



## Philosophy

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### Death games and Survival Horror video games: on the limits of pure torture show entertainments

*"It's easy to dismiss the stuff which gives people pleasure. We are so often guilty of assuming that the experience which provides pleasure is likely to be benign. The spectacles in the Coliseum were not benign. They pandered to the cruelest, most callous, and most vicious part of our nature as animals who have found a way to ritualize their appetites. The sophistication of those rituals does not make the atrocities on view any the less vile; nor any the less dangerous if removed from a truly moral context. I take it as a given that to dismiss the idea of a moral context is to despair of our species and of our planet. With that thought, as the Cesar would have proclaimed: "Let the games begin!"*" Clive Barker, Los Angeles, (Bernard Perron, 2009: Kindle Locations 46-50).

#### Abstract

This paper focuses on the similarities between the historically attested spectacles of death that took place in ancient Rome and the Survival Horror video games that virtually expose the viewer to the same intense and obscene violence towards living beings and bodies. Understanding the purpose of such gruesome acts of joy in the former context might be a start to understand the effects of these games or the cultural symptom they represent in our society.

**Keywords:** Survival Horror, video games, death games, violence, ethics, virtual reality.

#### Introduction

Death games and horror video games have in common the same purpose to disgust and frighten their audiences while paradoxically entertaining them. Enjoying the fun of watching the suffering of others being tortured or fighting for their lives implicates another paradox considering the human capacity to feel empathy. In ancient Rome those practices had their reason in being useful for political interests of maintaining order in society and dispose of aristocracy's unwanted enemies. They were shows of power that reunited the luxury with filth, the rich with the poor, and the extreme pleasures with extreme physical pain. Outside the specific historical context of ancient Rome that created the necessity to impose order through fear and awe, gothic literature and the later horror genre of cinema and video games reintroduced the bloodshed entertainment as fictional exercise of imagination. Once cruel realities, death games returned as computer-game simulations dramatized in Survival Horror narratives. The question rises: what does the phenomenon of such

video games that reproduce the spectacle of extreme torture might tell about the world that produced them, about contemporaneity? We shall start our exercise in answering this question by regarding the answers critics gave when dealing with the problem of death games in ancient Rome and through history.

#### On the possible causes for institutionalizing bloodshed

Among various theories about the phenomenon of death games happening in ancient Roman arenas there are few trying to explain their social purpose in the context of a Rome whose eroded virtues and morale threatened to cause societal instability and chaos. According to Donald G. Kyle "Spectacles [...] were political devices used by leaders to gain support under the Republic and by emperors to appease the masses under their autocratic system in the age of 'bread and circuses' [...] At spectacles crowds of commoners had a sense of confidence and power, and a dialogue took place between the provider and the consumers of the games. The 'spectacle' unfolded

publicly within a threefold interactive dynamic involving the crowd and the authority figure(s) as well as the direct participants or victims. [...] Following Foucault's ideas on punishment as a confirmation of social order, some scholars see the games as symbolic demonstrations or performances, as rituals or 'shows' of power. [...] the games showed imperial power and control even over nature, and with the variety and multitude of species and races involved, the games were a microcosm of the territorial extent and imperial majesty of Rome. Like festivals, processions, drama, and games in other societies, spectacles were ritualized performances that communicated, restored, consolidated, and sometimes helped change the communal order. Not mere entertainments or distractions, they were systems of meaning or cultural performances by which socio-cultural orders (i.e. values, norms, status relationships) were formulated and reformulated" (Donald G. Kyle, 1998, 2001: 8, 9).

The function of violence in such spectacles was "[...] a policy of expediency against worthless victims [...] not as sadistic but as pragmatic, [...] a demonstration of the power of the empire and a destruction of irreconcilable foes. [...] In urban Rome the arena, in effect, provided spectacular civics lessons in schools of death. The games taught the Romans who they were and how they were to behave." (Donald G. Kyle, 1998, 2001: 9).

Nevertheless, the function of the Survival Horror Videogames phenomenon in our society might be far different from the social function of Coliseum's games in their times; but even so, the latter has in common with the historically certified death games besides the ludic aspect also the viscerally violent torture shows created to frighten and disgust their audience. There are many separator aspects between the two phenomena: the real and the virtual settings, the direct involvement of human lives and the artistic visual and audio representations of the cinema or video game shows. Despite those differences, we can trace common things – regarding the treatment of the real and virtual bodies, living beings etc. – and even if Survival Horror is not a pandemic genre for today's more and more global society (as were the arenas in ancient Rome), horror, as Noel Carroll (1990) wrote in his book *The Philosophy of Horror*, it became extremely popular in the last decade.

According to Ewan Kirkland, Survival Horror is a video game genre centered on the narrative. Storytelling is at the core of horror games while its purpose, as other authors agree, is to create the appropriate immersion necessary to scare and disgust the players: "Carroll (1990) suggests the monsters of horror are built to create a reaction of disgust. Clearly, there is no real risk of contamination involved in contact with video game monsters. Nevertheless,

fictive monsters can activate notions of contamination or trigger disgust reactions by associating monsters to substances and concepts that somehow pose a threat to the purity of the player. At the same time, monsters also typically pose a real threat towards the player's objectives. The player is thus invited to feel both fear and disgust in relation to monsters." (Bernard Perron, Inger Ekman and Petri Lankoski, 2009: Kindle Locations 2828-2831). Ewan Kirkland emphasizes the importance of different video and audio remediation techniques employed to create cinematic feeling, thus suggesting the importance of the story in these games. But the story is always about the horrific content in this genre. The obscene violent video-shows portray similar attitudes towards living beings and bodies with the less immersive but more real status of the Roman arena and the fanaticism for its gruesome games. In Rome a very precise ethical system of punishment and privileges managed through sacred rituals the *mise en scene* of violence and death, sadism, tortures while in dystopian virtual realities like *Silent Hill* or *Resident Evil* such sights are fictitious, simulated, bringing *pane et circus* (or maybe only *circus*) to the very house of every computer or console player. However real or simply virtual the death games are, taking pleasure out of watching such otherwise cruel scopophilia was usually justified through moral and ethical reasons. Survival Horror games always planted their roots in something uncanny, dirty, ambiguous. But, even before H.P. Lovecraft, art-horror creators made use of and exaggerated the aesthetical and moral negative categories such as the evil, the ugly, the wrong and the abject – consciously with the purpose to define by contrast what is right and good, seldom pointing to divine morale, taboos, incomprehensible justice or laws humans intentionally/by accident ceased to respect or unwisely crossed their limits: "Survival Horror is closer to *ludus* than *paidia*, characterized by closed systems, limited participation, dichotomized worlds divided between good and evil, a sense of centralized authorship, and moral certainties" (Bernard Perron, Ewan Kirkland, 2009: Kindle location 941).

As Noel Carroll stated when discussing the *philosophy of horror* (Carroll 1990) horror genre always correlates to knowledge; he identified two general types of plots (the *overreacher* and the *complex discovery plot*) in which knowledge is essential either because it is forbidden, either because it is insufficient and in both cases the wrong attitude towards it drags somehow the monstrous supernatural violence upon humankind. The monsters are morally wrong subjects, unnatural beings; impossible creatures that act driven by unknown supernatural rules, their function – explicit or not – is to intermeditate between the divine justice and sinful humankind; their

punishment manifest itself visually by various ways of body tortures and it is to be feared and avoided.

In horror genre human characters' actions follow a *biblical* scenario always challenging god-like supernatural beings because at some narrative point someone had to try to find out what was better left unknown (Noell Carroll, 1990); the result of this attempt is disastrous and features the characteristics of divine punishments apocalyptically manifested as unleashed, explosive, violent super-natural forces. Those are visually portrayed as spectacular shows inviting the audience to have fun while entertained by the fictive immersion in such virtual visceral realities. Some horror video game settings generally describe the collision of the capitalist society (i.e. Resident Evil games and movies), the destruction of its architecture, social chaos and the collapse of social order; others concentrate more on psychology and internal mental struggling and suffering (i.e. Silent Hill franchise); but all of them bring forth body penitence and torture shows meant to demonstrate there are laws and powerful forces humanity better not forget to respect. The Roman politicians made use of arena torture shows and death games to demonstrate their divine power with the purpose to tame the mass and re-establish the order in society. In video games such reasons are inappropriate at a first glance; however, during the gameplay and while unfolding the story we often find out about some morally unacceptable acts of certain individuals that started the horrific catastrophes bringing the punishments on themselves and others (families, friends, or cities – Raccoon, Silent Hill, or potentially the whole global society – Resident Evil games). The supplicants against the bodies are morally justified as necessities to create order in society at least from a hierarchical point of view of a being like God or of a political class who holds such power over others' lives. The video game character learns about these ethics when passing through monsters' layers not unlikely Dante learned about the reason of punishing the souls while journeying through hell; and not unlikely how the spectators of arena's death games learned about the crucial reason of obeying certain behavioral proscriptions when watching the unfortunate fate of those acting against Rome's interests. However, in Survival Horror genre (as it does in horror literature and cinema) the moral conflict and the monster's appearance will be always subdued to the common sense of what nowadays good and wrong mean: "Politically speaking, power is evident in control over the human body, with the right to kill or not to kill jealously guarded by the state. Murderers, who have detracted from the welfare of their society or enemies actively attacking it, have traditionally been subjected to capital punishment or death in warfare. The

execution of a serial killer removes a source of malevolence from society and affirms the very nature of justice, just as, through warfare, a state extends its power for the welfare of its members or the political goals of its leadership. In the second half of the twentieth century, however, numerous democratic countries have removed the death penalty on their assumption that its existence detracts from their notion of civilization and the way in which violence should be handled within society. These changing attitudes to death make the waging of war all the more problematic and highlight the problem of terrorism, since terrorism is the act of imposing death upon members of a society within their own territory and not upon some field of battle. This was one reason why the terrorist attack upon New York on 11 September 2001 was so devastating. Indeed, the emergence of terrorism, especially in the latter part of the twentieth century, introduced a distinctive element within the history of death in that, all political, religious and economic issues apart, these apparently random killings provided a focus for that fear which can easily be the shadow-side of the sense of security that had been cultivated amongst relatively rich citizens in settled political societies" (D. J. Davies, 2005: 152). Historically, the function of public tortures of the living creatures, humans or further dead bodies was always to reinforce the principles of the society, or rather to impose them through fear. Not simply just the will of politicians, emperors or clergy, the decision of using extreme violence was justified as being the will of God or gods. Torture and violence were told to represent divine measures to re-establish the order in the world; they were ritualized and carefully managed. Torturing the body can be visually represented by visual media like movies and video games. However, when discussing the problem of remediation in Survival Horror, Ewan Kirkland showed how "different media are employed to situate gameplay in narrative context and to imply past or future narrative events; the use of video game space in storytelling; and the ways game structure is organized to produce story through play. [...]The player of a Survival Horror video game is internal-exploratory, rather than external-ontological (Ryan) 2001). He is tasked with guiding a hapless character through a fictional world, rather than being privileged with the god-like ability to build and influence the world itself" (Bernard Perron, Ewan Kirkland, 2009: Kindle Locations 929-930). Remediation and special effects if used in suggesting time travelling or anamnesis (i.e. Travis and Heather from Silent Hill series) or psychological distress (i.e. in Amnesia staying in the dark decreases the *sanity meter* which provokes lack of character control, blurry and distorted vision, inability to proper walk) is actually linked to the

torture of the mind instead of the body and perhaps it is closer to the situation of the audience (spectator or video game player) that doesn't feel the pain of the victims but is emotionally moved by such a sight if the definition of empathy is a general human characteristic. While arena death games faced the problem of its victims' body disposal<sup>1</sup>, video games and movies deal lightly with non-material virtual executions or virtual body punishments, insisting on creating the impression of pain, despair and reality of otherwise mere illusions of the screen. There are no real victims in horror literature, movies and video games, no bodies at all, yet their imaginary passions and tortures are set in narrative context through which the player learns how they are caused by and connected to ethical wrongs and morale taboos violations. Thus, according to horror plots' poetics, the atrocities in these games are reactions to either psychological struggles of tortured minds (unconsciously blaming themselves for violating certain social taboos), either the consequences of morally wrong deeds of some scientists, groups of interests or corporations. The visual and audio aesthetics employed in creating the atmosphere and the environment in which the narrative evolves are deeply connected to moral principles and society values that differ from pre-modern societies' beliefs and reasons, although many of the latter are often selected to be the source of counter-realities opposing the structure and rules of today's society. In other words, often the monstrosities tend to follow the rules of social systems that defy the principles of democracy (structured in medieval religious organizations, like the sect of Las Plagas in Resident Evil 4 or the religious cult from Silent Hill plots).

Taking in account the situation of the viewer in the arena and that of the player of Survival Horror games we can approach the two considering the role of witness they both have. Of course, this can also be said about the horror movies. In all three cases, the viewer is not the subject of death; instead – death is always the theme to be witnessed. Death and many variations that lead to it; there are different ways competing to conquer peaks of obscenity and bypass records of violence until giving the final sentence. This show is not fully explained in the case of contemporary media (including video games) but perhaps we can learn about it if we search more through the different interpretations of the causes of

such realities in the Roman society. Of course our wondering question is if some of the answers we receive from the critics that tried to explain the reason of the arena in ancient Rome can or not be applied to the reason of such games in our society. We do not take in account all games, but those virtually reproducing the bloodshed only few of societies dared to institutionalize. Despite the Roman Empire, other pre-modern societies used to play also gruesome games ending with many deaths of the losing competitors: "Interpreting punishment as a juridical-political reactivation of the power of a sovereign against insult and attack, Foucault points out that the symbolic power of the beaten and broken body of the victim extended to the treatment of the corpse. [...] in medieval and even modern Europe as public executions persisted as popular spectacles.<sup>51</sup> There are Roman parallels, but also significant exceptions: death in the arena seldom came so quickly and Roman *noxii* received no blessing – Roman sentiment was inconsistent with 'May God have mercy on your soul.' The enormously powerful symbolism of the abused and unburied corpse was more obvious, and it had more sacral connotations, in pre-modern societies: it communicated pathos or punishment depending on the relationship of the viewer to the viewed, the potential burier to the potentially (un)buried" (D. J. Davies, 2005: 128). There is one characteristic to societies that used public violence to kneel their populations, which is the crisis they were forced to deal with. Rome was losing the control of the empire and used violence in the form of public games to re-educate the masses. To be able to understand this, we have to look at those critics that tried to explain the function of death games in Roman arena:

"Some recent studies relate the arena to broad themes of desire, death, and disorder. Carlin Barton offers a psychological examination of the Roman 'physics' of desire, despair, envy, and fascination concerning the pervasive images of the gladiator and the monster (abnormal or deformed creatures). In the transition from Republic to Empire, Roman society was in moral and political flux, consumed with angst and anomie. "The paradox of the social pariah, the irrevocably socially debased creature, exalted by its commitment to its own annihilation, became increasingly familiar, even insistent, in the literature of the imperial period." Barton suggests that Rome needed negative extremes to balance its formal emphasis on control and propriety; it needed to strike and to embrace the monster and the monstrous. Irresolvable tensions in Roman society (e.g. between hierarchy and collectivity, violence and harmony) found compensatory channels, not solutions, in the imagery of the despised and the obscene" (D. J. Davies, 2005: 10).

<sup>1</sup> in Roman and early Christian society bodies were profoundly symbolic. 'The Roman citizen consisted of a name and a body . . . The body of a citizen was the man himself, the "embodiment" of the truth about him.' The anthropological constant that a society's patterns of disposal of the dead are of profound cultural significance can be applied to the spectacles. The treatment and disposal of the dead victims of the arena formed an integral stage in the tripartite process of a death spectacle: the acquisition, the public violence, and the disposal.

Or: "As in society at large, victims of the arena were granted rights and privileges in proportion to the good or harm that they did for Rome. Rome's desire to protect itself and punish its foes went beyond death" (D. J. Davies, 2005: 20). If we look at the horror genre and Survival Horror in particular, we can trace similar moral based themes that emphasize the importance of the conflict between humans and monsters. In *Silent Hill 4: The Room*, for example, the serial killer Walter Sullivan (previously abused in his childhood at the *Silent Hill* orphanage) ritually murdered humans, animals and committed suicide in order to become undead and get control over the victims manifestations in his version of *Otherworld*, thus condemning their souls to eternal suffering. The tortures are not morally justified here, the serial killer that turned himself into a god went far from the limits of injustice, but the player's and character's role in *Silent Hill 4* is to morally fix this injustice, acting according to the contemporaneous ethics the hero (Henry) believed in. In comparison, we have two distinct attitudes towards a similar violent content of making a show out of implying suffering to animals and humans. But spectators of death matches did go to witness them merely for fun: "J. Carcopino's text declares: Revisiting the arenas of Rome after nearly 2,000 years of Christianity, we feel as if we were descending into the Hades of antiquity. The amphitheatre demands more than reproach. It is beyond our understanding that the Roman people should have made the human sacrifice, the *munus*, a festival joyously celebrated by the whole city" (D. J. Davies, 2005: 6); similarly, video game players do have fun while journeying into the sadistic virtual shows horror games are. In both cases the fun is morally justified: either as witnessing a divine punishment to those that acted against the state (in Rome) either as becoming the fictive tool of nowadays morality violently destroying the monsters who started to violate the natural order: "Through its actions, this antagonistic force [of horror films] shows itself to be so thoroughly inhuman that no audience member would fault the hero for killing the evil as an act of self-defense. This exactly maps on to the experience most action-oriented designers want to create, going all the way back to *Space Invaders*; the player is thrown into a dangerous situation with a clear, undeniable "kill to survive" motivation. The evil forces are numerous and all deserve to die. Hence horror games are a natural fit" (Rouse 2009: 16).

The whole horrific idea of torturing living beings with the purpose to create confusion, fear, despair, all by managing the aesthetics of violence against the human bodies and animal bodies, has a possible explanation when the morality in a society has deteriorated and the force of justice needs to

compensate the lack of order and virtues with a similar violent and brutal response:

"Exploring the arena 'in the context of Roman ideas about society, morality and mortality', Thomas Wiedemann views the killing of beasts and humans in the games symbolically as a defense of civilization and social order against nature, barbarism, and criminality. The arena was a marginal, liminal site where Romans confronted the limits of the human versus the natural world in beast combats, the limits of morality, law, and social order in executions, and the limits of human mortality in the gladiatorial munus. Wiedemann also emphasizes the role of bloody spectacles as fundamental to Rome's cultural identity or Romanitas (Romanitas) in the process of Rome's unification of Italy and expansion overseas" (D. J. Davies, 2005: 10).

In conclusion: we state that if the gruesome arena death games did have their function in restoring the principles of a society whose moral values were in peril and where order and security were questionable, horror video games use the virtual simulation of similar violent spectacles according to different purposes correlated to the moral values the spectator of nowadays society is culturally imbued with. The latter case has to be viewed in its context. If Roman emperors indirectly threatened everyone while giving spectacles to demonstrate the omnipotence over the lives of those who disobeyed the law, the violent show witnessed while playing a game from *Silent Hill* series follows a different path. There are obvious differences given the fact in arena there were real people and all the beasts were real animals while all the monsters in horror genre are virtual beings. There are also similarities when thinking of the rituals present in both the ludic-narrative context of Survival Horror and in the care for the corpses of the arena victims, nonetheless with different functions in the two phenomena. But if in Roman arena the divinity (acting as supernatural force through the will of the emperor) condemned the supposed morally deformed individuals who dared to defy it, or showed its force over nature by torturing wild beasts broadly perceived as subhuman monstrosities, the situation is different in Survival Horror video games; in horror fiction the moral law and the concept of nature itself as rational order are deeply chained one to another representing the same reality the hero stands for. In horror the monsters are not natural beasts; they have a connection with something always irrational and by definition outside the limits of the way modern science began to reconsider the limits of nature: "Tanya Krzywinska writes about the rhythm of playable sequences and cut-scenes, arguing that it "takes on a generically apposite resonance within the context of horror because it ties into and consolidates

formally a theme often found in horror, in which supernatural forces act on, and regularly threaten, the sphere of human agency" (Krzywinska, 2002: 206). This keenly focuses on the visibility of moral forces and the role of agency in providing horror's elemental power - a zone in which the breadth of consequences are teased out. Super-natural forces act to set things in motion, while the character struggles to effectively react - a deeply different formulation than most action scenarios, where the player's supernatural ability forces the entire game-world to react in turn" (Bernard Perron, Christian McCrea, 2009: Kindle Locations 3297-3301).

The cultural backgrounds for these narrative settings are not literally (by their specific content) necessarily inspired from ancient Rome events: from Occidental to Japanese Folklore and various depictions of Hell like Dante's *Inferno* and the later Gothic<sup>2</sup> literature followed by horror movies - there are lots of sources of inspirations for Survival Horror games<sup>3</sup>. Our aim here is not to create a direct connection between the imaginary of Horror and the Roman arena in what the specific cultural content of this Imaginary inspires from. Rather we want to show the similarities the two phenomena have in common: the ludic aspect, the entertainment of enjoying extreme violence and death shows, perhaps relevant for finding a symptom of our present culture, wondering what do we face when different media reproduce more and more literature, movies and games with such historically troubled thematic.

<sup>2</sup> "Echoes of the themes, settings, and ambience of Gothic literature are so frequent in games from the Silent Hill (Konami, 1999-2008) and Resident Evil (Capcom, 1996-2009) series that it is possible to argue that Survival Horror games constitute a new form of the Gothic, one in which player activity drives the unfolding of the action" (Bernard Perron, Simon Niedenthal, 2009: Kindle Locations 2500-2501).

<sup>3</sup> "Video games rapidly became a suitable platform for perpetuating the pleasures of horror. The inspiration, especially for Japanese horror games such as Resident Evil, The House of the Dead (Sega, 1996) and Silent Hill, is drawn both from traditional British gothic and Lovecraftian themes as well as from horror in Japanese popular culture. Horror manga (Japanese comics) and anime (Japanese animation) have had an appreciable imprint on Japanese cinema in the eighties and nineties, with such success as Vampire Hunter D (1985) and Blood: the Last Vampire (2000) (Jones, 2005: 124). These two works have been adapted to video games: the Survival Horror game Vampire Hunter D (Jaleco, 2000) on the PlayStation, and Japan-exclusive graphical adventure games based on the Blood: The Last Vampire franchise on the PlayStation 2 and PlayStation Portable (PSP) in 2000 and 2006 respectively. As in the West, the horror genre is very popular in Japan, proliferating on every platform of popular culture where they all act upon each other. Similar to contemporary Japanese horror cinema, such "cultural cross-fertilisation" (McRoy, 2008: 2) in Japanese horror games must be taken into account to explain the popularity of Japanese horror games internationally" (Bernard Perron, Martin Picard, 2009: Kindle Locations 1609-1616).

Returning to the cause of why violence was institutionalized at some point in ancient Rome, we might consider further explanations: "For Plass 'violence, or more generally, disorder falls under an axiom of anomaly, that is, an abnormal or disruptive factor formally institutionalized in one way or another to be internalized, in a process characteristic of any immune system'. He argues that, as components of one social system, both arena sport and political suicide had a social purpose in dealing with problems of security and survival (i.e. either external danger or internal political conflict). As socially sanctioned violence and controlled disorder, both addressed social anomaly by incorporating disorder into order, restoring social routine, and (re)affirming security. Plass finds the arena's excessive violence consistent with the antithetical logic of liminal institutions which incorporate potential dysfunction to assure proper function. Spectators gather in an amphitheater away from normal life, they vicariously participate in combat, and they then return to normalcy" (D. J. Davies, 2005: 10).

By taking the last two arguments into account and by also thinking of the ways cognitive psychology uses virtual spaces with the purpose to cure phobias<sup>4</sup> we can trace a potentially effect of horror games and horror in general as catharsis. The discussion may go forth because of the still imprecise cultural role of morality in these games. It is clear now there is no similar intention of using violence in the same terms. death games were justified in ancient Rome, but the games still mimic in terms of fiction and immersion the former structure (based on hierarchy, morale, punishment and privileges) of the historically attested discourse.

As other already mentioned authors demonstrated, horror game narratives bring forth strong ethical and extreme moral problems the individual has to face while playing the game and advancing through story. The narrative task of the Survival Horror character is always to act against the violent monstrosities in order to defend the ethical system he believes in (fearing for the faith of his daughter, Harry Mason, the main character of *Silent Hill 1*, passes through hellish perils defeating his limitations and fears with a single ethical purpose: to do his duty as a father and protect his child guaranteeing her safety). To morally understand the

<sup>4</sup> Information about treating phobias with virtual reality broadly spread over the internet. Technological development permitted closed to reality simulations of the phobic objects, basically encouraging the patients to bravely face their fears in an artificially controlled environment. Babes-Bolyai, University of Groningen and other universities do have experience in researching this innovative field with such promising future: [www.rug.nl/cit/hpcv/VR\\_visualisation/fobiebehandeling?lang=en](http://www.rug.nl/cit/hpcv/VR_visualisation/fobiebehandeling?lang=en).

prototype of Survival Horror protagonists we must understand the ethics and values of today's culture that he/she stands for when facing all the unpleasant and vile monstrosities: "Central to the force of contemporary ethics lies the prime issue of human rights and the worth of individual right to life. The strong this-worldly focus of secular ethics has been complemented by a variety of reflections on life and death produced as much by bereaved people trying to make sense of life as by any theologian, scientist or philosopher" (D.J. Davies, 2001: 150). But, while rhetorically and paradoxically uses a proportional responsive violence and the same attitude towards the incoming monstrosities, the hero justifies his actions because he is forced to kill in order to survive. Refusing to fight for his life would lead to an equivalent of suicide, or homicide by doing nothing against the monsters. Ultimately all the characters of these games are forced to push their limits and act desperately while dealing with their most hidden fears (i.e. Travis from Silent Hill has to fight with the incarnations of his childhood traumas as monstrous beings that engulfed his immoral considerations about his parents which appeared as hunting demons. As the characters of Silent Hill series advance through story, they would usually understand they travel through their own psyche, and all the violence they face is a projection of their own problems. In Silent Hill Shattered memories the player begins the game from the perspective of a mentally disordered person in front of the Psychiatrist and literally has to take some psychology tests). Nonetheless at least hypothetically the morality order the player has to defend against the irrational monsters is successfully and unwillingly internalized while playing the game.

But, on the contrary, we may think otherwise: watching violence while enacting in gameplay might be a way of reestablishing the moral order in the individual, but on the other hand there is no doubt most of the players are already educated and do live in conformity with the same ethical system the character represents. Creating a main character whose mental frame and emotional expectations copy the average mentality of the nowadays cultural set of values might be simply the best option to create the conditions for a better immersion in the game world. Thus, starting from the player's moral expectancies would seem a necessary step for questioning his beliefs and his society beliefs in what today reality means. This involves not just the psychological construction of the characters, but also the settings or the environment which must look at first very close to what a human being effortlessly perceives every day. The myth of contemporary urban safety has to be created in its slightest details in order to be later ravaged by irrational monstrosities that seldom behave following

other moral discourses based on slaughter and abuse like the former historically mentioned case of Roman arena death games. Survival Horror's hero ultimately is a defender of democracy or whatsoever the global society tries to defend while all the monstrosities are connected to marginal realities of this society: with institutions Michel Foucault wrote about – the asylum and the penitentiary; or with other types of social order like the already mentioned religious sect of Silent Hill, the organized medieval-like group of Las Plagas fanatic terrorists from Resident Evil 4 and more others inspired from folklore and worldwide mythologies like the fairy tales collected from the Japanese Edo period.

Lastly, Survival Horror brings forth the problems of this society: consumerism and social growth<sup>5</sup>, nuclear threats and all the everyday fears<sup>6</sup> that remove the belief in a secure and safe world, therefore questioning the ability of democracy to defend its citizens. Whatever the endings lead to, the character is always on the good side, defending human rights, life, and protesting when witnessing the horrors of the alternate discourses whose emblem is the monster with its entire disgusting, impure, violent and scary arsenal.

<sup>5</sup> Zombies and cannibalism from Resident Evil series.

<sup>6</sup> Of hospitals, needles, spiders, doctors, demons and so forth; a lot of the mentioned examples can be traced in Silent Hill series, the zombie nurses being one of the franchise's symbols.

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