such as bodily fluids) that transgress the borders of self, of separateness.
5 Critics of The Thing (film) read the special effects as ‘excessive’ – as detrimental to the film’s narration. This is another case of perceived excess being associated with low cultural status. For summary of critical reception of The Thing see Bilson (1997).
6 To call the tone of this walkthrough ‘cautionary’, does not contradict our earlier description of walkthroughs as ‘imperative’ in mood. The cautionary technically belongs to the monitory mood in language, which expresses warning so it is close to the imperative; and the second and third sentences in this quote from the walkthrough are actually in the imperative.
8 Actually, there have been women scientists working in Antarctic since the late 60’s. Prior to this, research facilities were controlled by the US military, who refused to allow women into the region. According to a 2002 newspaper report, men outnumber women in the area by 2 to 1, but it is unusual to see a research team without a female member. Reported by Kristen Hutchinson in The Antarctic Sun newspaper 9.11.2003, accessed 12.2004, online at http://www.polar.org/antsun/oldissues2003-2004/Sun110903/womenCrackTheIceBarriers.htm