Cinema and the SNES

By Ashlee Bird

After a brief conversation with Professor Boluk yesterday, I have made the decision to change the research topic that I will pursue this week. While I do wish to pursue a study of education based games and the relationship between the communities that produce them and the communities that they successfully reach, I believe that particular topic does not adequately utilize the resources at hand during this workshop. Therefore, I got to thinking about to types of games and tech that I will have access to this week, and I started thinking about the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES). A particular genre of games for the SNES that I remember having in abundance when I was a kid grabbed my attention: game adaptations of films and television shows. Therefore, I have decided to examine how film and television franchises circulated in early arcades and consoles, specifically interrogating what is different about the SNES platform that lent itself to a cavalcade of game adaptations.

The SNES seemed to have a fascination with supporting games that were adaptations of film and television. Off hand, not having had that many SNES games myself, I could recall owning *Aladdin*, *Toy Story*, *The Lion King*, *Ren and Stimpy*, *Indiana Jones*, *The Adams Family*, *Beavis and Butthead*, *AAAHH! Real Monsters*, and a variety of others. This list itself spawned several questions that I would like to outline further.

I want to divide the resulting questions from my perusal of the SNES and its film/TV themed games into a few possible research questions. First, I will examine the possibilities as to why SNES seems to be the particular console to be flooded with this genre of gamic adaptations of film and television. What was it about this particular technology that lead game companies to produce a surge of this style of video game? To

examine this question, I believe it is important to examine consoles before and after the SNES, which was released in Japan in November of 1990, and in North America in August of 1991. As Gitelman discusses, it is useless to analyze content without first examining the medium and the relative possibilities and limitations of that medium, thus regulating the type of content that can be, and is produced. Therefore, was it simply technological shortcomings of the medium of the original Nintendo that stopped it from boasting the same repertoire of film and television themed games as the SNES? However, if this is the case, how does one explain the lack of gamic adaptations in future consoles such as the PlayStation, the Xbox, and the Sega Genesis, and even in more current consoles, as the video game industry now rivals the film industry? Furthermore, this leads to the question that might there have been a particular relationship between gaming and television/cinema at that time. What in American culture was influencing this sudden drive to need to play an active role in beloved films and TV shows when at that point there were already several well established game series' and worlds to expound upon?

Secondly, I want to undertake an examination of the physical media themselves to interrogate the connections between these types of games (if any): were the game boxes and cartridges/manuals presented like a movie box? Were the games advertised in a similar way to an advertisement for a film or television show? Who are they marketed toward and how? How concurrent with the release of the film/television show were the release of the games? Is there any connection Do the games *feel* like TV or a film upon playing?