

T.C.
BAHCESEHIR UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL
THE DEPARTMENT OF GAME DESIGN

**CORRELATION OF HEGEMONY AND VIOLENCE: A CASE STUDY OF
DETROIT: BECOME HUMAN (2018) AND RED DEAD REDEMPTION II
(2018)**

MASTER'S THESIS
LUTHFIAH DIEN

ISTANBUL, 2024

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GRADUATE SCHOOL

14/06/2024

MASTER THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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Name Of The Thesis:	Correlation of Hegemony and Violence: A Case Study of Detroit: Become Human (2018) and Red Dead Redemption II (2018)
Thesis Defense Date:	04.06.2024

This thesis has been approved by the Graduate School which has fulfilled the necessary conditions as Master thesis.

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ABSTRACT

CORRELATION OF HEGEMONY AND VIOLENCE: A CASE STUDY OF DETROIT: BECOME HUMAN (2018) AND RED DEAD REDEMPTION II (2018)

Luthfiah Dien

Game Design Masters Program

Thesis Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Diğdem Sezen

May 2024, 42 pages

It is widely agreed that video games can be considered cultural artefacts which reflect and/or explain society's way of life, one being hegemony and violence. Following Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony as a process by the State to circulate ideas by using society's intellectuals, this thesis attempts to find hegemonic practices being represented in the narratives of two game titles: *Detroit: Become Human* (2018), and *Red Dead Redemption II* (2018). Then, violent occurrences that correspond to these practices are compared/contrasted to find a relation between hegemony and violence. This study reveals that there is a certain degree of correlation between hegemonic practices and acts of violence that are reflected through both game titles.

Keywords: Narrative, hegemony, violence, counter-hegemony attempts, freedom and resistance.

ÖZ

DETROIT: BECOME HUMAN (2018) VE RED DEAD REDEMPTION II (2018) OYUNLARINDA HEGEMONYA VE ŞİDDET İLİŞKİSİNİN İNCELENMESİ

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Oyun Tasarımı Yüksek Lisans Programı

Danışman: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Diğdem Sezen

Mayıs 2024, 42 sayfa

Video oyunlarının, toplumun yaşam biçimini yansıtan ve/veya açıklayan kültürel eserler olarak kabul edilebileceği, bunlardan birinin de hegemonya ve şiddet olduğu yaygın olarak kabul edilmektedir. Antonio Gramsci'nin, devletin toplumun entelektüellerini kullanarak fikirleri yayma süreci olarak tanımladığı hegemonya kavramından yola çıkan bu çalışma, *Detroit: Become Human* (2018) ve *Red Dead Redemption II* (2018) oyunlarının anlatılarında temsil edilen hegemonik pratiklere odaklanmaktadır. Ardından, hegemonya ve şiddet arasındaki ilişkiyi ortaya koymak için seçilen oyunlarda bu pratiklere karşılık gelen şiddet temsilleri karşılaştırılmaktadır. Bu çalışma, hegemonik pratikler ile her iki oyunda da yer verilen şiddet eylemleri arasındaki ilişkiyi ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Anlatı, hegemonya, şiddet, karşı hegemonya girişimleri, özgürlük ve direniş.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the institution, department, and, especially, my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Diğdem Sezen, for her guidance, advice, criticism, encouragement, and insight throughout the research process and writing of this thesis. This thesis could not have possibly been done without her constant support and assistance.

I would also like to thank my fellow Game Design Master's students for their valuable company and insights on the topic of this study. Their bright minds and ideas gave me tons of inspiration in the writing process.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DBH : Detroit Become Human

NPC : Non-Player Character

RDR2 : Red Dead Redemption II



Chapter 1

Introduction

As an English studies/literature student who have spent a few years analyzing various kinds of media, I find the effect of media exposure in an unbelievable scope in people's lives to be a wonder. Digital media's capability in expressing ideas in many ways and through different means is currently one of the most advanced when it comes to connecting people from different parts of the world. The rapid development of digital media forms allows the world's events and meanings to be received by many people in an extensive, wider reach.

Video games, being one of such forms of media, are widely acknowledged by their creators and consumers for their sophisticated system of coded rules and mechanics integrated with promising narratives and virtually made worlds. Having explored numerous studies on video games in academic settings exposes different insights on how each person views each of these games, their strengths and/or weaknesses, and their uses.

Video games narrative, specifically, are relatively different from those of films or plays because they are interactive to a degree; their consumers, or players, are given the role both as audience and non-omniscient narrator who participate in shaping the story progression and its outcome through given controls of characters in the game (Thabet, 2015). Because of this, it is worth looking into how video games can convey messages in a more convincing and participatory way; whether video games are able to depict notions of culture and ideology.

Regardless of their fictional aspects, video games are still created by groups of people with their own specific views and sets of beliefs of the world. This means that whether intentionally or not—whether such games are made to express certain worldview—some consumers will recognize some underlying values being represented in the games they played. One such value is culture and ideology, although it is well-known that there has not been enough attention being put on video game narratives in the lens of cultural studies; only a handful of academicians and

researchers have put specific focus on putting the spotlight on video game narratives in ideological perspectives.

As such, this thesis aims to define how video games' narrative aspects can function as cultural artefacts to portray political or cultural concept that circulates within society, which will benefit other academia members and/or researchers with a particular interest in sociology in terms of conflicts in individuals and society. Specifically, the study will look at the notion of hegemony as defined by Antonio Gramsci by analyzing video games' narrative aspects that display hegemonic practices.

The following chapters in this thesis will discuss how video games can be considered cultural artefacts that embody concept of culture and ideology in audiovisual form. Then, the theories on hegemony, power, and violence are also briefly explained which serves as the basis of close reading, and using the narrative aspects in video games, the thesis will attempt to pinpoint aspects of violence that pertains to the practices; be it as the cause or result of the application. After analyzing in detail all of the necessary aspects, the thesis also hopes to be able to put in the detail how these games put the portrayal of hegemony and violence in a positive and/or negative light.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Video Games on Ideology and Cultural Studies

Dominant ideologies are tailored, imposed, and injected into members of the society through social and cultural institutions such as church, school, and the media to assert notions of identity, structure, and civil/social participation (Engstrom & Beliveau, 2021). Included in them is mass media, making up a large part in shaping cultural and ideological beliefs in the society. As a form of digital media consumed by the masses, video games are not isolated from being injected with cultural and ideological perspectives.

Some studies have touched upon the subject of culture and ideology in video games. Quijano-Cruz (2008) who examined video games using literary theories stated that the integration literary theory allows an in-depth exploration of ideas present in video games' embedded narrative. He mentioned that "...the main function of literary theory is to explore specific ideas presented within specific texts." (p. 167). Using literary theory to read video games serves mainly to find messages being expressed both explicit and implicitly. Murray (2009: 196) examined how games can expand and preserve cultural patterns through expressive symbolism which also benefits the human culture. She wrote:

Games seem to be well-suited to the role of cultural ratchet, preserving patterns of behavior from one generation to the next through the intrinsic pleasure of shared attention and imitation. Game play in itself is a means of transmitting general habits of imitating, sequencing, and synchronizing actions.

Murray further noted that symbol making exist within games and, therefore, digital games allow people to experience the representation of the complex human lives and culture similar to the reality. By the same logic, video games are able to symbolize or represent ideological thoughts. Latorre (2015) studied video games in social discourse analysis perspective. He argued that following the classical cultural

studies, video games cultural studies “...address two major research areas: (1) studies on representation and social discourse in popular video games in relation to issues such as the transmission of ideological values; gender discourses; reinforcement or deviation from social stereotypes; and questions of race, multiculturalism, and immigration and (2) studies on “active” reception modes in video games by certain sociocultural player profiles...” (Latorre, 2015, p. 481). Cassar (2013: 331) saw that ideology can be found in different aspects of video games. He expressed the argument in the following passage:

What is particularly intriguing about video games is the fact that ideology manifests itself on various levels. Since games are essentially concoctions of various media, ideological content is observable in many forms. In simple words, ideology in games occurs in both its cinematic and its textual expressions as well as throughout the rules and gameplay mechanics.

Not only that video games are viewed as an effective tool in expressing ideas and messages of ideology, but they are also able to create a different degree of participation of its ‘readers’ that is different from other contemporary media. Hayes and Gee (2010) studied game literacy practice in games also stated that playing a game “...is at one and the same time a form of consuming (‘reading’ or understanding the design features and content of the game) and producing (‘writing’ or enacting the game by playing it).” (p. 67). Video game literacy also entails the ability to interpret messages in the process of playing, according to Bourgonjon (2014). He also stated that video game literacy “...emerges as a necessity, if only to fully realize video games' potential, assure access and stimulate appreciation, and to help us approach and understand them from a well-informed, critical perspective.” (Bourgonjon, 2014, p. 11).

Bogost (2009) creates a framework on viewing video games by seeing rules and systems as constituting a procedure to convey arguments about the world—a rhetoric—since video games contain statements about how the world works. This also implies that, inherently, video games can depict the ideas, processes, and/or values of different theories on ideology. Rugill, McAllister, and Menchaca (2004) proposed a new framework in studying computer games for its participation in work/labor/play,

artistic and cultural criticism. They mentioned that frameworks of knowledge embedded in game worlds created by designers are acquired and interpreted by players, shaping meanings according to various experience and response. So, when a player decides to play a game, they are subjected into ideologies in its embedded narrative. To further emphasize their point, their study on some ‘hardworking labor’ games and noted that “...to play with notions of culture necessitates reflection on those parts of it that particularly define “the universal condition for the metabolic interaction” between human beings and the world in which they live.” (Rugill, McAllister & Menchaca, 2004, p. 306)

Studying video games with social-semiotic approach—semiotic being the study of meaning—Latorre, Oliva, and Besalú (2017) viewed that video games must be considered to be multimodal texts where each aspect such as the design, music, dialogues, and models contribute to meaning-making. Therefore, the multimodality of video games is beneficial in finding meaningful messages they express. Similarly, Cassar (2013) asserted that different components of video games contain notions of ideology, so they can be viewed in different perspectives. As such, ideology “...occurs in both its cinematic and its textual expressions as well as throughout the rules and gameplay mechanics.” (p. 331)

2.2 Concept of Hegemony

2.2.1 Gramsci on “Hegemony and the State”. Antonio Gramsci was an Italian philosopher who elaborated the term ‘hegemony’ when he was imprisoned by the Fascist state of Italy in (Bates, 1975). He was also a political scholar who studied Karl Marx’s work on economic domination in society. He explained that there are two ways of exercising dominion over the people: directly through coercion and indirectly through hegemony. The former, he mentioned, creates tendency of revolts by the society’s lower class. Although he was a Marxist scholar, Gramsci believed that culture and politics could repress these tendencies of revolts which Marx stated to be ‘inevitable’ as a result of economic changes. Gramsci (1992/1926-33: 245) wrote the following passage in his book:

The separation of powers together with all the discussion provoked by its realisation and the legal dogmas which its appearance brought into being, is a product of the struggle between civil society and political society in a specific historical period. This period is characterised by a certain instable equilibrium between the classes, which is a result of the fact that certain categories of intellectuals (in the direct service of the State, especially the civil and military bureaucracy) are still too closely tied to the old dominant classes.”

‘Separation of powers’, as Gramsci stated, was the result of a struggle between civil and political society to grasp their influence on the masses. Gramsci also explained that political groups with their tendency to exert coercive powers made them one sort of ‘executive rulers’, bringing up demands of democracy by the masses, “...making all posts elective...” (p. 246). To take pre-emptive measures of losing power, then, political group—also called the State—exert their power through intellectuals that exists within civil groups. Gramsci believed that civil groups and their popularity could enable the State to keep their dominion through circulation of ideas. This entire process is called hegemony, referring to the ability of the ruling class to utilize intellectuals as the source of ideas to strengthen their dominion over the people.

Bates (1975) mentioned that Gramsci did not view force as the only regulating power, but ideas also make up a part of the dominating power. Hegemony, then, is also a political leadership based on collective consent gathered by the ruling class and their thought through diffusion and popularity to the masses. According to Smith (2001) in his book of cultural theories, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony focuses on allowing the ruling class to maintain social order effectively with less coercive methods through ideas and beliefs. Done this way, both powers can exercise their dominance over the masses and disallow conflicting forces. At the same time, however, it enforces inequality between both parties and cuts off critical attempts by the masses (Smith, 2001).

There are several key terminologies in Gramsci’s theory on hegemony and the state. Gramsci termed political and civil society collectively as the superstructure, referring to the ruling forces. Bates (1975) explained that civil groups share and circulate ideas on the small-scale level of social and political values. Some examples

of such groups include school, church, clubs, etc. Meanwhile, political groups assert direct dominion over the people such as the police or the military.

Part of these groups, in particular from civil society, are the intellectuals whose role in expanding the ruling class's worldview to the people is essential. Intellectuals, according to Gramsci, are individuals who have had access to knowledge and information that the other people did not. Exposure to different perspectives, values, and ideas allow them to create their views on the world. At the same time, these intellectuals have the privilege of position among the civil groups where they hold the most important position in exerting views of the dominant to the masses. Bates (1975: 353) also wrote the following passage in his study regarding the role of the intellectuals and the success of hegemony:

The intellectuals succeed in creating hegemony to the extent that they extend the world view of the rulers to the ruled, and thereby secure the "free" consent of the masses to the law and order of the land. To the extent that the intellectuals fail to create hegemony, the ruling class falls back on the state's coercive apparatus which disciplines those who do not "consent," and which is "constructed for all society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command ... when spontaneous consensus declines.

In order for hegemony to be practiced accordingly, there needs to be a shared consensus in the society that accept the ruling class's values. Consent, in this case, is a major deciding factor in the success of hegemony; hegemonic process consider consent to be a collective agreement. This collective consent is considered a 'common sense' by the people, and they cooperate with it, as 'common sense' is considered a universal concept. (Engstrom & Beliveau, 2021).

Hegemony, therefore, assumed that the shared consent is adapted by everyone; it is powerful enough to repress conflicting thoughts and excluding groups that are out of the solidarity (Femia, 1981). Szeman and O'Brien (2018) also pointed out that hegemony is "...the ability of dominant groups in society to exercise control over weaker groups, not by means of force or domination but by gaining their consent, so

that the unequal distribution of power appears to be both legitimate and natural.” (p. 52).

2.2.2 Hegemony in mass media. In the context of media, Engstrom and Beliveau (2021) also defined a Gramscian approach to media studies. They wrote that Gramsci’s view on the prestige of the dominant class allow them a degree of authority as the producers of ideas which, in turn, can influence the masses of their beliefs. Engstrom & Beliveau (2021: 9) explained their arguments further:

By controlling the production of ideas, the dominant groups have the ability to silence and marginalize alternative ways of thinking, thus retaining their influence. This becomes even more relevant to the study of mass media, in that this prestige becomes wielded through the institutions of civil society—conceived of as being organized and holding some degree of authority—that have control over the production of ideas which may not collude with each other directly, but nevertheless reinforce commonly held beliefs and values between each other.

Mass media is considered as a tool to represent dominant ideologies through control of production and reproductions; “Through images and words, media messages not only cultivate cultural ideology, but they serve as means by which dominant ideologies within cultures become communicated so as to make them normal, natural, and a conduit of indirect control in civil society.” (Engstrom & Beliveau, 2021, p. 14).

Femia (1981) also wrote that Gramsci acknowledged the manipulative power of mass media and its possible ties to the government. Hence, it is possible for the state to utilize mass media because of their shared world view and lifestyle; all the while, these groups also rely on the state’s rules and regulations in order to operate legally. This way, the hegemonic order and contexts delivered by mass media can also be controlled by the state. On a similar note, Cassar (2013) argued that popular culture and mass media are able keep the hegemonic stability as they produced, reproduced, and transformed hegemonic values.

2.2.3 Hegemony in video games. Acknowledged as a part of culture that doesn’t stray from conflicts and arguments, video games are shaped by some semblance of

hegemony among others (Rugill, McAllister & Menchaca, 2004). Quijano-Cruz (2008) argued that "...in a society each node of power represents a single state apparatus which is both repressive and ideological, each aiming for its own goals, and each varying on how much ideology or force to use." (p. 164), meaning that the game industry also holds some semblance of power and control over ideological arguments they can represent in their products.

Fron et. Al. (2007) coined the term 'hegemony of play', referring to the dominant forces within video games industry that controlled the production and distribution of games. They believed that some semblance of hegemony exists in such ways that repress the need to accommodate other 'minority' players such as women and non-gamers. They further mentioned how video game 'producers' created the hegemonic beliefs within the industry such as players' demographic, design process (the state power who dictates what is and is not a game), and/or other discriminatory values. These values hinder the success of their games instead of enhancing them, and they challenged such notions so that the hegemonic beliefs could be countered.

Cassar (2013) wrote that "... Gramsci's concept of hegemony is based on the premise that ideas generated and divulged through media can and will be scrutinized and (if necessary) rejected by an audience who is capable of thinking on its own." (p. 346). His argument further continued with Gramsci's focus on hegemony as a struggle for the dominant class to uphold the status quo from conflicting ideas makes it particularly useful to 'read' video games. Video games are able to represent different and/or opposing ideological beliefs within the same medium as they are "...grounds where an ideological warfare is fought between different social groups." (Cassar, 2013, p. 349). Hence, people can observe Gramsci's hegemony as an ideological struggle from video games. On a related note, therefore, video games are not irrelevant for studies, examination, and criticism from the point of view of cultural theories such as Gramsci's.

In the discussion regarding the representation of "War on Terror" through Western video games, Saber and Weber (2017) see video games, without restrictions as to who or which groups of people can devise, as tools to devise hegemony and, on the other hand, create a space for counter-hegemony narratives. They expressed, in the context

of war games, that “...they are vehicles that convey and disseminate the dominant ideologies of the hegemonizing powers and by doing so reinforce pre-conceived cultural stereotypes upon the self and upon the other.” (p. 81). In addition, they expressed the ability of video games to be the space where hegemonic and counter-hegemonic values can be re-negotiated. Thus, video games have a large potential to represent certain picture of the practice of hegemony and/or resistance against hegemonic practices itself.

2.3 On Power and Violence

2.3.1 Discourse of power and violence. Hegemony can be considered one of the ways for the ruling class to obtain and maintain power among the lower classes. In general, the concept of ‘power’ refers to one’s ability to control over the masses. Power can be defined in various levels and contexts; one such definition came from a post structural scholar, Michel Foucault. Foucault examined power as a social phenomenon that shifted throughout different eras. He defined exercises of power that stemmed from monarchy/sovereign power, disciplinary power found in prison system, and ‘biopower’ that regulated people’s way of life through control of knowledge (Smith, 2001). Foucault et al. (2003) further asserted that “What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no; it also traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse.” (p. 120)

Emerging and dominant power can cause certain issues which include, but not limited to, oppression of the weaker and marginalized groups. Oppression occurs because of dominant, superiority systems that submit individuals who belong to certain groups into social mortification (Palmer et al., 2019). They also added that these people are prone to restrictions and considered as “expendable and replaceable” by the systems or institutions that constitute oppression.

The term ‘violence’ is complex to define on its own; it needs to be related with other concepts to create a clearer definition and objective of its use. In several cases, violence tightly relates to power, whether power acts as a cause for violence or violence acts as a show of power. Popitz (1992) defined violence as an act of power;

it is exercised either to demonstrate a show of power or as a way to use power to subjugates people (qtd. in Imbusch, 2003, p. 18). Calculated violence to exercise power is also effective to impose submission and overpower the opposition (Imbusch, 2003).

Jantzen and Jensen (1993) explained that players are given controls over virtual worlds, resulting in them becoming dominant power and allowing them to shape their own context and experience of power even within a narrative of violence. Within video games narrative where violence and power serve as the prominent themes, violence can be considered as a response to emerging power such as structural change and civilization developments brought by the system or institutions, especially coming from marginalized groups of people who are visibly affected by those changes.

2.3.2 Portrayal of power and violence in video games. As far as video games narrative is concerned, not only that violence can be committed and experienced by the people inside the narrative but also by the players with their controls over several aspects of the game. Tuominen (2020) in his study on Red Dead Redemption 2 by using Althusser's theory on ISA (Ideological State Apparatus) and RSA (Repressive State Apparatus) found that in its narrative, the state is seen as the opposition for its violent, corrupt, and deceitful practice. As such, he stated in his thesis, the narrative progresses in such a way that "Only way to resist the state, or advance one's alternative ideals, is by revolt, crime and murder." (p, 65).

One of the arguments Ludwig (2022) presented in their thesis about Detroit: Become Human is that the police, which holds the power to admit aggression and violence to the Androids, acknowledges that police violence occurred in the past and the current present. Fawcett & Kohm (2020) who studied two Batman games, Arkham Asylum and Arkham City asserted that these games enforce players to commit violence to criminals to maintain the hegemonic beliefs or the 'status quo' within the Asylum and the City. Those actions are thoroughly justified to suppress the threat to the state power that criminals possess.

While prior discussions regarding hegemony have mostly been focused on its intention to repress coercive measures in exercising power, the fact cannot be denied

that there will be criticism to such notion. Intellectuals of the dominant groups exercised their power over the weaker and marginalized groups who have not had access to educational and/or knowledge privileges as they are. However, when this border is broken, opposition groups will rise and use tools to reject hegemonic values being practiced, one of which by utilizing violence.



Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Framework

3.1.1 Narrative Analytical framework. Jim Bizzocchi (2007) created a framework named Narrative Analytical Framework specifically designed to combine the classic narrative arcs with ludology aspects of video games for discourse analysis purposes. This framework will be used to narrow the scope of the texts that will be examined, focusing on finding ideological aspects and meanings within the games' narratives. Five narrative components of this framework exist, three out of which I will be using in this study:

- storyworld – the environment where the game is situated,
- character – people that exist within the game world,
- micro-narrative – smaller moments of narrative flow and coherence that occur within a broader context of game play.

(Bizzocchi, 2007: 4)

3.1.2 Applying Gramsci's theory on Hegemony. The previous section explained Gramsci's theory of hegemony and the state, detailing the hegemonic process and involved parties within it. To find whether hegemony is present within both games, the findings from Bizzocchi's narrative analytical framework will be analyzed with the theory to find:

- The superstructure that exists within the game world and narrative, their purpose in initiating hegemony and roles in the hegemonic process.
- The intellectuals who publicized the hegemonic narrative of the superstructure.
- The society who received the hegemonic narrative and/or initiated any counter-hegemonic movements.

3.1.3 Concept of violence and its meaning. This study will consider that there are underlying reasons behind acts of violence that occur and/or re-enacted within both game titles. The framework used to define these comes from the field of social science

of violence research. Michael Hanagan’s (2003) definition on forms of violence will be used to determine the type of violence being repetitively shown throughout the two games. In addition, Peter Imbusch’s (2003) study on the concept of violence and changes in its etymology helps in examining the complexity behind violence designs and finding meanings within it. The framework is summarized below:

Category	Relevant dimensions	Definition criteria	Elements of definition
Who?	Subjects	Perpetrators as agents	Individuals, groups, institutions, structures
What?	Phenomenology of violence	Injury, harm, other effects	People, objects
How?	Ways in which violence is exercised	Means, circumstances	Physical, psychological, symbolic, communicative
Whom?	Objects of violence	Victims	People, objects
Why? (Reasons)	Causes and reasons	Interests, possibilities, contingencies	Forms of justification
Why? (Objectives)	Goals and motives	Degrees of expedience	Intentions
Why? (Justifications)	Models of justification	Deviating from or corresponding to norms	Legal/illegal Legitimate/illegitimate

Figure 1. A summary on the concept of violence and its meanings (Imbusch, 2003, p. 22)

3.2 Textual Analysis

The findings derived from the theoretical frameworks are then combined, compared, and contrasted using textual analysis. Textual analysis is a method of research using texts as case studies to learn about specific issues, ranging from the fields of humanities and social sciences (Fernández-Vara, 2014). Texts in this research refer to the artefacts being examined and studied with the selected theoretical frameworks, namely two video game titles and all aspects incorporated within them. The texts used for this research are Red Dead Redemption 2 (2018) published by Rockstar Games, and Detroit: Become Human (2018) published by Quantic Dreams. They will be also examined through close reading method, where the games are observed by playing closely and repeatedly to reveal meanings behind them (Bizzocchi & Tanenbaum, 2012).

Prior studies that have examined these games (e.g., Bagnoli, 2019; Tuominen, 2020; Ludwig, 2022; Pettersen, 2019) show evidence of cultural and ideological underpinnings being represented. These findings are considered an adequate starting point in approaching the topic of hegemony and violence. The two games inherently depict a struggle between a group of individuals (the outlaws and the androids) and a state of power (the government/civilized society and marginalized/the state power) despite being situated in a different contexts and environment. In addition, both narratives situate the players in the point of view of the marginalized party where violence is a legitimate choice of actions while being the direct consumer of how hegemonic practices are being shown through the games. Hence, these video games titles can give materials on the issue of the correlation between hegemony and violence.

3.2.1 Video games as Multimodal Text. Multimodal discourse analysis, defined by Paltridge (2012), "...considers how texts draw on modes of communication such as pictures, film, video, images and sound in combination with words to make meaning." (p. 170). In other words, multimodal texts are artefacts that combine audio, visual, and written words to convey ideas and meaning. It is important to establish video games as multimodal texts as they constitute not only textual format such as narrative and dialogues, but also the audiovisual aspect where meanings can be derived from.

This study will consider the two game titles specifically as multimodal texts to get more concrete and in-depth information on how ideological topics are being approached. Drawing from these definitions, several considerations for RDR2 and DBH to be used as texts are detailed as follows:

- Both game titles are situated within a similar cultural and social context, where the theme of power struggle is depicted prominently. RDR2 and DBH take place in a fictionalized setting of the United States, adopting several cultural references pertaining to the country. This similarity makes the analysis more in-depth and focused as specific attention can be drawn to the similarities, rather than having to view back and forth to entirely different cultural and social contexts.

- RDR2's specific focus on being a massive open-world RPG with more scattered narrative aspects allows players to discern and discover such phenomena in different ways. Meanwhile, DBH's narrative-driven and multiple choices/endings system encourages players to pay specific attention to details and draw various conclusions to the occurrences within the game. Analyzing these two different video game types can prove both the versatility of cultural theories application and the extent of video games' capabilities to depict cultural and social phenomena in their aspects.



Chapter 4

Findings

4.1 Context and Game Summary

4.1.1 Red Dead Redemption 2 (2018). Red Dead Redemption 2 was published by Rockstar Games in 2018 and, since then, has been receiving numerous praises and critics from other game makers, players, and even academicians. Rockstar Games is currently one of the largest, most popular publishers in the game industry. Having made some of the widely known franchise such as the Grand Theft Auto (1997 –) series and the two instalments of Red Dead Redemption (2010 –), one of which will be the object of study in this paper.

The game itself has been mentioned several times within different papers to contain representations of morality (Chun, 2020) and associations to political and/or social institutions (Bagnoli, 2019; Tuominen, 2020; Obreja, 2023) within its themes, narrative aspects, game rules and mechanics. The main story is set during the Western era in a fictionalized United States of America between the late 19th to early 20th century, depicting the Hollywood's 'Spaghetti' Western (Tuominen, 2020). The game tells the story about one group of outlaws who called themselves the Van Der Linde gang, taking the perspective of one of its members named Arthur Morgan. The group is depicted of being on a run from the clutches of lawmen and the developing civilized life after a heist gone wrong.

4.1.2 Detroit: Become Human (2018). Released on the same year by developer and publisher, Quantic Dream, Detroit: Become Human has since sparked the interest of different people of different backgrounds. Prior to releasing this game, Paris-based developer has published several well-known titles such as Heavy Rain (2010) and Beyond: Two Souls (2013) with similar interactive narrative storytelling mechanics. Detroit: Become Human is their latest release, incorporating some changes and improvements from its predecessors.

Several discussions regarding this game have been centered around political situations (Schubert, 2021; Ludwig, 2022), racial issues and identity (Frank, 2018; Ludwig, 2021), morality and player choices (Pettersen, 2019; Engels & Evans, 2022). The game is set in a futuristic reimagining of Detroit, US, which presupposes the scenario of evolving artificial intelligence and robotics technology in a human form called Androids. It mainly takes the player to experience the story from the perspective of three characters: Connor, an Android prototype detective working with a human lieutenant, Lt. Hank Anderson, to solve crimes related to rogue Androids; Kara, a housekeeping Android trying to escape the clutches of her abusive owner with a young girl named Alice; and Markus, a housekeeping Android who was accused of a crime then sent to be destroyed, only to return and become the leader a group of Androids resistance.

4.2 Applying Bizzocchi' Narrative Analytical Framework

4.2.1 Storyworld. RDR2 is mostly known for its massive map and open world concept. It is full of background mise-en-scenes that are not directly communicated and/or instructed, but instead needed to be discovered by curious players. This allows information gathering to be done in a more 'natural' way through discovery; the pieces of lore being scattered all over the environment adding to the narrative contexts.

Based on a real era in the US history, the late 19th century Western, RDR2 takes on some of its key characteristics then utilizes fictional naming conventions. The environment is visualized with bright but toned atmosphere—almost as if watching a vintage movie—with myriads of landscapes often shown in other similar medias taking on the Western genre. It can be easily recognized that, through exploration of the map, each region also represents different social groups and living conditions.

For example, if a player takes some time to walk around the small town of Valentine and Saint Denis, they can easily spot the stark difference between them; the former being much underdeveloped with barely any significant landmark, lesser shops, and minimal security, while the latter is better developed with large statues, city trams, well-dressed people, and higher level of security. This setup serves the narrative by

bringing the players into understanding the context of economic and social changes that the characters are initially struggling to cope.

Similar to RDR2, DBH's setting delivers pieces of the narrative by background mise-en-scenes although they are on a more micro-level basis. It lacks the freedom of movement and degree of exploration that RDR2 affords to its player, yet the slightly restrictive approach DBH offers allow players to understand the narrative in a more detailed way. The game mainly takes three characters' perspective, with each character are often situated in varying places within the virtual city. However, in several cases, these characters' story part collides and, therefore, are located in the same map but different spots. The environmental storytelling is not simply about the pieces of lore scattered in the maps, but also seeing the world through the lenses of these characters.

DBH is situated in a faraway future, taking the scenario of some sort of a thought experiment on the incredible advancement of technology to create machines almost on the same level as humans—better, even. Similar to RDR2, the environment differs by displaying different living conditions and social behaviors depending on which character are currently being controlled by the players. For example, playing as Kara, the housekeeping Android, would show players the rural side of the city. This means family houses in more quiet areas, housing complex and, on a later progression, places that are more secluded and personal. Meanwhile, playing as Connor, the prototype detective Android, would show the world that normal people cannot usually access such as police station and crime scenes.

This is important to point out because the different perspectives are presented with different atmosphere. When playing as Markus, for example, players are shown the higher or upper side of the society as his former employer was a famous painter. There are semblances of regalia through Markus' point of view, and even later in the story, this stays consistent as he invades corporate warehouses and skyscrapers then marches the streets. In a way, DBH's environmental storytelling lies in its relation to the characters and the mission they partake.

4.2.2 Character. The main protagonist of RDR2 and players' avatar, Arthur Morgan, is a character designed with complex moral and personality. His character

development plays a significant role in understanding the struggle between his ‘people’ and the society outside. He is also undoubtedly one of the most important members of the gang, judging by a certain mechanic when players have not brought Arthur back to the camp in a long time, any of the gang members would look for him to make sure he is doing well.

There are also many instances where the gang’s reliance on Arthur is significant. Some examples can be discerned by seeing how some key figure of the gang would confide in Arthur; of plans to move camps, finding supplies for everyone, and even the fact that Arthur was in charge of keeping the supplies of ammunition, which is one of the most dangerous but important supply for the gang. It is also through Arthur’s perspective that the struggle to find one’s place in the world is experienced and, therefore, presented the argument through the group’s point of view. At the same time, it is interesting to see that by seeing the events through the protagonist’s eyes, players are able to nitpick the flaws of the group’s dynamic. This is mainly evident in the camp where players can freely interact with the other members through direct conversation with them or listening in to their conversations.

RDR2 is riddled with interesting side characters with unique personalities, goals, and moral compass. They complement the main narrative arc of the protagonist and, at the same time, adapts to the changes of players’ input in the world. The behaviors of the people are one of the qualities of the game that makes the world—and the narrative in its entirety—feels more alive. NPCs scattered all over the world also play important role in understanding the dynamics of the people.

Meanwhile, DBH’s core narrative is explored through three protagonists, and the perspective changes accordingly along with the story progression. Although the three main characters, Connor, Markus, and Kara, have different views and experiences the story differently, some aspects of their journey are connected to the other. This also means that players’ input being done through one character with either impede or support the other character’s story progression.

For example, one mission in the game requires Connor to chase some dysfunctional Android being part of a resistance group. It turns out that that the group

he and the police force is chasing Markus' group trying to infiltrate the radio tower. At the end, Connor is faced with the decision to shoot the group's leader, and that decision will affect how Markus will take charge of the group. These kinds of character moments serve to connect the different perspectives into a coherent story.

Unlike RDR2, DBH does not provide the freedom of communication between NPCs that exist within the game world. It has several key side characters and a handful of NPCs playing an important role in the story with their own distinct personalities, and these characters are the ones players can interact with. Despite the limitations, they still participate in complementing the characters' narrative arcs and/or becoming the oppositions, further emphasizing the conflicts and dilemmas.

4.2.3 Micro-narrative. Micro-narrative features incorporated in RDR2 can be considered one of the most appealing values of the game. They come in several distinct form, some subtler than the others although most of them do not have significant impact on the narrative. Rather, these mechanics seem to serve players' satisfaction more than being used as tools to enhance the main narrative. Despite the fact, there are various lores and information that can be gathered through these micro-narrative moments in different ways.

Camp interaction is one of the most prominent micro-narrative aspects where players can engage in casual conversations with NPCs in the camp. What makes this particularly interesting is that interactions done this way are not one-sided. These can be triggered by both sides; either the players can initiate the conversation through dialogue options, or the NPCs can approach the player's avatar to talk with them first. Depending on who started the conversation first, the dialogue or response options also differ.

The occasional one-on-one conversation with Arthur and some gang members is another important micro-narrative moment in RDR2. It is important insofar as to serve as the medium to understand the protagonist's perspective on the ongoing dilemma. This is exclusively triggered by the players by approaching a spot within the camp. They sit down together side by side, and Arthur will start talking to these people about his worries and concerns in more detailed manner.

Compared to RDR2 where the micro-narrative moments are mostly separate mechanics from the core narrative, DBH incorporate them into the main story and appearing more subtly as if to present them more organically. These exist throughout each narrative arc of the three protagonists, and they can have actual impact on how the story will progress in the later stages of the game.

In one of Kara's story chapters, there was a moment where she and Alice, the young girl she has been trying to save and protect, went into a manor to seek help. They met a mysterious figure named Zlatko and his Android, Luther. Zlatko claimed that he could help Kara, but it turned out that he had been keeping stray Androids to experiment on them. Later on, Zlatko tried to erase Kara's memories to keep her as his 'servant'.

Depending on the players' success in freeing Kara before it happened or letting the process finish then tried to regain her memories, the players will be instructed to find Alice then flee the manor. One subtle micro-narrative moment occurs when Kara stumbled upon a cage holding an Android in the shape of a bear. The decision to free this bear or keep it in its cage will affect Kara's success in escaping the manor. The decision looks simple on the outlook; it is something not directly communicated, but later comes as an unexpected turn of events within the story that dictate the success of players' choices. Similar instances repeat itself and occasionally relate with each character's narrative arc as well.

4.3 Applying Gramsci's Hegemony Theory

To figure out how hegemonic practices are represented, the next subsections will discuss the political and social institutions playing prominent roles in RDR2 and DBH through the ways hegemony is formed and/or reformed.

4.3.1 Red Dead Redemption 2 (2018)

4.3.1.1 The repressive lawmen and military. Mainly for the police and military whose role lie as part of the political society or the State, the law and culture they

implemented in society superseded the older ways, singling out nomads and minorities such as the outlaws. They also play an active role in being the coercive enforcers of such laws, as Tuominen (2021) expressed in his thesis about the lawmen being mainly repressive in their practices according to Althusser's concept of RSA (Repressive State Apparatus).

As the story takes the perspective of a minority group, the State's intervention with the current society is mostly subtle or being put on the sidelines. Inherently, this issue is not the main subject of the narrative, but regardless serves as important factor that creates the initial conflict. The very first scene of the game explicitly described that "America has become land of the laws, even the west had mostly been tamed." (Rockstar Games, 2018) which signifies the current struggle Arthur and his fellow gang members is facing as part of the aforementioned 'West'.

Some missions highlight these repressive practices, and players are required to participate or witness them through the lens of an outlaw. These shed some light on the position of the repressive State in their attempt to snuff out the remaining people who do not fit nor adhere to the new civilization. One such mission titled "Goodbye, Dear Friend" brought players to witness the hanging of a rival gang leader, Colm O'Driscoll. He was caught by the lawmen and sentenced to death by hanging after being imprisoned and going through trial. The protagonist and some gang members are tasked to oversee this event by Dutch's order, making sure that Colm's men will not try to sabotage the hanging. The highlight of this mission is the comment made by the executioner; "...it is justice that separates us from barbarity. Yet, *justice itself can at times be barbaric*. For sometimes a man is so savage, *the only way to deal with him justly is by savagery*." (Rockstar Games, 2018; personal emphasis).

The game acknowledges the State's resort to coercion as means to exercise power. In this case, death penalties done by lawmen are seen as legitimate way to ensure the status quo is being uphold. On the other side, there exist within the narrative a conflict between the military and the last remaining group of the Native Americans, the Wapiti Indians. The narrative puts forth the struggle of Native American displacement caused an expansion for oil business to their lands, resulting in their alienation from their original lands. In a two-part mission titled "American Fathers I

& II”, Arthur was tasked to help the Wapiti Indians’ chief’s son, Eagle Flies, to prove that this business is illegal by stealing a document. Although they succeed this mission, the land acquisition still happens with the protection from the military. It further escalates the military’s position as the repressive party, resorting to punishment and imprisonment of the Indians who challenged this notion. It is specifically shown in a rescue mission attempt named “The King’s Son” to save the chief’s son who was sent to jail by the military for refusing to cooperate with the relocation.

RDR2 conforms to the concept of political institutions—including but not limited to the government, police, and the military—as described by Gramsci. He asserted that the political institutions refer to direct dominion over the people to stabilize the situation while asserting their exercise of power. Interestingly, however, the game seems to depict a connection between the political society and cultural society that is more autocratic-submissive; the former being the subordinate, and the latter being the one holding the ‘authority’ in a way that is irregular.

4.3.1.2 The ruling business conglomerates. In the story of RDR2, business conglomerates and the rich are often mentioned to be the cause of the civilized society. With industrialization taking hold of the country, those with wealth to support the growth and benefit from the result will evidently try to ensure its continuation. The changes are encouraged by such groups and, as a result, shifted the people’s way of life. At the same time, their influences, and riches—having more to spare than needed—become the justification for Dutch’s gang, and other outlaw gangs for that matter, to steal from them.

One of the early missions the players are subjected to is robbing a train with the brand of Cornwall Kerosene & Tar and its people. This was the start of their conflict with Leviticus Cornwall, the owner of the company, who apparently has a famous reputation to his name. Eventually, the gang’s involvement with theft and murder involving his assets caught Cornwall’s attention. The establishment of his role starts early in a mission named “The Sheep and the Goats” where he keeps some gang members hostage to lure Dutch out, telling him that “I am not a man to be messed with by the likes of you.” And “You think I got where I am by letting a scum like you rob from me?” (Rockstar Games, 2018). This signifies Cornwall’s influence on the city

and the authority he carries, being fearless in his attempt to retaliate with Dutch's thieveries with money and threats.

The influential reach of the company itself is unknown to the characters in the beginning, but as the story progresses, they learned that the company has a large influence on the State. Cornwall is the financial backer of the police and the military, running a large portion of the country's economy through his oil production and railway construction. This later escalates further as nearing the end of the story where Dutch, Arthur and Micah witnessed Cornwall speaking to two detectives in a mission named "Just a Social Call". Cornwall is seen berating them for their lack of progress in catching Dutch and his gang members, saying that "I have spent a considerable fortune with your agency... This Van der Linde robs me, and laughs at me. I asked for the best, I paid for the best." The conversation further continues with the detectives replying that they are "...doing all we can within the confines of the law." In which Cornwall shrugs off by saying "I think *we both know what you can do with your laws.*" (Rockstar Games, 2018; personal emphasis).

Cornwall's disinterest and blatant disregard of the law seem to emphasize his position as a businessman transcending the lawmen's own and, by extension, the law itself. His financial capabilities and monopoly over the most important products of industrialization puts Cornwall on the center of the society, making him seemingly invincible and untouchable. This notion is clearly disliked by the outlaws and other parties being aggrieved by the changes. In a mission titled "A Fisher of Men", Arthur, going out with a young boy named Jack to fish, found himself face-to-face with two detectives from the Pinkerton Detective Agency.

His association with Dutch makes the two detectives, Agent Milton and Ross, question his loyalty to the gang leader. Arthur retaliates to their accusation by saying "I haven't done nothing wrong aside from not play the games to your rules." Then continued with "You enjoy *being a rich man's toy*, do you?". His remarks are returned by Agent Milton with him saying that "*I enjoy society*, flaws and all. You people venerate savagery, and you will die savagely, all of you." (Rockstar Games, 2018; personal emphasis). By seeing how the environment has changed, and the treatments received by those who adhere to the law, Arthur recognized the business

conglomerates' position as holding an important grip in the society. They are able to run their businesses with the protection of the law and the lawmen, but at the same time, they are the ones funding those lawmen to ensure that their bidding is done to their preferences.

Seen through Gramsci's perspective, it can be said that Cornwall and his company—and the cultural impacts it brings to the society as a whole—embody a cultural institution that is not directly coercive and violent but is just as merciless in terms of getting economic benefits. Business conglomerates as cultural institutions work insofar as their ability to influence and legitimize changes in how society should be run and reformed, changing its people's culture and perspective entirely. However, unlike Gramsci's view of the State's authority in cultural institutions' establishment, RDR2 seems to challenge the notion by depicting cultural institutions' capability to create hegemony to their economic benefits while keeping the political institutions on a leash.

4.3.1.3 'Civilized Life' as the status quo. RDR2's main setting which the narrative closely ties with is the development of the country through industrialization and cultural shift. Shown through several regions that adopts better technology, access of transport, and conformation to the law, it can be said that the State intends to shed a light on the positive change structures in an attempt to reform the society. These 'positive' changes are the dogmas being implemented by the State which shifts the people's cultural practices.

A brief overview of this can be seen in the city of Saint Denis, being the current most developed city of that time. Players are able to find several establishments not offered in other regions such as movie theatre and high-end tailor. Bars are well-kept, and the city is connected with tram lines—first of its kind in the country. The main area is littered with grand buildings and mansions belonging to the country's richest people. Changes exhibited this way is enforcing the lawless to conform to the law in order to ensure their survival. Reflected not only through the cultural and structural change, but also the way that lawlessness is being alienated.

So, the ‘civilized life’ becomes the status quo in the narrative, widely accepted and acknowledged by the people. In accordance with the status quo, the people see the ‘lawless’ as an invalid and the ‘wrong’ way to live. In this case, the existing cultural institutions—the business conglomerates—are championing the idea of civilized, lawful life to the people through hegemonic process with the help of political institutions, meaning the lawmen and the military.

Hence, there are tensions between the masses who created and accepted this notion with those who are against it. As previously mentioned, the key factor of Gramsci’s idea of hegemony is a struggle; hegemony can be challenged by individuals of groups with different idea on how the society should be run (Cassar, 2015). This goes in line with the portrayal of ‘civilized life’ in RDR2 and while it seems to be publicly normalized, there are outside forces who believe that the status quo cannot dictate their life. Evidently, the surviving outlaws are among those who refused to conform to such notion.

4.3.1.4 Violence as counter-hegemonic attempts. In a conversation between Arthur and Dutch, he dismisses Arthur’s concern about the world changing by saying “We’re smarter than them, only the feeblest of men take jobs from the government.” (Rockstar Games, 2018). The notion of civilized life is outright rejected by Dutch van Der Linde, the leader of the gang which the protagonist allies himself to. He explicitly believed that lawfulness is a type of prison, robbing the people of their freedom to choose how to live and die. Hence, Dutch tries to do whatever it takes to flee the country in a mission for ‘freedom’ with the rest of the gang members. He instils the idea that lawfulness must be fought against by any means necessary and promises them a good life if they pledge their loyalty to him. This is established very early in the game when he addressed the group, after fleeing from escape to hide in an abandoned mining settlement amidst a heavy snowstorm, by saying “We’ve been through worse before...all of you, get yourselves warm. *Stay strong. Stay with me. We ain’t done yet.*” (Rockstar Games, 2018; personal emphasis).

Done in such a way, Dutch legitimizes his dominion over his communal group in order to gain support of the cause then branching out to conducting his ‘businesses’ out in the larger cultural communities. In line with this goal, then, the gang members

involve themselves in many conducts under Dutch's orders; mostly ruffling the feathers of the lawmen and some of the country's conglomerates. There are myriads of conducts done for this mission in hopes that it could lead to the realization of Dutch's ideals, many includes violent acts. Hanagan (2003) defines several forms of violence that shifts the dynamics of society and its hierarchy; one in particular, being mostly shown through the game's cinematics and missions, is "everyday violence". It refers to violence that "...uses direct means to accomplish immediate ends and does not assert public claims, a soliloquy that speaks for itself to itself." (Hanagan, 2003: 122).

By Dutch's orders and approval, most of the gang members involve themselves in theft, murders, and conspiracies to influence and resources, to "...reform society to a kinder, truer, better way." (Rockstar Games, 2018) as Dutch phrases it. Most of these are often done by public structure destructions (e.g. trains & bank robberies, shootouts, prison escape) and manipulating the business conglomerates. While Dutch and the gang seems to commit violence for their personal gain, it can also be considered as actions to resist the State and the status quo. From his decisions and violent conducts, Dutch is trying to find a 'rabbit hole' where him and the gang members could benefit from the ruling groups' resourcefulness.

Hanagan (2003) also asserted that forms of violence correlates collective action with distinct changes within society that reconfigures the State and defines how the legitimacy of violence is viewed. Dutch's missions seem to lean into this claim, and his method also reflects Cassar's (2015) comment on how Gramsci explained the constant power struggle to attain and maintain leadership within society: "He believed that before actual political power is obtained, the social group interested in a leadership role should already be exercising ideological leadership. This leadership is required even after political power has been attained. ... no power goes unchallenged." (p. 345)

With the propaganda Dutch engraved in the gang, none are able to question his actions and decisions up to a certain point of time where the conflict seem to escalate too much. The narrative so far has shown violent conducts done by Dutch and the Van der Linde gang as a counter-hegemony attempt. Upon progressing further into the game, his conducts become more as means to an end rather than striving for a

collective good. There are several lines Arthur, the main protagonist, spoke to the others that expresses such belief: a famous one being “We’re thieves...in the world that don’t want us no more.” (Rockstar Games, 2018).

In hindsight, Arthur believes that they need to change their ways—to disperse and integrate into the new society—so that they can keep living. He acknowledges that violence cannot fight against inevitable social changes brought by the State—with this, too, RDR2’s narrative acknowledges that hegemony is not easily challenged even with a structured violence done by a tight-knit social group with a meticulous plan.

4.3.2 Detroit: Become Human (2018)

4.3.2.1 The State’s segregation and systemic racism. DBH consistently shows instances that convey the State’s role in regulating the law, behaviors, and living conditions of the Androids. These are mainly shown by subjecting these intelligent, very humanlike robots various treatments according to their actions and usability. The regulations themselves are implemented not just to the Androids, but also to the manufacturers, distributors, and consumers who are all mainly humans. Shown through various cutscenes and the environment is the programmed obedience and regulated appearance which differentiate them with the humans.

However, one of the most striking regulations implemented by the government is the blatant, completely legal segregation and racism between the humans and the Androids. These are mainly evident in the public space used and shared by both communities. For example, the Androids has to stand in the back compartment of the bus and has their own designated waiting area; a handful of public vicinities such as bars, hotels, and restaurants have the “No Androids” signs on their doors. They are addressed as an ‘it’ by the humans instead of using gendered pronouns, and oftentimes, it looks like that the humans are used to associate the pronoun to the Androids without any repercussion.

In a mission titled “Fugitive” where players are in control of Kara, for example, she needed to find a place to stay for the night for Alice who was tired and freezing cold. Although there are several options players can explore and choose from, the only

most decent and comfortable one—the motel—has the “No Androids Allowed” sign on its door. In an attempt to get a room, Kara needed to steal clothes from nearby laundromat to disguise her distinctive Android features (the LED light, especially, which she hid by wearing a beanie). Then, she had to steal money from a convenience store through different methods including threatening the cashier with a gun or using Alice as distraction. Even after she managed to talk to the front desk, she had to use a fake name as identification. All these efforts were only done to rent a room that humans can easily do without disguise or being questioned. Hence, if one is to read through the entire process in Gramsci’s perspective, hegemony is instilled by the State to the people in a way that they normalize the separation, or the ‘us’ and ‘them’.

In line with the legitimization of segregation and racism—although some human individuals in-game find such regulations disturbing—these conducts are mostly normalized and widely accepted by the people in the game world. Androids are shown to be well-versed in doing house chores and manual/labor work without having the physical and mental limitations humans have, and because of that, many humans rely on their capabilities. It is depicted in several scenes upon exploration such as Androids walking the dogs and assisting elders. Even, at the early part of the narrative, it is established that the three protagonists are, in some ways, used by the humans for their pre-programmed skills: both Kara and Markus as caretakers, while Connor as a detective aiding the police forces.

4.3.2.2 Legitimizing police brutality. The normalization of segregation and systemic racism established by the State becomes the people’s new cultural practices and, in extension, the status quo instilled within the society. As a result, the State employs the police force as the enforcers and repressor against any conflicting forces. As part of the political society under the State, DBH places the police forces as the law enforcers on Androids that afford them much freedom in any crowd-control methods.

Several early missions would show the police’s mild and neutral actions in dealing with any act against the law. In the mission “Shades of Color”, Markus was hauled by a group of protesters and bullied by a group of protesters. One officer approached the commotion to dismiss them by saying “You damage it, I’m gonna have to fine you.” (Quantic Dream, 2018). Another mission brings player as Connor to

follow Lt. Anderson to a crime scene: nearing the police line, Connor was stopped by a human officer telling him “Androids are not permitted beyond this line.” And the lieutenant had to tell the officer that “It’s with me.” (Quantic Dream, 2018).

Later on, in a mission named “The Interrogation”, players can see Lt. Anderson bringing in an Android who murdered his owner. When he refuses to confess, he resorted to giving the chance for Connor to interrogate as he could persuade an Android to talk, being an Android himself. This scene showcases Connor’s capability as both an Android detective and police officer that upholds procedures as it is. All these scenes, in turn, imply the police’s notion of duty with a show of neutrality by conducting their tasks in a matter-of-factly manner. This also reflects Brodeur’s (2003) explanation on the *rareness of force*, meaning that “...when police resort to force they resort to the lesser forms of violence in the continuum of police coercion (physical contacts).” (p. 216).

Although the first few missions show the police without much hostility, the notion would change as the narrative progresses even further as players will be exposed with instances of severe police brutality and violent repressions. As such, one striking, albeit not surprising, narrative similarity in RDR2 and DBH is the police being situated as part of the State that is coercive and repressive. Further into the story, the game puts the spotlight on the police’s coercive and repressive methods. Ludwig (2022) pointed out in detail about the depiction of police brutality and misconduct in DBH; that such actions are done to protect the notion of duty, or the “they’re just doing their job” excuse. They further continued that the game “...draw attention to the systems and institutions that absolve police of their misconduct, they do not offer or imagine a viable solution like abolition or reform.” (p. 11).

In this way, the State giving the freedom to the police forces to act ‘accordingly’ can be seen as them legitimizing any actions and consequences that emerge. In a mission titled “Broken”, Markus and Carl were faced with Carl’s son who broke into his studio. Regardless of his decisions, the police officers, whom Markus called in by Carl’s order in case of a ‘break-in’, will shoot Markus to the ground following their bias to the Androids. Further into the story during the “Battle for Detroit” sequences,

police brutality is further highlighted by their use of guns and other repressive methods.

An alternate ending to Kara's story displays this in the most straightforward way. If Kara, Alice, and Luther (if he is still alive by that time) fails to escape or surrenders to the officers, they are brought to a camp where Androids are lined up to be destroyed. They were forced to shed their humanlike skin into their original, white metal-like appearance. The entire sequence shows officers assuming their roles as the enforcers, heavily geared up and equipped with military-grade guns. One scene shows an Android trying to run away from the line and shot on the spot by one of the officers with no remorse. In an alternate scene, one of them will shoot Alice dead if she tries to run over to Kara; it is also important to note that Alice is the only Android child in that camp. Similarly, if Kara tried to escape or disobeyed the officers' order, she would be shot to death in front of Alice. This display of blatant disregard and indifference seem to contradict Brodeur's (2003) terms on rareness of force within the use of firearms; that "...firearms are infrequently used, but they are the most frequent weapon displayed (Garner & Maxwell, 1999:31)." (qtd. in Brodeur, 2003: 216).

On the other side of the city, playing as Markus also brings players to witness similar repressive methods. While leading the protest, Markus who marches through the streets with other deviants is faced with a large number of armed officers and reinforced vehicles, signalling their attempts to intimidate the group from continuing any further. Interestingly, repressive methods committed by the police in this part depends heavily on players' decisions as Markus and, in extension, Connor.

4.3.2.3 Violent vs pacifist resistance against hegemony. One of the most important actors in the hegemonic process as explained by Gramsci is the role of the cultural society as the State's extension. These cultural societies include church, school, and journalism where ideas are circulated to the people in a much organic way. According to Gramsci's definition, then, DBH offers a great insight on the ways cultural societies are impactful in shaping the people's opinions. The legitimate segregation and constant violent treatment of the police give a space for inevitable resistance by the Androids themselves. Such notions also allow a legitimate space for

the humans to abuse their Androids to the extent of physical injuries that becomes the starting point of the deviant cases.

In a mission titled “Partners”, for example, players as Connor are exposed to Android abuse and deviancy. The premise was that a man was found dead in his own house murdered by his own Android that has been hiding in the attic. An investigation of the crime scene and interrogation with the Android would reveal that he has been constantly abused by the owner by hitting him with blunt objects and burning his skin with cigarette stub. On a similar note, players also experience this directly when taking control of Kara, who is also a victim of abuse by her owner, Todd. He would hit her every time she defended Alice, resulting in either her demise or her escape depending on the players’ actions.

These misdeeds fester into a resistance movement organized by the Androids which shifts the attention from the State’s status quo to a counter-hegemony attempt. In the game’s narrative, deviancy is defined as an error in program that resulted in the Androids showing signs of supposedly non-existent emotional capabilities. However, while the term is coined in such way by the humans, the Androids believe that these discrepancies are inherent parts of them; that they are as much alive and deserving of life as the humans do.

The movement, then, emerges by the need to be acknowledged and deemed equal to the humans. This effort is symbolized by a name—a word constantly mentioned, RA9. RA9 is a non-existent figure that becomes the symbol of resistance and salvation by the deviant Androids. Playing as Connor, players will frequently see RA9 as writings on the surface and interviews with the suspected Androids to the point of borderline obsession. In their study of the religious representations in DBH, Tomczak (2019) stated that “...they (RA9) promise delivery from the evil, but at the same time, encourage violent revolution and have no tangible proof of their existence within the game world.” (p. 167).

The belief in RA9 is giving the Androids their own justification to commit violent acts that serve their purpose. In Hanagan’s (2003) classification of violence, this resistance movement can be viewed as ‘everyday violence’ in its methods, but it

also can be considered a ‘symbolic violence’ in the way that it holds the symbolic meaning of inequality erasure. Similar to Van der Linde gang’s attempt to defy the status quo of civilized life by stealing from the rich and fleeing the country in RDR2, Androids resistance group in DBH displays a similar notion in an attempt to defy segregation and systemic racism. Specifically, players are able to experience this as Markus who ends up becoming an important figure in the resistance movement with a group named Jericho.

Several missions lead players as Markus to commit actions to enhance the popularity of their resistance; in “The Stratford Tower” mission, for example, Markus and his friends infiltrated a broadcasting tower to hijack one of their broadcast channels so they can spread their freedom message. Then, in both “Capitol Park” and “Freedom March” missions, Markus would lead Jericho to ‘free’ other Androids and walk through the streets saying freedom chants. What would occur during these missions depends on the players’ choice to be aggressive or peaceful in their methods, and both has their own consequences. On one side, choosing to be aggressive would lead to violent response by the police and military officers, while being peaceful would reduce the possibility of the brutality from occurring.

These counter-hegemonic attempts influence how the humans themselves would sympathize with the Androids’ stance of freedom. Gramsci’s notion of hegemony as a constant struggle to seize dominion over ideas are reflected clearly in this resistance movement. In the “Battle for Android” sequence which combines the three protagonists into the final event, one of the alternate ways for Kara, Alice, and Luther to escape is by passing through the border checkpoint to Canada. The border officers would check the immigrants with specific device that could spot Androids. Now, whether the border officer will let them through depends on the news on the television that broadcasted the current protest. If he sees the Androids fighting against the officers, he will let the officers shoot the three of them on the spot, but if he sees the peaceful march, he lets them through and simply says “Welcome to Canada.” (Quantic Dream, 2018).

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion: On Hegemony and Violence

Through its design process, rules, mechanics and narrative, video games are capable to reflect discourses on culture and ideology that exist within society. Despite being fictional and fantastical oftentimes, video games are still designed by actual people with their own values and identity. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that video games naturally embody these values. By putting a specific focus on studying video games as cultural artefacts, researchers are able to discern that video games are, to some degree, mediums where ‘cultural warfare’ occur. This means that representation of various culture and ideology can support or clash one another when put together in different aspects of games.

Putting a specific focus on hegemony and violence, this thesis has explored an in-depth study of the narrative aspects of RDR2 and DBH, two story-driven game titles that contain complex narrative sequences. The term ‘hegemony’ refers to Antonio Gramsci’s definition; it is the process in which the ruling class exercise their dominion to the masses with the help of political and cultural groups. Gramsci views hegemony as a way for the ruling class—also called the State—to spread ideas more organically by using ‘intellectuals’ such as pastors, teachers, journalists, etc. Done this way, the State are able to control the people by a simultaneous consent and normalized values they implemented to the society. This also aims to reduce the coercive and repressive methods that the State tends to resort to—it is done as a way to repress violent tendencies by the masses.

After a close reading and analysis of both game titles, it can be seen that there is certain amount of correlation between hegemonic practices and acts of violence. Narrative occurrences and outcomes in RDR2 and DBH represent the lack of proper hegemonic practices. Both games are capable to show that despite the State’s ability to create a general consensus, there will be an opposition to their ideas from a small to a larger scale. The status quo established by the State are blatantly biased and one-sided which pushes certain people to become marginalized. In RDR2, the concept of

‘civilized life’ that the ruling class employs is pushing the outlaws to a corner, committing crimes in order to flee; meanwhile, in DBH, rulings and segregation of Androids as ‘emotionless work force and machines’ cause a city-scale protests and a revolution attempt.

Hence, both games depicted acts of violence as a legitimate way to respond to the status quo that favors one side of the society. The State’s failure in exercising power through cultural institutions is implicitly depicted as a cause of unbalance and repression. This represents Gramsci’s theory of hegemony as a struggle of ideological warfare. However, neither games seemingly condemn nor support acts of violence as a response to the lack of hegemonic practices. Rather, they depict possible occurrences and responses pragmatically.

Further research could reveal more correlation between hegemony and violence specifically in game rules and mechanics; in what ways are they pragmatic, or whether designers’ bias play important role in representing concept of hegemony and violence within the rules and mechanics. Alternatively, players’ opinion and agency (or lack thereof) can also be the focus on determining the effects of such representations. This could answer the questions such as “do players notice hegemonic implications during gameplay?”, or “do players feel responsible and/or sympathize when participating in the struggles by committing acts of violence?”

Then, it can also be beneficial to look at other game titles that specifically brings up political and/or cultural issues. The reason for this is because those games are typically designed with a straightforward cultural aspects and arguments about the world. In this way, the study can also further prove the benefits of considering video games as cultural artefacts.

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