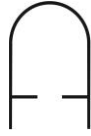TITLE: THE BIOPOLITICS OF THE COLOSSUS

AUTHORS: Kerem Güman

PAGES: 38-58

ORIGINAL PDF URL: https://www.arteoloji.com/dergi/the-biopolitics-of-the-colossus20221029121529.pdf

THE BIOPOLITICS OF THE COLOSSUS

İzbandut'un Biyopolitiği

Kerem Güman[*]

Abstract

The dynamics of creating a narrative for videogames vary mostly due to the commercial needs of the videogame market. Many of the games that have similar repetitive dynamics dependent upon various hype mechanisms such as fan service are intended to keep the gamer population under the brand. There are but a few narrative videogames that try to be as original as they can, creating their own audience by introducing their own rules to the market. The objective of this paper is to question if a narrative of a videogame can define its own ludological aspects and in doing so what makes an interactive story a contemporary art piece beyond any commercial success by bringing the two worlds together. Literature review method has been used for this manuscript to gather supportive references for the discourse. After collecting enough info on the research subject, the videogame called Shadow of the Colossus (Team Ico, Bluepoint Games, Japan Studio. 2018) has been chosen as a sample.

Keywords: *Videogame Market, Environmental Issues, Paul-Michel Foucault, Contemporary Art, Serious Games.*

Öz

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Video oyunları için bir anlatı yaratmanın dinamikleri, çoğunlukla video oyunu pazarının ticari ihtiyaçları nedeniyle değişmektedir. Hayran servisi gibi çeşitli yanıltıcı reklam mekanizmalarına bağlı benzer tekrarlayan dinamiklere sahip olanların çoğu, oyuncu popülasyonunu marka altında tutmayı amaçlamaktadır. Piyasaya rağmen kendi kurallarını dayatarak ve kendi izleyicilerini yaratarak olabildiğince orijinal olmaya çalışan bu anlatı oyunlarından çok az örnek vardır. Bu makalenin amacı, bir video oyunu anlatısının kendi oyunbilimsel yönlerini tanımlayıp tanımlayamayacağını ve etkileşimli bir anlatıyı ticari başarının ötesinde sanat eseri yapan şeyin ne olduğunu araştırmak ve sorgulamaktır. Bu yazıda, söylem için destekleyici referanslar toplamak amacıyla literatür taraması yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Araştırma konusu hakkında yeterli bilgi toplandıktan sonra örneklem olarak Shadow of the Colossus (2018) adlı video oyunu seçilmiştir.

Keywords: *Video Oyun Pazarı, Çevresel Sorunlar, Paul-Michel Foucault, Güncel Sanat, Ciddi Oyunlar.*

[*]Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Çankırı Karatekin Üniversitesi, Sanat Tasarım ve Mimarlık Fakültesi, Resim Bölümü, keremguman@karatekin.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0001-8530-5847

Genişletilmiş Özet

Duygulanım yaratmada güçlü birçok çağdaş sanat formu vardır ve etkileşimli anlatıya sahip video oyunlarından bazıları zaten bu kalite düzeyine ulaşmıştır. Video oyunları için bir anlatı yaratmanın dinamikleri, çoğunlukla video oyunu pazarının ticari ihtiyaçları nedeniyle değişmektedir. Hayran servisi gibi çeşitli yanıltıcı reklam mekanizmalarına bağlı benzer tekrarlayan dinamiklere sahip olanların çoğu, oyuncu kitlesini marka altında tutmayı amaçlamaktadır. Piyasaya rağmen kendi kurallarını dayatarak ve kendi izleyicilerini yaratarak olabildiğince orijinal olmaya çalışan bu anlatı oyunlarından çok az örnek vardır. Bu makalenin amacı, bir video oyunu anlatısının kendi oyunbilimsel yönlerini tanımlayıp tanımlayamayacağını ve etkileşimli bir anlatıyı ticari başarının ötesinde sanat eseri yapan şeyin ne olduğunu araştırmak ve sorgulamaktır. Bu yazıda, söylem için destekleyici referanslar toplamak amacıyla literatür taraması yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Araştırmada örneklem olarak Shadow of the Colossus (Team Ico, Bluepoint Games, Japan Studio. 2018) adlı video oyunu seçilmiştir. Bulgular, tıpkı bir roman okumaktan veya film izlemekten edinilen deneyimler gibi, bir video oyunu aracılığıyla, oyunun anlatı tasarımının bize aktardığı biçimde onu özümseyerek ve içselleştirerek kurgu içine dahil edebileceğini göstermektedir. Bu, önceden kullanılmış olan sanatsal araçlardan farklı bir güç olarak, biyoiktidar, oyuncuya özel tasarlanan duygulanımı deneyimlemeye iter. Bir video oyunu anlatısı, tıpkı fotoğrafı araç olarak kullanan alanlarda rastlandığı üzere, diyalektik bir imgenin aurayı sanat eserinden ayırarak yaptığı gibi, etkileşimli bir biyoiktidar ile izleyiciyi etkileme potansiyeline sahiptir. Shadow of the Colossus (2018), antagonisti bir zamanlar yaşadığı söylenen güçlü bir avcı olan Nemrut adında bir hükümdarın hikayesinden esinlenildiğine dair güçlü ip uçları barındırır. Tıpkı Nemrut ve vatandaşlarının, Nuh'un zamanında meydana gelene benzer ikinci bir tufanı önlemek için dünyadaki herhangi bir yerden daha yüksek bir kule inşa etmeye karar verdiklerinde olduğu gibi, bulunduğu ovadan izole, yüksekteki bir kule anlatının merkezi konumundadır. Antagonistin oyuncudan talep ettiği şey, orijinal hikayedekine paralel olarak, kendi mahkumiyetini bertaraf etmek üzere kurulu doğa düzenini alaşağı etmeye yönelik bir tür başkaldırı niteliği taşımaktadır. Doğanın gücüne galip gelme arzusu, "İnsanlık tarihi" olarak bilinen bir masaldır. Dünyadaki doğal kaynakları kontrol etme yarışını gizlemeye yönelik kullanılan bahanelerden biri olan romantik idealler, birbiri üzerine ilan edilen her savaşın neredeyse temel nedeni olmuştur. Genel olarak video oyunu tarihi bize bir kavram olarak zafer için rekabeti mecbur kılar. Fizikçi William Higinbotham'dan John Romero'ya, Tim Schafer ve hatta Jonathan Blow bile bir hedefin peşinden giderek, oyunu kazanmak için sonunda ulaşılacak bir başarıyı ölçüt olarak ortaya koyar. Yarattıkları oyunların farklı amaçları olsa da ortak bir noktası vardır, o da bir: "Rakip"tir. Bir "Öteki" olarak rakip, önceden belirlenmiş bir dizi kural dahilinde oyuncuya meydan okuyarak her zaman oyuncunun zekasının üstesinden gelmeye çalışır. İnsan, rakibi, uyumsuzluğun nihai kaynağı olarak tanımlamak suretiyle, uyuma yönelik bu tehdidi ortadan kaldırmak, kaynağını verilen kurallar çerçevesinde ortadan kaldırma tutum ve davranış eğilimi gösterir. Bu kaynağa bir fikrin cisimleşmesi adını verirsek, o zaman yenmeye çalıştığımız şey her zaman karşıt gücün bu bedenidir. Koşulsuz uyumu talep eden bir karşı güç, yalnızca karşıt bir gücü devirmek için bir araç değil, aynı zamanda bir fikir olarak biçimdir. Biyopolitika, genellikle olumsuz çağrışımlar içeren bir kavram olsa da faydacı kullanımla, özellikle video oyunu tasarımında olduğu üzere, herhangi bir sanatsal anlatıya olumlu yönde yardımcı olabilir. "Biopolitics" kavramının interaktif deneyim yoluyla cisimleştirmesiyle nihai anlatıya sahip olarak değerlendirilecek bir oyun varsa, o da Shadow of the Colossus'tur (2018). Bu video oyununun örneklem olarak seçilmesinin ana nedeni, güncel sanatın yeni formları ile iyi bilinen İncil'e dayalı bir hikayedeki gibi paralel yapıları bünyesinde barındıran son derece yaratıcı etkileşimli bir anlatı arasında herhangi bir bağlantı olup olmadığını sorgulamaktır. Video oyunu endüstrisi hala genel olarak eğlence sektörü başlığı altında konumlandığı için, bu iki

spesifik alana odaklanmış bir araştırma henüz yapılmamıştır. Işığın ve gölgenin tek renkliliği, Mono ve Wander'daki gibi kişileştirilir, oysa Mono, saf bir ışık kaynağı olarak beyaz olarak tasvir edilir ve sonunda Wander, güçlü bir yerel ışık kaynağı altında bir nesneden düşen bir gölge olarak kararır. Bu nedenle, gezgin olarak oyuncu, bir sanat formunun parçası haline gelir ve Dormin, oyunda ilerledikçe kişinin oyuncunun zihnini bulandırarak onu tamamlar. Çağdaş AAA video oyunlarını oynayarak deneyim elde etmenin genellikle sanal bir kazanım olduğu ve faydaların yalnızca oyun içi olduğu varsayılırsa, bu oyun yalnızca gerçek yaşam için yararlı olabilecek gerçek bir deneyim sunmaktadır. Bu nedenle, oyuncunun eylemlerinin anlatı için değil, oyuncunun iç dünyasının gelişmesi için bir "açığa çıkan trajedi" (Cole, 2015, s. 2) olduğundan bahsedilebilir. Shadow of the Colossus'ta (Team Ico, Bluepoint Games, Japan Studio. 2018), Dormin, oyuncuyu gönüllü olarak, doğal yaşamın kaynağını ortadan kaldırma bedeli karşılığında tam bir hakimiyet vaadi veren biyoiktidardır: Doğanın kendisi, hepimizin içinde yaşadığı doğa olarak ve/veya bir insanın doğası olarak bir ikilik. Dormin Wander'ı kontrol ederken, oyun da oyuncuyu anlatı çerçevesinde kontrol etmektedir. Silahını isteyerek kınına sokarak ve ancak Colossus'ları (doğayı) yaşatarak bu durdurabilir. Günümüz dijital medyasının sorunları ve şimdiye kadar yaşadığımız felaketler üzerine özeleştirel ve alegorik bir çalışma olduğu düşünüldüğünde, bir sanat eseri olarak oyunun kendisine saygı gösterip göstermemek gibi bir seçimden bahsetmek mümkün değildir. Burada formdan kaynaklı yönlendirilmiş bir görüşten söz edilebilir. Etkileşimli sanatsal form, kontrol edenin kendisindedir.

Introduction

There once was a ruler called Nimrod, the mighty hunter. He and his fellow citizens have decided to build a tower higher than any other place on earth to prevent a second deluge like that which happened during Noah's age. In doing so they rose against God accusing him trying to drown their ancestors and marched to invade heaven but were defeated only by becoming alienated to their own language divided by God to seventy different versions of it (Graves & Patai, 2005, p. 126). The desire to be triumphant over the force of nature is a well-known tale as "The history of humanity". The real reasons behind the use of romantic ideals as a substitute is the race for controlling the natural resources on earth have almost been the very reason for every single war declared upon one another. Through dominance, there comes the status quo power over the living body.

The videogame history in general tells us about the competition for victory as a concept. From the Physicist William Higinbotham who paved the way for the modern videogame industry to the videogame designers like John Romero, Tim Schafer and even Jonathan Blow have pursued a goal, an achievement to be reached in the end to beat the game. Although those games they have created have different goals to achieve there is one thing in common: "The opponent". The opponent as an "Other" always tries to overcome the player's wit by challenging her/him within some predetermined set of rules. As human beings, we tend to define the opponent as the ultimate source of unconformity. To eliminate this threat to our conformity is to exterminate the source of it within the set of rules given. If we define this source as an embodiment of an idea, then what we try to defeat is always this body of the antagonistic force so called the "Otherness". A counterforce, which can be called biopower, is a tool not only to overthrow an opposing force, but the form as an idea. Though biopolitics is a concept with negative connotations, it may be of use in interpreting any form of art, especially video games.

If there is one game to be addressed as having the ultimate narrative which personifies/embodies the concept "Biopolitics" via interactive experience it is Shadow

of the Colossus (2018). The main reason to choose this very videogame as a sample is to question if there are any similarities between the creative process of an artwork and designing an exceptionally creative interactive narrative which happens to embody such parallel structures within as the well-known biblical story of Nimrod. There is yet to be any focused research on these two specific fields as the videogame industry is still generally positioned under the title of the entertainment business.

1. Intertextual Intercourse of an Interactive Narrative

The sub-identity gained by a forced episodic memory caused by playing a narrative-driven fiction, acts as an element of a biopower the videogame player generally willingly submits, as the economic model chosen for a videogame is generally capitalist. The absolute conformity that is being asked by capitalism for the cost efficiency as seen within the concept of surplus value is, according to Foucault (1978), also a tool of the so called biopower. Mostly the biopolitics is a term known for its negative uses like segregation and social engineering for Foucault states that starting from the Middle Ages as the regulations were formulated by the solutions to the plague in general is the origin of the term so called bio-power (s. 10-141). Although it can be used for the benefit of the various environmental issues, one can see the higher power as the market that rules over the game developers. This higher power, however, which also has a symbiotic relationship with the demanding force of the popular culture where the entertainment business is largely based upon is not an absolute one. Turning its own weapons upon itself, an interactive story may give the player a responsibility of committing an involuntary crime against something e.g., the promise of an absolute control over the deceased, by pulling her/his strings towards a greater evil.

Invested time within a reality cannot justify it as a singularity and time has also the ability to alter our perception. As Mackey clarifies that the serious game as a medium can hold the bio-power over the audience as it can play with the player's mind. By playing a videogame, not only the player is experiencing the narrative time as present, but she/he generally has the power of changing it simultaneously. Like the narrator, the player gains a relatively limited power over the course of the diegesis

(Mackey, 2006). This semi-autogenous narrative makes the storyteller, for the first time in the history, the audience itself.

Unlike Mackey's opinion, in Shadow of the Colossus (Sony Entertainment, 2005), a videogame that has been three times recreated for the newer consoles, the narrator of the game tells us a story which had been happened before and there is no way to change the end results. To see it through to the end, one must go through the exact routine as anyone who plays the game. The aim is to destroy every single colossus on the map, so to raze the sculptures down that are somehow connected to the colossi, and to animate the now deceased beloved of the protagonist, once again.
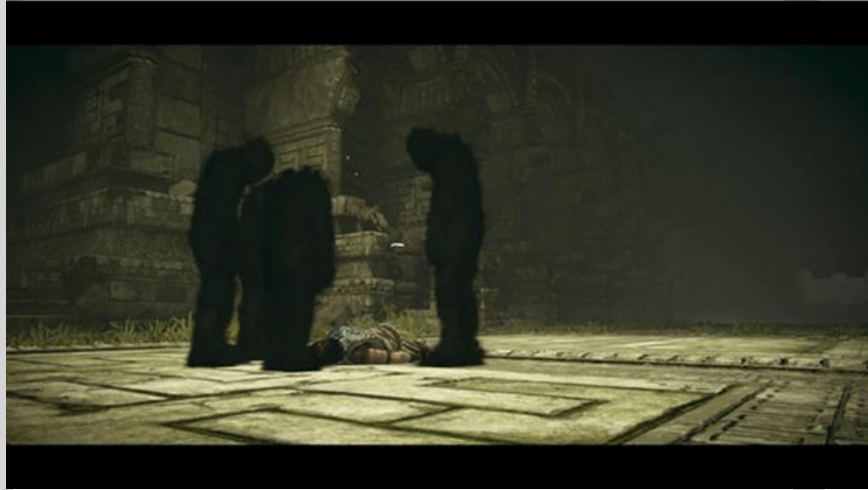

Figure 1: Wander and the shadows appearing by him after the defeat of the fourth colossus (Team Ico, Bluepoint Games, Japan Studio. 2018).

During the adventure, which is a lonesome journey to "the next foe", but not a scripted one, thanks to the open world design, and the only clue to find the direction can be found by pointing a sword to the sky to focus all light beams, an irony that it is not his heart but the tip of the sword that shows the way which will eventually lead to the demise of our antagonist.. Ere the player gets in contact with a voice through a temple shaped structure where Mono, the now deceased lover is waiting to be returned to life. The voice that whispers to the antagonist giving directions what to do next, is an evil force that is represented by a shadow waiting to be released from a magical detention

and that will in the end gain the control of our actions as players, no matter what.[1]. When Fulcher (2019, p. 19) states that "Games like Journey and Shadow of the Colossus (2018) create [an] atmosphere and catharsis that blur the lines of art and entertainment", he seems to bring the videogame genre closer to art, because that is one of the characteristics of contemporary avant-garde art. By releasing the shadow within the colossi, which leads to a catharsis, player removes the curse by a predetermined sacrifice and to be reborn by nature she/he un/willingly seeks to destroy for her/his virtuous cause during her/his adventure.

The multiplying shadows of the protagonist Wander for every defeated colossus and the pieces of the antagonist Dormin set free for every razed statue are also connected. For every time, a shadow of Dormin is released, a humanoid shadow appears right by his inanimate body that is returned to the temple by a shadow of a colossus released by him right after defeating the colossus (see Figure 1). The liberated shadows causing the synchronous destruction of the statues are representational entities of the source, which is the bare truth, just as the metaphor of the sun being the source of the ideal plane (Plato, 2004, p. 328). The shadows stand for the anti-ideas whereas the colossi are like that of the physical world we live in, a personification of the mother nature, and the statues are the art that represent the colossi as being the nature itself (see Figure 2).

The message herein, for every time someone tries to eradicate an idea, that is the main source of the nature, a shadow of it (anti-idea) will be cast to the minds to prevent

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[1] It is depicted as some sort of a horned demon named Dormin, which is spelled "Nimrod" backwards is also a cursed being as Nimrod is and his/ her soul torn into pieces that are each divided and hold by the colossi to prevent the demon escape from the prison tower. There are further similarities as the monuments in the game representing the colossi are also depicted as sitting on their thrones the same way the monuments at the top of the Mount Nemrut ("Nimrod" for Turkish language). In 1987 UNESCO declared the mountain as a world heritage site: "Crowning one of the highest peaks of the Eastern Taurus Mountain range in south-east Turkey, Nemrut Dağ is the Hierotheseion (temple-tomb and house of the gods) built by the late Hellenistic King Antiochos I of Commagene (69-34 B.C.) as a monument to himself." (UNESCO, 2020) According to the Bible, Nimrod is the first king of Babylon, who was "a mighty hunter before the Lord" to whom he rebelled against (Genesis 10:9, 2020). The protagonist Wander is possessed by Dormin by the end of the game is also a hunter, who is also a rebellious figure for he steals the dead body of her lover and brings her to a forbidden tower modelled as a representation of the Tower of Babylon in the middle of a deserted area, whereas Nimrod can also be seen as a wanderer in his quest to build power.

them to learn the truth by encapsulating them in a comfort zone of acting like a hero, even if this virtuous act costs one her/his closest friend, in case of Wander his horse Agro[2] which helped him the most during his quest, and here it is yet another trolley problem: For every colossus Wander kills, he distances himself form the truth by rejecting the intellectual world, believing that in doing so, his beloved would return to him.

Figure 2: Several anthropomorphic statues
representing the colossi from the game.
(Lawrence, 2018).

The narrative of the game thus leads us to experience the idea that is predetermined by the creator and for that can the game be called a contemporary art piece? This is the very medium that builds upon the narrative potential of the cinematic language. The level of interactivity elevates the narrative, giving the player a false belief that he or she could change the fate of the pratogonist, something which makes the player more emotionally invested in the game. The musical score of the game also directs the mood of the player. Every time when a colossus is defeated by the protagonist, by giving a sad tune of Kow Otani's masterpiece rather than a glorious one

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[2] Programmed deliberately to give the player the feeling of an organic independent life form that does not obey every command she gives. (Berri, 2012)

is a decision made intentionally although it was mistaken for a glitch by the beta testers (Ueda, 2019). That the intention of the main character seems righteous and pure also misleads the player. Le Guin explains this paradox giving example from an Andersen tale called The Child and the Shadow:

> The man is all that is civilized-learned, kindly, idealistic, decent. The shadow is all that gets suppressed in the process of becoming a decent, civilized adult. The shadow is the man's thwarted selfishness, his unadmitted desires, the swear-words he never spoke, the murders he did not commit. The shadow is the dark side of his soul, the unadmitted, the inadmissible... He confronts his dark self at last, but instead of asserting equality or mastery, he lets it master him. He gives in. He does, in fact, become the shadow's shadow, and his fate then is inevitable (Le Guin, 1975, p. 140).

Figure 3: Antiochos himself and the gods of his syncretistic Graeco-Persian pantheon: Artagnes-Heracles-Ares, Apollo-Mithras-Helios-Hermes, Zeus-Oromasdes, and a new goddess, "all-nourishing Commage, Eastern Terrace of Mount Nemrud. (Downey, 1997, p. 95).

The player as the character, acquires the enormous power of the colossi killed, though without knowing what to do with it, before losing it all together, just like Nimrod does in the legend. The resemblance is not limited to the story of Nimrod but also the monuments of the ancient ruins of Mount Nemrud created in the shapes of the sitting gods. (See Figure 3).

2. A Paradise Lost

According to Lehner the colossi are the nature itself. The bodies of the colossi are comprised of things taken from nature such as animals, plants of various kinds, etc., which means that killing the clossi is killing nature. (Lehner, 2017, p. 67).

The garden representing the nature that is now restored, full of life with all the living animals gathering around the new-born, is an allegory of heaven as an afterlife experience. The dying nature represented by the colossi thus rises from where it is hidden and pushed back within this symbolic garden is a catharsis as a concept, which summarizes the whole experience. At the end of the narrative, we see a stag up in the garden of the tower[3]. That is no other than Nimrod, the Enchanted Stag, a justification of the pure intentions revealed and released from the rubble of the colossi (see Figure 4).

The concept of relief from a burden here is so condensed that it can be explained via the experiences of a society as a nation relieved from a dictatorial regime which was once established by the same society. One can clearly say that the deceased Mono is the muted conscience of the mass where there is no opposition (see Figure 5). Nimrod therefore can be read as a personification of that nation, an ideology that is once corrupted by its own decisions. Following the collapse of the false ideals, a nation reborn is being represented as the Enchanted Stag. Lehner suggests that: "The conventional anthropocentric perspective of the protagonist is disrupted and replaced with a new level of sympathy. Understanding of the non-human enemy is enforced by

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[3] The stag also stands for the God's Realm in Turkish and Hungarian tradition, as the name of the King Nimrod's wife Enee stands for the hind.

disrupting the whole mechanical and perceptual system of the player." (Lehner, 2017, p. 68). From a Freudian perspective the process here is experienced by the player within the self-alienated ego-ideals of that society personified within the form of Wander.

Figure 4: The stag as a representation of Nimrod (Team Ico, Bluepoint Games, Japan Studio. 2018).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, for the first time in human history, our societies have taken a setback more than ever before just like Wander is being pulled by the sword fallen into the pool. His story also tells us about a failed attempt on turning our backs to the nature and thus leading to various catastrophic environmental disasters. His lust for power to rule over everything, even death, leads him only to his destruction and life recovers after his death as it has never been a clear message that all can be healed before it is too late. Scientists report that if the global production and consumption rates of fossil fuels do not decrease, there will be no turning back for the nature to a state as we have always known (NASA, 2020). The black matter also representing the shadow is a metaphor for the fuel oil economy that which is seen as the main cause of the global warming.

*Figure 5: Wander by Mono with his horse Agro (Team
Ico, Bluepoint Games, Japan Studio. 2018).*

While Sicart states that the game has simple dynamics as stabbing (Sicart, 2008), that some players have chosen not to progress further in the game right after losing Agro to the chasm even if there is no achievement for it can be a delicate way of expressing one's affection to the game designer. It is the designer's choice not to give enough info about the artwork but to make sure every player gets unique experiences even if the narrative is linear.

Nevertheless, there is always a choice of passive resistance which isn't the very obvious of all the other options. It is a matter of fact that we as "players" of real life can prevent the inevitable by inactivity (Milburn, 2018, p. 198). This inactivity will preserve the digital monuments electronically yet may encourage the player to be wary of the possible negative consequences of his or her actions. (see Figure 6).

Nguyen (2017, p. 21) identifies this act as a confession for the guilt of not paying enough attention for the environmental issues. An option to yield weapons while the player can become a reality only by beating the game to realize that it is only a hint of what is going on out there, which is hard to comprehend if one doesn't even try to think outside the tube. The idea reflected in the famous B movie market motto "what you see is what you get" can be said to pervade all the AAA games of the era. It is the main propulsion of the player to commit what is being asked of her/him: Kill everything that

moves! But there are so few games that put the player into a situation that is to be ashamed of. And there are but fewer players who take a step on the other side of the fence as a player and see the big picture. The game, therefore, as Cesar (2018) states, gives this concept of responsibility through an amplification of qualities which the gamer community demands like good graphics/mechanics/dynamics, replayibility and such… as a promotion to help *testadura* to play the game for a chance to catch the true meaning of the narrative in the end. This is the means by which the message is conveyed insofar as any medium is chosen for a narrative within the videogame industry. For it has become the golden standards of every commercially successful project of the "Users' choice".

Figure 6: Destruction of a representational figure right after the defeat of its colossus (Team Ico, Bluepoint Games, Japan Studio. 2018).

The dialectical strain between alienation and a humble solitude is what makes the diegesis unique within its own terms. Fulcher (2019) states that the concept of dialectical image borrowed from the language of photography and used in the context of contemporary avant-garde art can also be applied to the imagery in videogames (p. 24). This totality depends upon a responsibility, that is the main drive for the player, to reach a final verdict none other than a chosen path given by the rules that is set for the specific game world. The dialectical strain caused by the limited choices given to the player to

advance the narrative is what separates the game as an art form from any kind of artwork where the players are being passive observants in an environment where also a constant activity is needed. (Frome, 2007, p. 832). Therefore, Wander becomes the ultimate tool to give the player the exact designed experience, not as in in-game stats but the real one.

3. Projective Shadow Play

In Shadow of the Colossus (Team Ico, Bluepoint Games, Japan Studio. 2018), players are being forced to question their own moral codes. This hypodermic model chosen to create a dialectical strain met with a discovery of something that, in Plato's words: "is thrice removed from the truth" (Plato, 2004, p. 241). The sole purpose of the game that is to save the beloved from being dead, which is the primary drive that conveys the player to reach to the end of the narrative encapsulates the player as a form of art created for an imitation of an emotional state to show that the player is being misled from the truth itself. Mitgutsch explains this process as a relearning experience, an experience to be gained at first to raze it to the ground and build anew by looking upside down, the other way around and finally to see something quite different the first time (Mitgutsch, 2009, p. 19)

Figure 7: Wander, a hunter like Nimrod, while hunting
a colossus (Team Ico, Bluepoint Games, Japan Studio.
2018).

A confrontation with the concept of truth has always been a problematic dating back to the ancient philosophers. This learning process is somewhat in relation to Plato. Epitomizing his allegory by depicting the price of confronting with the truth has always created a dualism from the point of view of oneself and the *illuminated* is always on a disadvantaged position when confronting the *testa dura* (Plato, 2004, p. 329). And by knowledge one can no longer put glory over repent. Just like those two conflicting forms of ideas of the allegory, there are too few of those games like Shadow of the Colossus (Team Ico, Bluepoint Games, Japan Studio. 2018) that shadow forth what we are up against if we continue to harm nature. There are also so few of those players who can read the real messages behind those experiences they have from games rather than playing by their marvelous graphics etc. and try not to contemplate. But then the game itself could not be played by this number and become a colossal title like it is now, if it were not for its graphical performance. Henceforth it is but the only way to inform those few that could be saved from the darkness of the cave at the cost of being criticized for dullness.

This is where the game shines as an allegory of the famous story of Nimrod: Being too far from the facts of the truth and staying in the comforting zone of ignorance is a self-destructive way which harms not only the ignorant herself/himself but also the environment one shares. The biopolitics of the mass culture forces the independent game developers to set their narratives up on a language that is seen among many other mainstream titles. The medium preferred may damage the message it tries to convey to the many contemporaries. Yet it becomes powerful enough to maintain as a title for many decades, as there are three remake version of Shadow of the Colossus (Team Ico, Bluepoint Games, Japan Studio. 2018) (for now), reaching a larger audition to experience what it truly offers. The user reviews can be generalized around those comments below, supporting all the theories above as:

Obvious things: this game is beautiful. Period. This game is different than most of the games on the market. Open question: does 'different' mean 'good' by definition? Sadly, I have found this game quite boring. To reach the Colossi takes 10 minutes of very-nice-views-but-nothing-more. To beat the Colossi, it is either

directly-obvious-what-to-do or frustratingly non-obvious. The difficulty level is uneven, and I have found some middle-Colossi to be the most challenging. The story is virtually non-existent. For ~8h of play there is nothing. The ending is open, which is cool when you have observed character development for x hours, but with no background it makes it even more empty. (braczkow, 2018)

Players that are born into the current market has little interest on playing a game like Shadow of the Colossus (Team Ico, Bluepoint Games, Japan Studio. 2018), that has similar mechanics as of those highly competitive ones: The protagonist has only two weapons that allows no levelling up process nor they have alternative skin options as the other games (see Figure 7). A user raves for the game having this restrictive concept:

I hate this game. It is just art basically and it is just good on the outside. Nice Music, nice bosses design, nice graphics, and THAT'S IT. Frustrating controls (notably with the horse) and bad camera angles and little to nothing to do. No NPCs, No loot, No story, No exploration, No items, and weapons, etc. Since when "simplistic" has become a quality? Those kinds of games were good 15 years ago. (Jimbro84, 2018)

Indeed, in 2003 there were much less AAA games with an aggressively competitive style of gameplay. Yet in those days the market was more open to independent entrepreneurial projects due to the newness of the medium. In their book Ruggerio and Becker describe these kinds of games as the games we cannot win: "Developers of unwinnable serious educational games want to raise awareness of their issue, as well as stimulate interest and activism." (Ruggiero & Becker, 2015, p. 177). Yet there are few positive reviews as well as this one:

Shadow of the Colossus (Team Ico, Bluepoint Games, Japan Studio. 2018) is a masterpiece. Completely original. Artistically perfect. Emotional. Even without the incredibly satisfying, creative, and enjoyable battles, the experience of just running around the atmospheric world on the horse is heart-swelling. I wish I

could go there. The only fault is sometimes clumsy and frustrating horse controls, but even then, it's for the sake of realistic feel. (techtronics, 2018)

Although there are extreme negative and positive reviews on the game, most of them discuss whether it is good or not, agreeing upon the same criterion: graphics, gameplay, and emotional engagement. There is yet to be one on what the game really is about for those "technical issues" brought to the attention are all but a mere tool to give the player a specific experience. It is an experience about the importance of a contemplative isolation. An experience of how our critical thinking on the current economic model is suppressed and surpassed. It is a dichotomy on which norms are we depending upon and what we try to exclude from our minds:

The Shadow of the Colossus (Team Ico, Bluepoint Games, Japan Studio. 2018), then, is not an external obstacle to be overcome but the internal hubris of a soul bent on destruction and permanent battle – as Wander's tragic death makes patently clear at the end of the allegorical videogame. (Banita, 2014, p. 97).

Conclusion

Pliny suggests that art originates from the Ancient Greek outlining their shadows on bright day light are todays copy of the copy of ideas themselves (Rackham, 1961). The monochromatism of the light and shadow are personified as in Mono and Wander, whereas Mono is depicted as white as a pure light source and Wander in the end becoming dark as a shadow cast from an object under a powerful local source of light. Therefore, the player as a wanderer becomes a part of an artform, completing it as Dormin casts a shadow under one's mind as one advances through the game.

Considering gaining experience via playing contemporary AAA videogames is generally a virtual gain and the benefits are in-game only, this piece of art is giving an experience that is only useful for the real life. Therefore, it is an "unfolding tragedy" (Cole, 2015, p. 2) where player's actions are not for the narrative but for the player's inner world to develop. The thing that makes the player to transcend is though not only the narrative structure of the game but the experience of being thrown out with just a

single purpose to hold onto, that is, the simulation itself as trying to be a substitute for real-life (Ciccoricco, 2020).

While trying to be that simulation, Grey suggests that the game itself is an artwork for its qualities if applied to what Adorno would expect from a Brechtian Play: It uses eternal concepts as symbols that create distance for the mere consumers, yet the experience is still the same as what being a mortal means to the player (Grey, 2009, p. 244). In Shadow of the Colossus (Team Ico, Bluepoint Games, Japan Studio. 2018), Dormin is the bio-power that puts the player voluntarily on a mission to gain total control over the natural law for the price of eradicating the source of it: The nature itself, a dichotomy as the nature that we all live in, or/and as the nature of a human being. As Dormin controls Wander, the game controls the player narrative-wise. One may stop this by willingly sheathing her/his weapon and letting the colossi (nature) live.

Considering it being a self-critical and allegorical work on the problems of contemporary digital media and the disasters we have experienced so far, it is not a choice of matter whether to pay respect to an artwork as the game itself. The oriented view caused by the form as narrative exists and therefore here it is another quality of the game to be added. The interactive form of art thus can be viewed within via the controller that controls. Furthermore, the experience which transcends the medium and beyond is the most important element of art like that we experience from the game. Even though a biopower is present and it tricks the player to do what needs to be done by negating the process, the message at the end alone is worth the experience: To beat the shadow cast over the world is a matter of whether if each and every one of us decide to beat the shadows of our own.

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