

The Cultural Life of James Bond



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Specters of 007

*Edited by
Jaap Verheul*

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To my parents



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Introduction: Specters of 007

Jaap Verheul

The release of *No Time To Die* (UK/USA: Cary Joji Fukunaga, 2020) heralds the arrival of the twenty-fifth installment in the James Bond film series. Since the release of *Dr. No* (UK: Terence Young) in 1962, Eon Productions' first film adaptation of Ian Fleming's already-popular source novels, the cinematic James Bond has expedited the transformation of Fleming's literary creation into an icon of western popular culture that has captivated audiences across the globe by transcending barriers of ideology, nation, empire, gender, race, ethnicity, and generation in spite of its blatantly white, heteronormative, and Eurocentric worldview. *The Cultural Life of James Bond: Specters of 007* seeks to untangle the puzzling yet seemingly perpetual allure of the James Bond phenomenon by looking at the non-canonical texts and contexts that encompass the cultural life of James Bond. Chronicling the evolution of the British secret agent over half a century of political, social, and cultural permutations, the fifteen chapters examine the brand of Bond beyond the official Eon film series and across multiple media platforms while simultaneously understanding these ancillary texts and contexts as contested sites of negotiation with the twenty-five features that currently make up the Eon film franchise. In doing so, *The Cultural Life of James Bond* subscribes to what Christoph Lindner (2010, 1) has termed the "new wave of Bond criticism," which seeks to move scholarship on James Bond beyond a traditional emphasis on the Ian Fleming novels or the twenty-five Eon films in order to apply a range of methodologies to the interdisciplinary study of the cultural life of James Bond. The volume is thus as much concerned with Bond scholarship as it is with Bond himself.

The Cultural Life of James Bond pursues three strands of inquiry. The first section chronicles the increasingly transnational composition and myriad afterlives of the Eon film series. If 007 has often been understood as Britain's savior in an era of post-imperial decline, and if most of the earlier Eon-entries were produced in the United Kingdom, the franchise gradually transformed itself into a transnational if not global phenomenon,

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co-produced by different countries, inspiring endless spin-offs across the globe, and celebrating Bond as the quintessential cosmopolitan in order to enhance the character's appeal with international audiences. The first part, "Beyond Britain," analyzes Bond's influence on international filmmaking as well as his surrogate outings in the United States, Continental Europe, and India. The franchise's transnational configuration has influenced—and has itself been influenced by—the cultural politics of the Bond phenomenon. The second part of the volume, "Beyond the Hero," accordingly discusses the representation of race, ethnicity, citizenship, and gender in the Bond films, novels, and ancillary texts. In the wake of Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott's (1987, 42-43) conceptualization of James Bond as a "mobile signifier" in their landmark study on *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero*, scholarship on James Bond has stressed the franchise's ability to adapt itself to continuously changing norms, values, ideologies, and practices. In spite of this malleability of signification, however, Bond's essentially white, male, heteronormative, and British identity continues to regulate the films' alternative and occasionally subversive articulations of Otherness. The chapters in the volume's second section explore these discrepancies as they examine the tension between the series' progressive and conservative elements, which are simultaneously in conflict and in dialogue with one another and thus constitute contested sites of negotiation. The third and final part, "Beyond the Films," moves away from the texts and contexts of the Eon film series as it chronicles the transmediality of the cultural life of James Bond beyond its cinematic outings. Over the span of fifty years, the brand of Bond has shaped and itself been affected by a range of articulations across multiple media platforms, encompassing literature, cinema, television, fashion, gambling, music, and, more recently, a digital existence in video games. The third section of this edited collection looks at Bond's transmediality in order to revisit and reexamine those features of the Bond phenomenon that have been produced and circulated on media platforms that transcend both the Ian Fleming novels and the Eon film series. In doing so, the chapters unravel how these non-literary and non-cinematic texts, contexts, and practices have contributed to the lasting appeal of her majesty's most well-known secret agent.

But why study Bond? The question has been asked before. For the inaugural issue of the *International Journal of James Bond Studies* (2017), Ian Kinane offers a rich intellectual history of scholarly writings on the James Bond phenomenon. Kinane (2017, 3-4) subscribes to Bennett and Wool-lacott's aforementioned understanding of the James Bond phenomenon as a mobile signifier, suggesting that "the Bond franchise provides a particular

framework through which scholars may observe and address shifts that have occurred in British and international cultural politics from the post-war period through to the millennium and the immediate post-millennial period.” He locates the genesis of critical inquiry into 007 in the publication of Kingsley Amis’s *The James Bond Dossier* in 1965 (Amis 1965). Amis, an established novelist and literary critic, published his analysis at the height of what James Chapman (2007, 90) has referred to as a decade of “Bondmania,” introducing a scholarly approach to popular spy fiction and to Ian Fleming’s novels and short stories that had heretofore been reserved for the study of a more highbrow literary canon. Soon thereafter, Umberto Eco unveiled his structuralist inquiry into Fleming’s novels in *The Bond Affair*, a collection of essays co-edited with Oreste del Buono and published in English in 1966 (Buono and Eco, 1966). In his contribution to the volume, “The Narrative Structure in Fleming,” Eco famously provides the building blocks of the narrative structure of Fleming’s tales of Cold War espionage as he examines a series of oppositional relationships—between Bond and the villain, girl, or M; or between the West and the Soviet Bloc—as well as the game-like “play situations”—M provides Bond with task; Bond is tortured by the villain; Bond conquers the girl—that drive the narrative of each Bond novel from *Casino Royale* (1953) up to *The Man With the Golden Gun* (1965).

The interventions by Amis and Eco set the stage for Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott’s *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero* (1987), a seminal addition to the nascent field of “Bond studies” that was published in 1987. Bennett and Woollacott untangle the cultural politics of the Bond phenomenon as they chronicle its evolution as a mobile signifier over the course of the “three moments of Bond.” The first moment, around 1957, saw “the transformation of Bond from a character within a set of fictional texts into a household name” following the paperback publication of *Casino Royale* and *Moonraker* in 1955 and 1956, respectively, as well as the serialization of *From Russia, with Love* in the *Daily Express* in 1957 (Bennett and Woollacott 1987, 24). The second moment of Bond materialized in the mid-1960s in the wake of the first four film adaptations of Fleming’s Bond novels: *Dr. No* (UK: Terence Young, 1962), *From Russia, with Love* (UK: Terence Young, 1963), *Goldfinger* (UK: Guy Hamilton, 1964), and *Thunderball* (UK: Terence Young, 1965). If 007 had become a household name by 1957, the James Bond phenomenon nonetheless remained a mostly British affair that catered to lower middle class audiences. The first four film adaptations, by contrast, modernized Bond into a member of the “professional class,” thereby widening his fanbase as they removed the connotation of 007 as an establishment figure—a trope still visible in David Niven’s impersonation

of the popular hero in the 1967 satire *Casino Royale* (UK/USA: Ken Hughes et al., 1967). In addition, the Eon films also expanded Bond's popularity beyond Britain, with *Goldfinger*'s setting in the United States granting the franchise access to North-American audiences in particular. This second moment, then, may be considered as "the moment of Bond in the sense that his popularity was unrivalled by that of any other cultural figure," elevating the mobile signifier to "an established point of reference to which a wide range of cultural practices referred themselves in order to establish their own cultural location and identity" (Bennett and Woollacott 1987, 36). By the early 1970s, when the third moment of Bond arrived, the pinnacle of Bondmania had passed. In this third moment, the Bond phenomenon continued to be defined by "its selective and strategic activation of that currency [of 1960s Bondmania] together with the more episodic and ritualistic nature of Bond's popularity" (Bennett and Woollacott 1987, 37). Henceforth, Bennet and Woollacott conclude, the mobile signifier of Bond would operate as an "institutionalized ritual" that could be reawakened with the release of each new Bond feature.

The turn of the twenty-first century coincided with a renewed scholarly interest in the Bond franchise and with the publication of four pivotal contributions in particular: two monographs, James Chapman's *Licence to Thrill: A Cultural History of the James Bond Films* in 1999 (with a Revised Edition in 2007) and Jeremy Black's *The Politics of James Bond* in 2001, and two edited collections, Christoph Lindner's *The James Bond Phenomenon: A Critical Reader* in 2003 (with a Second Edition in 2009) and Edward P. Comentale, Stephen Watt, and Skip Willman's *Ian Fleming and James Bond: The Cultural Politics of James Bond* in 2005. Chapman's and Black's monographs deepen Bennet and Woollacott's understanding of 007 as a mobile signifier in that they consider James Bond, as Kinane (2017, 5) observes, "not so much as a cinematic icon as he is a legitimate and authorized figure in and of cultural history; it is through Bond, these works assert, that much of the socio-political and cultural concerns of post-war Britain can be identified, assessed, and analyzed in original ways." Indeed, Chapman (2007, 19-20) explains, *Licence to Thrill* offers a cultural history of the James Bond films that examines "the various contexts of Bond" (and in particular the series' origins in the British film industry of the late 1950s and early 1960s), analyzes the films' narrative ideologies, visual style, and politics of nation and gender, and chronicles their critical and popular reception in order to arrive at an understanding of "how they have responded over time to changes both in the film industry and in society at large."

Christoph Lindner sustains this enterprise in his edited collection on *The James Bond Phenomenon* while introducing an interdisciplinary approach to the study of Bond. The volume also reflects on the current state of Bond scholarship in that it includes the by-now canonical works of Umberto Eco, Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, and James Chapman. Lindner's collection presents an array of scholarly methods and theoretical frameworks, ranging from Eco's aforementioned structuralist account to Ajay Gehlawat's postcolonial reading of the franchise's orientalism, Jeff Smith's industrial analysis of John Barry's soundtracks and theme songs as well as their pivotal role in promoting the films, and Elisabeth Ladenson's queer reading of the Bond Girl and *Goldfinger's* possibly "lesbian" Pussy Galore (Honor Blackman). In its interdisciplinary approach, *The James Bond Phenomenon* subscribes to Bennett and Woollacott's understanding of James Bond as a sliding signifier in that it demonstrates, as Lindner (2009, 5) suggests, "how and why the 007 films are successful not only in regenerating their social relevance and popular appeal, but also in sustaining the cultural mythology that has come to define the figure of James Bond." A similar rationale undergirds Edward P. Comentale, Stephen Watt, and Skip Willman's edited collection on *Ian Fleming and James Bond: The Cultural Politics of James Bond*, which emanated from a symposium dedicated to the literary legacy of Ian Fleming at Indiana University in Bloomington in 2003. Returning to the origins of the Bond phenomenon in Fleming's novels and short stories through the lens of critical theory, the editors (Comentale et al. 2005, xi) understand the figure of 007 as envisioned by Fleming as giving "expression to biases and anxieties that continue to shape our understandings of identity and belonging."

The ascendancy of Daniel Craig to the role of 007 spurred further interest in the academic inquiry into all things Bond. The post-millennial renaissance in Bond scholarship occurred in two waves that followed the widespread impact and popularity of Craig's two most influential outings as the British superspy in *Casino Royale* (UK/Czech Republic/USA/Germany/Bahamas: Martin Campbell) in 2006 and *Skyfall* (UK/USA: Sam Mendes) in 2012. In the first phase, the commercial and critical success of *Casino Royale* engendered the publication of the revised editions of the aforementioned works by Chapman and Lindner, both of which now included chapters on Craig's first appearance as 007. Chapman (2007, 241) aptly refers to *Casino Royale* as the "revisionist Bond," understanding its "back to basics" approach as a response to developments in early-twenty-first century action-based spy thrillers on the one hand—noting in particular the influence of the more gritty, physical, and "psychologically realistic" Jason Bourne films—and

the narrative structure and character arc of Fleming's source novel on the other. In addition, two edited collections were published in the wake of Chapman's and Lindner's revised editions. Christoph Lindner acknowledges the influence of *Casino Royale* on the materialization of his second volume on *Revisioning 007: James Bond and Casino Royale* from 2010. While seeking new contributions for the second edition of *The James Bond Phenomenon*, Lindner received a considerable number of proposals pertaining to Craig's first film. *Revisioning 007* represents the outcome of these submissions and thereby expresses "a recurring preoccupation with the film's manipulation of the established 007 formula and, in particular, the deliberate changes *Casino Royale* makes to Bond's character and identity" (Lindner 2010, 2). In 2011, Robert G. Weiner, B. Lynn Whitfield, and Jack Becker's mammoth volume on *James Bond in World and Popular Culture: The Films Are Not Enough* introduced 37 chapters that provide a comprehensive account of, among other subjects, the Bond phenomenon's multimodality, politics of race, class, and gender, and articulations of nationhood and empire.

The "second wave" in post-millennial Bond scholarship" occurred, as Kinane (2017, 6) has observed, in the wake of the release of *Skyfall* in 2012: the year in which the James Bond phenomenon thoroughly ingrained itself in the British cultural imagination. Coinciding with the year-long celebrations in honor of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, James Bond appeared, in the figure of Daniel Craig, alongside the British monarch in the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Summer Olympics. Directed by Danny Boyle—who would later helm the twenty-fifth installment in the Eon film series only to leave the franchise prematurely due to creative differences with Bond producers Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson—the opening ceremony evoked the iconic opening sequence of *The Spy Who Loved Me* (UK: Lewis Gilbert, 1977) as audiences worldwide watched 007 escorting the Queen to the Olympic Stadium, where the pair signaled their arrival by presumably jumping out of a helicopter while their parachutes displayed the Union Jack and Monty Norman's "James Bond Tune" reverberated throughout the arena. When *Skyfall* appeared in theaters only four months later, the Bond-signifier had firmly cemented its association with "Britishness"—which the film itself reinforced by centering the narrative and setting of the twenty-third Bond feature on the United Kingdom.

The unparalleled success of *Skyfall* at the global box office, where it earned \$1,108,561,013, engendered a surge in scholarly publications that sought to address the film's three significant interventions in the Bond phenomenon: its novel articulation of "Britishness," its newfound desire to bring the franchise's cultural politics of race and gender into the twenty-first

century, and its recognition of the series' unprecedented and worldwide popular appeal. Lisa Funnell's collection of essays in *For His Eyes Only: The Women of James Bond* from 2015 scrutinizes the cultural politics of the brand of Bond and in particular its engagement with discourses of gender and femininity. In his "Foreword" to the volume, Christoph Lindner (2015, xvii) subscribes to Bennett and Woollacott's understanding of Bond as a floating signifier, reminding us of "just how much of that process of signification depends on Bond's relationship with women" while pointing out "the ways in which women in the 007 series also function as floating signifiers in their own right, reflecting but also sometimes anticipating or undermining mainstream constructions of identity, agency, and power." The Bond phenomenon's articulation of gender and femininity is also at the heart of Lisa Funnell and Klaus Dodd's co-authored monograph on *Geographies, Genders, and the Geopolitics of James Bond* (2017), Claire Hines' work on *The Playboy Bond: 007, Ian Fleming, and Playboy Magazine* (2018), and Monica Germanà's study on *Bond Girls: Body, Fashion and Gender* (2019). Moreover, in her edited collection on *Fan Phenomena: James Bond* (2015), Claire Hines (2015, 5-6) arrives at an understanding of the seemingly lasting allure of the sliding 007 signifier by examining how Bond fans have approached, appreciated, and appropriated the "transmedia anomaly" and "intertextual phenomenon and cultural icon" that is James Bond. In like manner, Jeremy Strong's volume on *James Bond Uncovered* (2018) understands adaptation as pivotal to the intertextuality and intermediality of the Bond phenomenon.

As this hike in scholarship indicates, "James Bond studies" has, according to Kinane (2017, 7), "evolved out of the growing need for a sustained critical and discursive framework by which to examine Ian Fleming and James Bond specifically, as well the political and socio-cultural importance of Bond's position within the spy genre and within popular culture studies at large." *The Cultural Life of James Bond: Specters of 007* sustains this enterprise as it further develops Bennett and Woollacott's understanding of the James Bond phenomenon as a mobile signifier.

The collection's first part, "Beyond Britain," pays tribute to the phenomenon's increasingly transnational configuration while also tracing its historical origins in order to discern and deconstruct the conventional association of James Bond with imperial and masculinist "Britishness." James Chapman's reading of the often-ignored US television adaptation of *Casino Royale* (USA: William H. Brown Jr.) from 1954 reveals that the first reworking of Ian Fleming's source novel relocates its mostly European narrative and setting to a distinctly American context. Chapman accordingly questions the "Britishness" of the Bond phenomenon while acknowledging

the televisual origins of adapting Fleming's tales of Cold War espionage for the screen. In like manner, the following two chapters understand the production of the mobile signifier of Bond beyond its exclusively British context. Akin to Chapman, Mikołaj Kunicki looks at early televisual adaptations of the Bond formula as he examines three spy series produced for television in Poland, the German Democratic Republic, and the Soviet Union during the 1960s and 70s. Kunicki posits that, at the height of the Cold War, the popular cultures of the Eastern bloc participated in a global network of cultural circulation that extended beyond the Iron Curtain, producing Bond-inspired spy dramas that mirrored their British counterpart in their emphasis on the escapist appeal of consumerism. Ajay Gehlawat's chapter chronicles the history of Bond "adaptations" in Bollywood in order to identify a shift from the "Indianization" of the Bond formula in the 1960s and 1970s to its gradual erosion in the globalized Bollywood film industry of the twenty-first century. In doing so, Gehlawat demonstrates that Indian interpretations of the Bond phenomenon increasingly resemble the aesthetic and cultural markers of the contemporary Hollywood film form. The following two chapters understand the transnational composition of the Bond phenomenon in its industrial context. Melis Behlil, Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado, and Jaap Verheul dissect the opening sequences of *Skyfall* in Istanbul and *Spectre* in Mexico City in order to argue that the franchise's predilection for runaway productions has begun to influence the textual composition of the James Bond film series, fashioning a colonial imaginary of exotic non-places that has since long been a staple of the brand of Bond. Huw D. Jones and Andrew Higson argue that the transnational appeal of Daniel Craig's tenure as 007 is dependent on the textual qualities of the films on the one hand and the business of Bond on the other. While the ownership and distribution rights to the Bond films may facilitate their transnational circulation and remarkable box-office takings, Jones and Higson's industry and audience research reveals that European audiences do not a priori associate Bond with "Britishness" as the films' textual composition has started to resemble—in a vein similar to Gehlawat's reading of the Bond of global Bollywood—the formal qualities of the contemporary Hollywood blockbuster.

The Cultural Life of James Bond's second part, "Beyond the Hero," engages with ongoing debates on the cultural politics of the James Bond film series. Toby Miller deconstructs 007's masculinity as he understands the British superspy as an icon of failure. Miller argues that Bond's manhood rests on a paradox in which his commodified manliness compensates for his weakness by masking the gradual decline of hegemonic white and imperial British

masculinity after the Second World War. Moya Luckett reminds us that the Eon film series obscures 007's failed manhood by positioning the women of Bond as second-class subjects. Luckett explores the seriality of the Bond Girl and situates it in relation to the "collectivity" at the heart of feminine and feminist cultures. While the Bond series falsely suggests that each Bond Girl operates as part of a larger "collective" of Bond Girls, the Bond phenomenon in fact relies on the individualized seriality of each Girl in order to atomize the women of Bond and render them replaceable as they hold little agency and lack the capacity to progress and develop. Lorrie Palmer furthers the conversation on the Bond Girl through the lens of race and ethnicity. Palmer looks at the encounters of Pierce Brosnan and Daniel Craig with women of color within in the specific setting of the eastern bazaar in *Tomorrow Never Dies* (UK/USA: Roger Spottiswoode, 1997) and *Skyfall*, respectively. Palmer understands the bazaar in these Bond films as both a social space and as a site for spectacle and consumption. If Brosnan's encounter with Michelle Yeoh (Wai Lin) in Saigon constructs the bazaar as a site of hybridity and open engagement with the Other, Craig's pairing with Naomie Harris (Eve Moneypenny) in Istanbul envisions the bazaar as an Orientalist space of colonial power relations in which "the civilized" seek to segregate themselves from the Other. Anna Everett understands race in the Bond films in terms of 007's troubling "intersectional cosmopolitanism." Everett demonstrates how the Bond phenomenon cultivates what Susan Sontag has referred to as an "aesthetics of destruction" onto the bodies of black Bond Girls and black Bond villains. For Everett, the films indulge in a form of racialized and racist violence that articulates an anxiety and paranoia about the redefinition of hegemonic whiteness in the United Kingdom in the wake of its imperial decline and the arrival of new postcolonial subjects after the Second World War. Seung-hoon Jeong situates 007's tenuous cosmopolitanism in a context of the post-Cold War globalization of espionage. Comparing James Bond to Jason Bourne, Jeong understands both heroes in terms of their abjection from the twenty-first-century network of global surveillance. The millennial Bourne, however, departs from 007 in that his traumatic abjection subjects him to a bare life that lacks the hedonistic privileges of Bond's cosmopolitan adventures. If Bourne's attempt to regain his memory initiates a journey of self-discovery that in turn strengthens his resistance to the unethical system—the CIA—that trained him, the millennial Bond is internally excluded from his own agency—MI6—with this abjection culminating in terrorist revenge and sovereign reaffirmation.

The third and final section of *The Cultural Life of James Bond*, "Beyond the Films," considers the transmediality of the Bond phenomenon by examining

the signifier's mobility across such cinematic and non-cinematic media platforms as arthouse cinema, title sequences, theme songs, casino cultures, and video games. Christopher Holliday discusses the intersection of the early Bond films of the 1960s with the modernist traditions of the post-war art cinemas of Britain, Europe, and North America. Holliday reveals that these Sean Connery entries eschewed both art cinema's social realist strand and popular film's escapist disposition in that they incorporated formal features that had heretofore been reserved for art cinema's modernist disposition, such as Ken Adam's production designs, Maurice Binder and Robert Brownjohn's title sequences, John Barry's electronic soundtracks, Peter Hunt's discontinuous editing, and the films' bold display of sex, sexuality and eroticism. Jan-Christopher Horak takes a closer look at the cultural politics of race and gender in the James Bond title sequences while arguing that Maurice Binder used his designs to promote the brand of Bond by repeating motifs and technologies associated with a modernist grid-based design that promoted the simplification of form. Moreover, Horak explains how the title sequences' digital shift in the 1990s enabled their designers, Daniel Kleinman and MK12, to develop the films' themes and narrative patterns, thereby not just branding the film series but also individualizing each entry. Meenasarani Linde Murugan similarly explores the modernist legacies of the 1960s Bond films by examining the lasting influence of Shirley Bassey on the sound of Bond. Murugan situates Bassey's theme songs in the transnational circulation of black musical performances across the Atlantic in order to expose a paradox at the heart of Bassey's impact on the Bond phenomenon. Bassey's voice, she elucidates, should not be understood exclusively as an act of gendered or racial resistance to the franchise's hegemonic white manliness because the Bond producers simultaneously enlisted her remarkable vocal performances in the service of both empire and patriarchy. Joyce Goggin examines the central position of the casino cultures of Las Vegas and Macau in Ian Fleming's novels and the Eon film series in order to argue that the franchise's reboot with *Casino Royale* in 2006 evoked broader currents in twenty-first-century blockbuster filmmaking as well as neoliberal economics. In particular, Goggin looks at *Skyfall* in order to unravel how its nostalgic revisionism renews the franchise's interest in gambling and casino culture by indulging in the card-playing logic at the heart of the brand of Bond. In the wake of the spectacular growth of entertainment and gambling industries after World War II, Goggin evinces that Bond's predilection for gambling mirrors a more general ideological shift toward an increasingly financialized economy of risk-taking and speculation. The intersection of Bond with gaming is further explored in

the final chapter of this volume, in which Ian Bryce Jones and Chris Carloy revisit the videogame *GoldenEye 007* from 1997. They compare the landmark first-person-shooter and film-to-game adaptation of *GoldenEye* (USA/UK: Martin Campbell, 1995), which was designed exclusively for the Nintendo 64 console, to its re-adaptation *GoldenEye* from 2010 for the Nintendo Wii console in order to chronicle transformations in intellectual property on the one hand and conceptual developments in first-person-shooter-storytelling on the other. Jones and Carloy manifest that both videogames are less concerned with “adaptive fidelity,” or the making of narrative contributions to the *GoldenEye* film, but instead privilege a “fictional coherence” in which the games’ “interactive” components encourage the user to role-play as the character of 007.

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