Fortnite as Bildungsspiel? Battle Royale Games and Sacrificial Rites

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Renata E. Ntelia as of January 2022 has successfully defended her PhD and has been awarded the doctorate title from the Institute of Digital Games, University of Malta. Her research pertains to love in games as experience and representation. She has presented at international conferences such as CounterText, CEEGS, PoCG, DiGRA, and FDG. She had published book chapters and journal articles, including a chapter titled "In the Mood for Love: Embodiment and Intentionality in NPCs" in *Love and Electronic Affection: A Design Primer* published by Routledge Creative Media and the Arts, and a journal article named "How Damsels Love: The Transgressive Pleasure of Romance" in New Horizons in English Studies in October 2021. Her research interests include feminist phenomenology, affect theory, comparative narratology, and thanatology. She is a lecturer of games within the School of Computer Science, University of Lincoln. She also designs games and playful experiences.

ABSTRACT:

This article examines the online multi-player game Fortnite: Battle Royale as a modern-day representation of sacrificial rites. It is argued that Fortnite: Battle Royale constitutes a simulation of a sacrificial rite due to its gameplay mechanics. In the game, the players need to kill each other off and come out victorious. As such, the players need to recognise themselves in opposition to others, exterminate those others, and sacrifice their innocence in the process. As conceptualised by R. Girard, this experience of a sacrificial rite constitutes a form of social education and conditioning. Such experiences are predominantly represented in the genre of Bildungsroman: coming-of-age stories that concern a literal or metaphorical rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. In Fortnite: Battle Royale, the psychological effect of this conditioning is amplified due to the medium-specific affordance of having the player as both the spectator and the spectacle of the sacrifice; namely, the player watches themselves being offered as a sacrifice while trying to overcome the trial. In this regard, Fortnite: Battle Royale follows and expands on the tradition of the Bildungsroman establishing a new take on the genre that is thereby termed Bildungsspiel – a coming-of-age game.

KEY WORDS:

battle royale games, Bildungsroman, Fortnite, mimetic desire, René Girard, sacrificial rites, spectacle.

"But there are much worse games to play."
- Suzanne Collins

Introduction

Fortnite[1] is an online multiplayer game developed by Epic Games. With 350 million registered players across the globe, it has been called one of the most prominent,[2] if not the most prominent,[3] games of our time. Fortnite was first released in July 2017 as PvE (player versus environment): players worked in teams to build forts and fend off hordes of husks, zombie-like creatures. Two months later (September 2017), its so-called *Battle Royale* (BR) mode

1   EPIC GAMES: *Fortnite: Battle Royale*. [digital game]. Cary, NC : Epic Games, 2017.
2   ANDERSON, K. E.: Getting Acquainted with Social Networks and Apps: Figuring Out Fortnite in (Hopefully) Less Than a Fortnight. In *Library Hi Tech News*, 2019, Vol. 36, No. 9, p. 11.; KING, R., DE LA HERA, T.: Fortnite Streamers as Influencers: A Study on Gamers' Perceptions. In *The Computer Games Journal*, 2020, Vol. 9, No. 4, p. 349.; TSUKAYAMA, H.: *Everything You Need to Know about Fortnite and Why It's so Popular.* Released on 3rd April 2018. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/04/03/everything-you-need-to-know-about-fortnite-and-why-its-so-popular/>.; MAKUCH, E.: *Fortnite: Battle Royale Has Hit 10 Million Players in Two Weeks*. Released on 12th October 2017. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <https://www.gamespot.com/articles/fortnite-battle-royale-has-hit-10-million-players-/1100-6454008/>.
3   FELDMAN, B.: *The Most Important Video Game on the Planet: How Fortnite Became the Instagram of Video Games*. Released on 9th July 2018. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/07/how-fortnite-became-the-most-popular-video-game-on-earth.html>.; MARLATT, R.: Capitalizing on the Craze of Fortnite: Toward a Conceptual Framework for Understanding How Gamers Construct Communities of Practice. In *Journal of Education*, 2020, Vol. 200, No. 1, p. 3-4.

was published and its popularity skyrocketed.[4] In *Fortnite: Battle Royale* (FBR), one hundred players are flown via a 'battle bus' to an island where they have to fight each other alone or in teams of up to four players until only one player or team remains standing. The map of the island is divided into a playable area, a safe zone, and the 'Storm', a magnetic field that causes considerable damage to the players. As the match progresses, the safe zone decreases and the Storm, together with the damage it inflicts on the players, increases. Even though a large part of the gameplay is devoted to searching and scavenging for resources and building defensive constructions, the game mechanics eventually force player versus player combat.

The similarities with popular series concerning death-matches between contestants, most tellingly *Battle Royale*[5] by K. Takami and *The Hunger Games*[6] series by S. Collins, are not coincidental. In The Hunger Games, 16-year-old Katniss Everdeen enters a government-organised death-match, in which two tributes from each of the 12 districts of the story's dystopian society compete to the death until only one survives. Similarly, in Battle Royale, every year a dystopian society plagued by unemployment and social unrest condemns a class of school students to participate in a three-day competition, in which they have to kill each other until there is only one survivor. The first of the most professed applications of this concept to a game was *Minecraft: Hunger Games*[7] mode, which was directly inspired by the homonymous book series. This mode served, in turn, as an inspiration for FBR.[8] Equally, FBR follows closely the successful example of *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*[9] (PUBG) – a BR game drawing from the aforementioned Battle Royale book.[10]

In this article, FBR's player experience is examined in its capacity as a Bildungsartefact. Bildung is conceptualised as a matter of social education and conditioning. It is argued that BR games, FBR in particular, provide social conditioning through playing. This argument is supported by contextualising FBR in the long tradition of sacrificial rites and positioning its prominence within the concept of rites of passage as spectacles. It is posited that FBR can be perceived as a coming-of-age experience akin to those presented in the genre of the Bildungsroman, examples of which are the books mentioned above. Since FBR is a game, the term Bildungsspiel is proposed: a coming-of-age game that redefines this literary genre with medium-specific affordances. There is no intention to attribute Fortnite's appeal or ascribe its experience to a single facet. The popularity of FBR is to a large extent due to its being free to play and available across many platforms as well as to its facilitating socialising in a controlled environment.[11] There is no arguing of a unanimous

4   MARLATT, R.: Capitalizing on the Craze of Fortnite: Toward a Conceptual Framework for Understanding How Gamers Construct Communities of Practice. In *Journal of Education*, 2020, Vol. 200, No. 1, p. 3-4.; Remark by the author: The mode's popularity has been so immense that other companies later published BR games or included BR modes in their well-established franchises, like *Call of Duty: Warzone* (INFINITY WARD: *Call of Duty: Warzone*. [digital game]. Santa Monica, CA : Activision, 2020.) and *Battlefield V: Firestorm* (CRITERION GAMES: *Battlefield V: Firestorm*. [digital game]. Redwood City, CA : Electronic Arts, 2019.).
5   TAKAMI, K.: *Battle Royale: The Novel*. Los Angeles, CA : Tokyopop, 1999.
6   COLLINS, S.: *The Hunger Games (series)*. New York, NY : Scholastic, 2008-2010.
7   MOJANG STUDIOS: *Minecraft*. [digital game]. Stockholm : Mojang Studios, 2011.
8   CARTER, M. et al.: Situating the Appeal of Fortnite Within Children's Changing Play Cultures. In *Games and Culture*, 2020, Vol. 15, No. 4, p. 461.
9   PUBG CORPORATION: *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*. [digital game]. Seongnam : PUBG Corporation, 2017.
10   FELDMAN, B.: *The Most Important Video Game on the Planet: How Fortnite Became the Instagram of Video Games*. Released on 9th July 2018. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/07/how-fortnite-became-the-most-popular-video-game-on-earth.html>.
11   ANDERSON, K. E.: Getting Acquainted with Social Networks and Apps: Figuring Out Fortnite in (Hopefully) Less Than a Fortnight. In *Library Hi Tech News*, 2019, Vol. 36, No. 9, p. 13.; CARTER, M. et al.: Situating the Appeal of Fortnite Within Children's Changing Play Cultures. In *Games and Culture*, 2020, Vol. 15, No. 4, p. 457-466.; FELDMAN, B.: *The Most Important Video Game on the Planet: How Fortnite Became the Instagram of Video Games*. Released on 9th July 2018. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/07/how-fortnite-became-the-most-popular-video-game-on-earth.html>.; KING, R., DE LA HERA, T.: Fortnite Streamers as Influencers: A Study on Gamers' Perceptions. In *The Computer Games Journal*, 2020, Vol. 9, No. 4, p. 350-352.

experience or playstyle of Fortnite, either. The article specifically looks at FBR in its capacity as a Bildungsartefact by arguing that it constitutes a re-enactment of the long tradition of sacrificial rites. It is argued that FBR is a medium-specific example of a universal social practice[12] that far surpasses the experience of a single game while, at the same time, inadvertently or not, informing it.

Bildungsspiel, a Genre

BR games are already considered a separate genre due to their mechanics. G. Choi and M. Kim have argued that BR mechanics facilitate a unique game experience focused on survival and PvP combat, which discerns them from other genres.[13] Here, a cultural aspect is assigned to the BR genre, which, as argued, further explains its uniqueness and popularity. By contextualising BR games within the frame of sacrificial rites and Bildungsromane, the game experience is better understood and more thoroughly analysed. While BR games do not contain a storyline of ritualistic sacrifice, as do the coming-of-age stories that inspired them, it is contended that the game experience constitutes in itself a re-enactment of sacrificial rites. The players need not be told to act as if they participate in a sacrificial rite as part of an embedded narrative.[14] The fact that they have to kill each other to survive and come out victorious comprises the most basic premise of a rite of passage. Sacrificial rites and their representations are preoccupied with themes of mortality, social coexistence, and the passage to adulthood, as the aforementioned books show. BR mechanics, and specifically the connection between killing and making a spectacle out of it, simulate the intrinsic to sacrificial rites dialectic relationship between violent death and society. This inundates the game experience with cultural significance that far surpasses the personal.

This becomes more pertinent if one notes Fortnite users being versatile in terms of country of origin, gender, and age[15] notwithstanding, the game is mostly popular among children and teenagers,[16] with players 8-17 amounting to 45 per cent of the audience.[17] As M. Carter et al. contend: "Fortnite is best understood as a phenomenon at the point of intersection between the contemporary ecology of digital game cultures and contemporary

12 Remark by the author: The popularity of the Netflix series *Squid Game* is yet another example of this perseverance, see: HWANG, D.-H. (Created by): *Squid Game (series)*. [VOD]. Los Gatos, CA : Netflix, 2021.

13 CHOI, G., KIM, M.: Battle Royale Game: In Search of a New Game Genre. In *International Journal of Culture Technology*, 2018, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 5.

14 WEI, H.: Embedded Narrative in Game Design. In KAPRALOS, B., HOGUE, A., XU, S. (eds.): *Futureplay '10: Proceedings of the International Academic Conference on the Future of Game Design and Technology*. New York : ACM, 2010, p. 247. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/1920778.1920818>.

15 PARKIN, S.: *How Fortnite Conquered the World*. Released on 27th May 2018. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/games/2018/may/27/fortnite-conquered-the-world-video-game-teenagers-parents>.

16 STUART, K.: *Fortnite: A Parents' Guide to the Most Popular Video Game in Schools*. Released on 7th March 2018. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/games/2018/mar/07/fortnite-battle-royale-parents-guide-video-game-multiplayer-shooter>.; KULMAN, R.: *600,000 Minutes of Fortnite? Why Kids Get Hooked: Why Do kids Want to Play Fortnite Nonstop?*. Released on 7th March 2019. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/screen-play/201903/600000-minutes-fortnite-why-kids-get-hooked>.; PAUMGARTEN, N.: *How Fortnite Captured Teens' Hearts and Minds: The Craze for the Third-Person Shooter Game Has Elements of Beatlemania, the Opioid Crisis, and Eating Tide Pods*. Released on 14th May 2018. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/05/21/how-fortnite-captured-teens-hearts-and-minds>.; CLEMENT, J.: *Fortnite: Statistics and Facts*. Released on 27th May 2021. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/topics/5847/fortnite/#dossierKeyfigures>.

17 CLEMENT, J.: *Fortnite: Statistics and Facts*. Released on 27th May 2021. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/topics/5847/fortnite/#dossierKeyfigures>.

cultures of childhood, as young people move from one stage of childhood to another".[18] The fact that Fortnite's audience is made up to a large extent by children and teenagers makes its experience of sacrifice more apt to that of a coming-of-age game – or *Bildungsspiel*. In that, Fortnite is examined as a specific example of a BR game in its capacity to simulate a sacrificial rite – child sacrifice in particular. This does not mean that other games, BR games especially, cannot be analysed in the same framework of sacrificial rites. Yet it is argued that the current discussion is exemplified better in the case of Fortnite.

I appropriate the term Bildungsspiel from the original term *Bildungsroman*. Bildungsroman derives from German and its literal translation is that of an educational novel. Historically, the Bildungsroman is considered to have sprung out of J. W. von Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*.[19] It is a complex term that has been the subject of considerable scrutiny.[20] Some authors call for a more inclusive reconstruction of the term,[21] specifically to address its male dominance in "the assumption of the male self as the universal self" as J. Maroula would have it,[22] while others argue for altogether abandoning the concept.[23] Its cultural contention notwithstanding, Bildungsroman remains an accepted and acknowledged genre.

A Bildungsroman can include fictional rites of passage from childhood to adulthood. These rites are often metaphorical: a quest or a journey, physical or psychological, during which the child has to face challenges and overcome struggles. In other cases, like in the novels mentioned above, the rite is literal; a sacrificial rite at that. Children are sacrificed or forced to compete against each other sacrificing thus their antagonists and their childhood innocence in the process. In the words of S. S. M. Tan: "coming-of-age often involves a recognition of a culturally defined childhood as well as loss: loss of innocence, loss of childself".[24] F. McCulloch corresponds this experience to a "process of maturation [...] culminating in the moulding of a compliant and productive citizen who has internalised society's hegemonic values".[25] A rite is then a lesson to be learnt. The survivor is the successful student who shows that they can conform to the rules having mastered the pre-existing system.

In this light, the Bildungsroman seems to be retaining the status quo. At the same time, the Bildungsroman contains a transgressive power, which gives the hero, and by proxy the reader, the opportunity to challenge the hegemonic mode of being. By being a narrative of becoming, F. McCulloch argues that: "it is a genre of mutability that offers the potential of becoming through interactive narratives that resist dominant modes of being".[26]

18   CARTER, M. et al.: Situating the Appeal of Fortnite Within Children's Changing Play Cultures. In *Games and Culture*, 2020, Vol. 15, No. 4, p. 457.
19   For more information, see: VON GOETHE, J. W.: *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Hamm : G. Grote, 1872.; Some theorists trace its origins even earlier, see: LOWE, B.: The Bildungsroman. In CAESERIO, R. L., HAWES, C. (eds.): *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 405-420.
20   See also: BRUFORD, W. H.: *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation: 'Bildung from Humboldt to Thomas Mann'*. New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 1975.; ODENSTEDT, A.: Hegel and Gadamer on Bildung. In *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 2008, Vol. 46, No. 4, p. 559.; BIESTA, G.: Who's Afraid of Teaching? Heidegger and the Question of Education ('Bildung'/'Erziehung'). In *Educationl Philosophy and Theory*, 2016, Vol. 48, No. 8, p. 832. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2016.1165017>.
21   MEYER-DRAWE, K.: Das Ich im Spiegel des Nicht-Ich. In *Bildung und Erziehung*, 1993, Vol. 46, No. 2, p. 195.; VINTERBRO-HOHR, A., HOHR, H.: The Neo-Humanistic Concept of Bildung Going Astray: Comments to Friedrich Schiller's Thoughts on Education. In *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 2016, Vol. 38, No. 2, p. 215.
22   JOANNOY, M.: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century. In GRAHAM, S. (ed.): *A History of the Bildungsroman*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2019, p. 202.
23   MASSCHELEIN, J., RICKEN, N.: Do We Still Need the Concept of Bildung?. In *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 2003, Vol. 35, No. 2, p. 139.
24   TAN, S. S. M.: Burn with Us: Sacrificing Childhood in The Hunger Games. In *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 2013, Vol. 37, No. 1, p. 55.
25   McCULLOCH, F.: Bildungsromane for Children and Young Adults. In GRAHAM, S. (ed.): *A History of the Bildungsroman*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2019, p. 174.
26   Ibidem, p. 199.

The formula may be contrived but the hero still has the chance to act and experience the results of their actions. This is where S. S. M. Tan positions the cathartic aspect of the Bildungsroman and situates its diachronic appeal: "a specific cultural-narrative to envision children "righting" the future",[27] making "each story resonating powerfully with its audiences".[28] A hope to do everything better, sort to speak.

In this aspect, games as ergodic media,[29] the outcome of which is the result of the player's actions, are very welcoming to Bildungsroman narratives. A. Ensslin and T. Goorimoorthee[30] in applying the term to digital games claim that while the natural medium of the concept was that of the novel, it has successfully been mediated in other forms[31] allowing for a *transmedia Bildung*, as they call it.[32] In that, they consider digital games as capable of affording a narrative and experience of Bildung as other media. Games possess the capacity to simulate a trajectory of self-growth and invoke moral and intellectual musings over it. Indeed, games have long been proven to facilitate education in a multitude of ways.[33] Yet, in the specific concept of Bildung, this connection is expanded due to the singularities of the genre: its relation to mastery and the transference of Bildung to the reader.

Bildungsroman is a genre preoccupied with mastery.[34] The hero is able to choose their fate and make their own choices by succeeding in honing their skills and becoming their own masters. When the concept of Bildungsroman was first theorised by German philologist K. Morgenstern in the early 19th century as a narrative of transformation and growth, he argued that a reader becomes educated themself while reading: Bildungsroman "furthers the reader's Bildung to a much greater extent than any other".[35] As A. Ensslin and T. Goorimoorthee explain: "Thus, the reader is inscribed, or coded, into the narrative as an inherently flawed, or incomplete novice, and her Bildung (in the sense of both operational skill and philosophical/spiritual awareness) develops alongside that of the protagonist, as she or he peruses the artefact in question".[36]

Games are a medium in which this mastery does not need to be explained to the player. It is actualised in each playthrough: the player starts as a novice and finishes the game as a full master that has conquered the challenges, their ludic progress attesting to that. The player cannot move on with the game if they have not mastered it first.[37] The player is executing a trajectory of mastery no matter the narrative of the game. The plot and setting might accentuate or facilitate this experience, but the experience is due to playing before anything else. Appropriately, in FBR the player has to master the game

27   TAN, S. S. M.: Burn with Us: Sacrificing Childhood in The Hunger Games. In *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 2013, Vol. 37, No. 1, p. 71.
28   Ibidem.
29   For more information, see: AARSETH, E. J: *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*. Baltimore, MD : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.00
30   ENSSLIN, A., GOORIMOORTHEE, T.: Transmediating Bildung: Video Games as Life Formation Narratives. In *Games and Culture*, 2020, Vol. 15, No. 4, p. 1.
31   See also: BOLAKI, S.: *Unsettling the Bildungsroman: Reading Contemporary Ethnic American Women's fiction*. Amsterdam : Brill, 2011.
32   ENSSLIN, A., GOORIMOORTHEE, T.: Transmediating Bildung: Video Games as Life Formation Narratives. In *Games and Culture*, 2020, Vol. 15, No. 4, p. 2.
33   For example, see: KEE, K. et al.: Towards a Theory of Good History through Gaming. In *Canadian Historical Review*, 2009, Vol. 90, No. 2, p. 303-326.; McCALL, J.: *Gaming the Past: Using Video Games to Teach Secondary History*. London : Routledge, 2013.; GEE, J. P.: Learning by Design: Good Video Games as Learning Machines. In *E-learning and Digital Media*, 2005, Vol. 21, No. 1, p. 5-16.
34   For more information, see: HOWE, S.: *Wilhelm Meister and His English Kinsmen: Apprentices to Life*. New York, NY : Columbia University Press, 1930.
35   SWALES, M.: *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*. Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press, 1978, p. 12.
36   ENSSLIN, A., GOORIMOORTHEE, T.: Transmediating Bildung: Video Games as Life Formation Narratives. In *Games and Culture*, 2020, Vol. 15, No. 4, p. 4.
37   VELLA, D.: No Mastery without Mystery: Dark Souls and the Ludic Sublime. In *Game Studies*, 2015, Vol. 15, No. 1. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <http://gamestudies.org/1501/articles/vella>.

in order to survive and, even more so, to master it better than all the other players. The rite of passage to adulthood is not metaphorical anymore but simulated. The players need to compete with each other and sacrifice their innocence by becoming killers.

At the same time, Bildung also concerns our ability to break free from our social position and parentage by allowing us an intuitive and dynamic relation to our environment:[38] "a decisive move away from the predestined path of joining one's father's guild and toward independent enquiry into one's own talents," as A. Ensslin and T. Goorimoorthee explain it.[39] Games possess the capacity to affect their surrounding space and reshape it as much as they are shaped by it. This is especially true for physical games, in which the boundaries are completely conventional. While digital games, like FBR, are more constricted due to their materiality,[40] they also exhibit opportunities for the players to interact with the game system and the other players in innovative ways. As such, they also demonstrate the potential of a breakthrough, which is integral to the genre of the Bildungsroman.

FBR possesses this Bildungseffect because it allows its participants the possibility to develop and manifest their own desires. While FBR, as a digital game, is constricted due to its coded system, it still contains the ability for the players to sacrifice their role models in a proper Bildungs or coming of age experience. This potential arises from the game's social affordances as a multiplayer game, and a streaming sensation at that, as well as its design as a PvP battle arena. Interestingly enough, a 10-years-old child player of FBR explains how one of the reasons he likes playing the game is because he can happen upon his favourite YouTube gamer-celebrity and potentially kill him.[41] Children watch famous players play Fortnite: BR not only because they learn the game but also become inspired to try different strategies that they cannot achieve by themselves. These professional players and their gameplay expertise become the objects of the children's desire. Being able to kill these famous players in the game facilitates the child's transgressive Bildung, which surpasses the hegemonic discourse that conditioned it. What is this discourse and how does social conditioning specifically relate to sacrificial rites and games? To answer these questions, the argument builds on R. Girard's conceptualisation of violence.

Sacrificial Rites

The affinity between sacrificial rites and BR games is straightforward: the participants have to survive by killing each other. Moreover, this killing constitutes a form of spectacle, which makes it ritualistic and sacrificial. This comes as no surprise as BR games are based on stories of sacrificial rites, namely The Hunger Games and Battle Royale. Obviously, the games are representations of a sacrificial rite since there are no real killings. Yet, the ritualistic element and its social significance as a matter of Bildung remains. To draw the connection between surviving and inflicting violence and its function as social conditioning, R. Girard's theory on sacrifice is used.

38   WULF, C.: Perfecting the Individual: Wilhelm von Humboldt's Concept of Anthropology, Bildung and Mimesis. In *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 2003, Vol. 35, No. 2, p. 246.
39   ENSSLIN, A., GOORIMOORTHEE, T.: Transmediating Bildung: Video Games as Life Formation Narratives. In *Games and Culture*, 2020, Vol. 15, No. 4, p. 5.
40   NTELIA, R. E.: E-Sports at the Olympic Games: From Physicality to Virtuality. In MARGARITIS, K. (ed.): *Law, Ethics, and Integrity in the Sports Industry*. Hershey, PA : IGI Global, 2019, p. 134.
41   CARTER, M. et al.: Situating the Appeal of Fortnite Within Children's Changing Play Cultures. In *Games and Culture*, 2020, Vol. 15, No. 4, p. 459.

In his book *Violence and the Sacred*,[42] R. Girard connects the cultural institution of sacrifice with what he calls the substitution hypothesis. While sacrifice may seem like an intrinsic transference of guilt in the shape of a scapegoat, killing off an innocent in the place of the actual culprit,[43] R. Girard claims that sacrifice needs not adhere to any moral values or expiation: "Rather, society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a "sacrificeable" victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect".[44] The true horror of sacrifice is that it can potentially affect everyone; no ontological or moral attributes of an individual can save them from being a sacrificeable victim. The victim of sacrifice is then a substitute for any potential victim if violence remained unchecked: "The victim is not a substitute for some particularly endangered individual, nor is it offered up to some individual of particularly bloodthirsty temperament. Rather, it is a substitute for all the members of the community, offered up by the members themselves. The sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from its own violence; it prompts the entire community to choose victims outside itself".[45]

According to R. Girard, sacrifice is presocial but not asocial. It is evidenced in all societies because it is society's response to society's inherent violence; a violence that in sacrifice gets directed to specific victims so it remains regulated and under control: "The function of ritual is to "purify" violence; that is, to "trick" violence into spending itself on victims whose death will provoke no reprisals".[46] Sacrificial victims are not special, and their choosing is arbitrary. At the same time, being a victim is subject to norms. An appropriate victim must at the same time be recognizable as part of the community and different enough for its choice to be bearable and forbid confusion. The sacrificial victims are "exterior or marginal individuals, incapable of establishing or sharing the social bonds that link the rest of the inhabitants".[47] R. Girard understands this crucial link that is missing between the victims and the community in very concrete terms: "Their death does not automatically entail an act of vengeance".[48] As such, sacrifice is this unique phenomenon during which violence is exercised without enabling more violence but rather breaking the violent circle.

R. Girard comments that rites of passage are one of the most applicable cultural phenomena to function as sacrificial rites. Rites of passage, as coined by ethnographer A. Van Gennep,[49] are about a change of status: the participants find themselves at a threshold between being a member of the community and not being. They then have to successfully perform the ritual to be considered equals within society. These rites are ripe for becoming manifestations of sacrifice because the sacrificeable victims have to resemble the sacrificing community while retaining a distance from it. Children, as a result, performing their rites of passage are the best candidates. Their sacrifice gracefully retains this duality of concealment and awareness of transference of R. Girard's substitution hypothesis.

These rites of passage are sometimes reduced to simple tasks. Nonetheless, they find their true manifestation in the form of sacrificial rites. As R. Girard contends, in the rites of passage, the younger members of society "have no personal acquaintance with maleficent violence. In subjecting them to rites of passage the culture is trying to induce

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42   GIRARD, R.: *Violence and the Sacred*. Baltimore, MD : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972, p. 3.
43   For more information, see: MAISTRE, J. M.: *St Petersburg Dialogues: Or Conversations on the Temporal Government of Providence*. Montreal : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993.
44   GIRARD, R.: *Violence and the Sacred*. Baltimore, MD : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972, p. 4.
45   Ibidem, p. 8.
46   Ibidem, p. 36.
47   Ibidem, p. 12.
48   Ibidem, p. 13.
49   For more information, see: VAN GENNEP, A.: *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago, IL : University of Chicago Press, 2019.

a state of mind favourable to the perpetuation of a differentiated system".[50] The participants of these rites become both sacrificers and sacrificed. They need to enact violence to retain the cycle and society's status quo. By transferring violence against the new generation, the new members-to-be, society guarantees its existence because it demands that its children accept its violent discourse to gain admittance rights. A child has to sacrifice itself before everyone else to become an adult and partake in adult society; it is the rite of passage from childhood, which is unaware of death, to the traumatised by the knowledge of violent adulthood. The sacrificial rites of passage are an entry point, which proves to society that whoever survives has learnt their lesson and can perpetuate society's conventions. What exactly are these conventions and what is the differentiated system that needs to be perpetuated? R. Girard explains these by the concept of mimetic desire.

Mimetic Desire

R. Girard understands society's inclination towards sacrifice as a predisposition towards violence. Violence for R. Girard is not a natural phenomenon bound to become manifested. It is, however, a highly potential occurrence, the results of which can be catastrophic if violence remains unchecked. Rites are put into place even in the most advanced societies as a safeguard against the contingency of violence. R. Girard explains this original violence with the concept of mimetic desire. Mimetic desire functions for R. Girard as follows:

"Once his basic needs are satisfied (indeed, sometimes even before), man is subject to intense desires, though he may not know precisely for what. The reason is that he desires *being*, something he himself lacks and which some other person seems to possess. The subject thus looks to that other person to inform him of what he should desire in order to acquire that being. If the model, who is apparently already endowed with superior being, desires some object, that object must surely be capable of conferring an even greater plenitude of being. It is not through words, therefore, but by the example of his own desire that the model conveys to the subject the supreme desirability of the object".[51]

R. Girard further develops this notion as a relationship of rivalry towards others: "Rivalry does not arise because of the fortuitous convergence of two desires on a single object; rather, the subject desires the object because the rival desires it. In desiring an object, the rival alerts the subject to the desirability of the object. The rival, then, serves as a model for the subject, not only in regard to such secondary matters as style and opinions but also, and more essentially, in regard to desires".[52]

For R. Girard, desire is inherently mimetic because it is generated by the rival model, and it is oriented towards the object of the model's desire. Hence, desire is very often accompanied by rivalry and violence. Mimetic desire, subsequently, becomes "simply a term more comprehensive than violence".[53] For R. Girard, mimetic desire does not by default lead to violence. It does so only when the object of desire of both subject and the model cannot be shared. As explained by W. Palaver in his book *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*: "Rivalry and interpersonal violence threaten whenever two people direct their respective desires at a single object, which they are unable to both possess".[54] For W. Palaver, the fact that in many cultures the world over these objects are forbidden is proof that mimetic

50   GIRARD, R.: *Violence and the Sacred*. Baltimore, MD : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972, p. 285.
51   Ibidem, p. 146.
52   Ibidem.
53   Ibidem, p. 148.
54   PALAVER, W.: *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*. East Lansing, MI : Michigan State University Press, 2013, p. 38.

desire leads to violence. He gives the example of the Tenth Commandment, which specifically forbids one to covet one's neighbour's belongings, including his wife, his slaves, his animals, his house, etc. This unsharability of certain objects is not an inherent trait of theirs. It is instead a matter of convention. It is no coincidence that in many cultures these objects are possessions of the male order, most tellingly women. It is because, as is argued below, the hegemonic patriarchal economy permeates and preserves the concept of mimetic desire.

The understanding of some objects as unshareable is itself a culturally charged conditioning. The perpetuation of unsharability which results in violence, and by proxy to sacrifice, is a means for hierarchy to sustain itself and its prescripts. In his book *The Scapegoat*,[55] R. Girard traces a history of "texts of persecution": accounts of violent phenomena from the point of view of the perpetrator. He connects them with myths and religious traditions, such as the Christian passion, showing that there is a cultural tendency for us to identify with the scapegoat and the innocent victim without accepting that the presence of the sacrificer is equally important and equally part of us. This line of thought can be pushed even further to explain how the presence of the perpetrator is in itself a cultural construct that facilitates society's establishment, if not consecration. In actuality, the use of this violent discourse functions as a tool for the perpetuation and stabilisation of the hegemony.

Violent Discourse

As R. Girard notices, the fear of violence brings society together; it is an agglutinant force. Yet the fear of violence is in itself a fantasy and a narrative that convinces people to stay together and retain the status quo. Indeed, in most societies, this discourse prevails as dominant.[i] W. Palaver alludes to that when he contends that only contentious objects that cannot be shared lead to rivalry and aggression: "As soon as the object of desire can no longer be shared — as with objects of sexual desire, social positions, and the like — mimetic desire generates competition, rivalry, and conflict".[56] W. Palaver is vague about which objects cannot be shared but in including social positions among them it already shows that constructs play an important role in defining these objects. W. Palaver's stance becomes more obvious later when he contends that: "We fight over objects that they [the models] themselves showed us we should desire".[57] This violent discourse shapes our desire and understanding of it as much as our physical contact with violence. Actually, more so since we are more readily exposed to mediated forms of violence and desire. R. Girard makes the connection himself in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*[58] when he traces his concept of desire and conflict in works of literature by Stendhal, M. de Cervantes, G. Flaubert, M. Proust, and M. F. Dostoyevsky. Through their heroic figures, R. Girard exhibits how mimetic desire can lead to personal and social crises and how it can happen through fiction as much as in reality. For example, he shows how Emma from *Madame Bovary*[59] comes to her desire for a lover through the romantic books she has been reading since her adolescence, or that Swann's love for Odette in *Swann's Way*[60] is described as the result of other men's desire towards her.

55   GIRARD, R.: *The Scapegoat*. Baltimore, MD : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, p. 7.
56   PALAVER, W.: *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*. East Lansing, MI : Michigan State University Press, 2013, p. 46.
57   Ibidem, p. 82.
58   For more information, see: GIRARD, R.: *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. Baltimore, MD : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.
59   See also: FLAUBERT, G.: *Madame Bovary: Mœurs de province*. Paris : Revue de Paris, 1856.
60   For example, see: PROUST, M.: *Du côté de chez Swann*. Paris : Grasset Editions, 1913.

It is in this context of violent discourse that representations of sacrificial rites find their applicability in the form of coming-of-age stories – or Bildunsromane. W. Humboldt brings this connection between social conditioning, Bildung that is, and mimesis to the forefront.[61] He understands Bildung as possible in its capacity as mimetic. The child learns by mimicking and that which it learns presupposes society. The child has to learn that desire is bound by social regulations, and they cannot desire without consequences. To be able to desire, they need to conquer and defeat a rival. Since the adult members of the society cannot be the objects of the child's violence, per R. Girard's substitution hypothesis, the child has to turn its hostility to other children instead, still non-members of the community but close in proximity and resemblance to it. In that way, the child becomes an adult as approved by society by actually performing the violent practices of adulthood.

Exemplarily, in the film adaptation of *Battle Royale*[62], the main protagonist, Shuya Nanahara (T. Fujiwara) exclaims towards the end of the movie: "I'll keep fighting even though I don't really know how until I become a real adult".[63] By contrast, Kitano (T. Kitano), a school teacher and director of the deadly games, shows the dead body of the class's ex-teacher before the beginning of the game as a lesson to be learnt: "We have here a failure as an adult. Be careful that you don't become an adult like him".[64] The teacher's failure as an adult results in his death. His death is also a symbolic death of any alternative mimetic model; the teacher could not abide the violent character of the society and therefore could not be a part of it anymore.

Battle Royale describes a dystopian society in crisis. This crisis intensifies the violent urges of its members therefore R. Girard's eruption of violence occurs. Indeed, while the narrative states that the current crisis is due to children's loss of respect towards adults,[65] the true failure seems to have been the result of society itself. Kitano alludes to that when commenting in a dream-sequence that hitting a student is prohibited: "Lay your hands on a student now and you're fired".[66] By removing this small act of violence, which for Kitano is not only an act of discipline but also a form of care and attachment – he claims that slapping students helped him "tell them apart, to grow to like them"[67] – society loses its outlet for violence. This results in greater and uncontrollable violence. The solution under this state of emergency and *exception*[68] is for society to put rites into place in the form of sacrificial games to appease violent outbursts and bring the general population once again in serendipitous coexistence.

While sacrificial rites are mostly witnessed among primitive societies in which law and the judicial system are not as advanced as in the Western world, R. Girard does not deem sacrifice obsolete in contemporary times. As he claims, whenever there is an event violent enough to disturb society's equilibrium, the community turns to sacrifice once more: "any community that has fallen prey to violence or has been stricken by some overwhelming catastrophe hurls itself blindly into the search for a scapegoat".[69] The members of the said community "convince themselves that all their ills are the fault of a lone individual who can be easily disposed of".[70] As R. Girard notes, this can lead to spontaneous outbreaks of violence such as lynchings and pogroms.

61   See: HUMBOLDT, W.: *Werke in Fünf Bänden.* Darmstadt : Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960.
62   FUKASAKU, K. (Director): *Battle Royale.* [Blu-Ray]. Tokyo : Toho Company, 2000.
63   Ibidem.
64   Ibidem.
65   Remark by the author: At the same time, the plot implies that it is the product of inadequate parenting, for example Nanahara describes how his parents were completely absent or Kitano is shown to be a distant father to his daughter.
66   FUKASAKU, K. (Director): *Battle Royale.* [Blu-Ray]. Tokyo : Toho Company, 2000.
67   Ibidem.
68   Remark by the author: The term belongs to G. Agamben.; See: AGAMBEN, G.: *The State of Exception.* Durham, MC : Duke University Press, 2005.
69   GIRARD, R.: *Violence and the Sacred.* Baltimore, MD : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972, p. 79.
70   Ibidem.

Sacrificial Games

Interestingly enough, festivals, contests, sporting events, and, aptly, games are all considered by R. Girard commemorative of sacrificial rites in modern and contemporary societies. In the aforementioned Battle Royale movie, there are a series of flashbacks, in which the male students, now fighting for their lives against each other, are seen participating in a game of basketball against an opposing school, while their female schoolmates encourage their efforts from the bleachers dressed in cheerleader uniforms. The happiness, joy, and effervescence[71] shared by the students after they win the match stands in striking contrast to the antagonism and mutual mistrust they exhibit later in the movie when they are forced to exterminate each other. In terms of function, however, both experiences serve the same cause. In the words of Kitano: "Life is a game. So, fight for survival and find out if you're worth it".[72] If life ends up being brutal and violent then it demands a matching game to teach that. Basketball is too tame a game once violence has been manifested; playing for survival is the only acceptable resolution.

R. Caillois in *Man and the Sacred* sees in the children's game of tag the best example of a contamination ritual: "The one who is "it" passes on his quality by touching a player on the hand, but he must avoid being touched in turn by the latter, for he would then become "it" again".[73] As R. Caillois explains, there is often a special rule introduced that prevents such a manoeuvre: "the children frequently agree that it is not permitted to retouch one's father",[74] as per the parlance of the game. The necessity for such a rule provides, according to R. Caillois, evidence to the ritualistic nature of the game, since it eliminates "the circulation of impurity",[75] as rites do. Moreover, it provides a structured experience of contamination that is separate from actual life, in which one can always "lead the impurity back to its source, to touch one's father again".[76] The rules and regulations put into place allow the game, and the rite, to offer their participants, and the society to which they belong, a sanctification of the impurity that otherwise would spread to the whole community, like R. Girard's violence.

Similarly to R. Girard, who quotes R. Caillois for his connection of the festival to sacrificial rites,[ii] R. Caillois understands play as a sacred phenomenon in which the profane reigns; a state of exception that enables one to escape from their ordinary self and through, because of, and during this escape to perform the actions which are demanded for their cleansing and decontamination: contaminating oneself at a time and space allocated to this contamination; the only process available to the members of the community to defile one another in a manner which will not jeopardise their social concord. As with sacrificial rites, in play, players can perform violence in a predefined manner, so it does not spill outside the acceptable limits.

Understanding both play and rite as spatially limited is an attribute first theorised by J. Huizinga in his book *Homo Ludens*,[77] the playing human. Examining play as a phenomenon preceding culture, Huizinga uses the term magic circle, a space separated from ordinary life where the rules of play reign: "The turf, the tennis-court, the chessboard

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71   For an explanation of the term, see: DURKHEIM, E.: *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. New York, NY : Simon and Schuster, 1995.
72   FUKASAKU, K. (Director): *Battle Royale*. [Blu-Ray]. Tokyo : Toho Company, 2000.
73   CAILLOIS, R.: *Man and the Sacred*. Champaign, IL : University of Illinois Press, 1959, p. 144.
74   Ibidem.
75   Ibidem.
76   Ibidem.
77   For more information, see: HUIZINGA, J.: *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. London : Routledge, 1949.

and pavement-hopscotch cannot formally be distinguished from the temple or the magic circle".[78] For J. Huizinga, this segmentation of space for play has no essential difference from the demarcation of sacred places or places for all kinds of rituals, which include practices of art, law, commerce, and science. R. Caillois in *Man and the Sacred* but most evidently in *Man, Play and Games* (1961) follows J. Huizinga's thought regarding the magic circle. In his treatise on play, he adopts most of J. Huizinga's characteristics as an activity: "accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life".[79]

As critics of both J. Huizinga and R. Caillois have argued,[80] this chrono-topological segregation of play not only is arbitrary but does not represent reality. It instead separates life into bubbles of practices, be it war, play, the court, or the ritual. As such, the concept of everyday, ordinary life becomes trivial and empty. Indeed, R. Caillois himself must understand that play and games are not separated from life since they shape it. How else could contamination in a game work in such a manner to prevent contamination outside the game? It must mean that this practice retains a continuation; if not categorical surely psychological. As T. Henricks points out, it is the intention of the person that allows games and play to form and this constitutes a conscious, albeit not always successful, arbitrary choice to allocate certain spaces and places to the practice of games, rites, and sacrificial rites.[81] It is in this capacity of theirs, that games can be great tools of social education, Bildung that is, much like Bildungsromane.

Just like with Bildungsromane, games can provide social education through a variety of means; be it their design, narrative, social gameplay etc. In the case of BR games, and FBR in particular, it is argued that this social conditioning is positioned primarily in their quality as re-enactments of sacrificial rites. In this, FBR educates the player psyche in accordance with the social norms and prescripts of the mimetic desire and violent discourse as explained by R. Girard. This Bildung is especially pertinent when child players are involved. Yet, the players do not have to be children themselves for this Bildung to take place, in the same fashion that the readers of Bildungsromane do not have to be children to receive the 'Bildungseffect'. In such cases, sacrificial rites re-establish for their audience the violent biddings of their contemporary society and keep violence checked within the fictional boundaries of the 'Bildungsartefact': the pages of The Hunger Games, the scenography of Battle Royale, and the battle arena of FBR.

In actuality, as argued in the following section, players of FBR may have an even more intense and, thus, resonating priming of their psyche within the context of violent discourse because they are both performers and spectators of the sacrificial rite, simultaneously. As performers, they possess the ability to act out their own trajectory and, as such, become masters of their own fate. As spectators, they retain distance from playing out the events in the game, which is necessary for the Bildungselement of the game as a prescripted outlet of sacrificial violence. This happens while they play through the avatarial control of the game and, also, after they die in the game due to FBR's spectator mode. As such, games, FBR most pertinently, provide an additional, medium-specific, experience of Bildung in their capacity as spectacles of self-performance.

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78   For more information, see: HUIZINGA, J.: *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. London : Routledge, 1949, p. 20.
79   CAILLOIS, R.: *Man, Play, and Games*. Champaign, IL : University of Illinois Press, 1961, p. 9-10.
80   See also: EHRMANN, J.: Homo Ludens Revisited. In *Yale French Studies*, 1968, Vol. 21, No. 41, p. 31-57.; CALLEJA, G.: Erasing the Magic Circle. In SAGENG, J. R., FOSSHEIM, H., LARSEN, T. M. (eds.): *The Philosophy of Computer Games*. Berlin : Springer, 2012, p. 77-91.
81   For more information, see: HENRICKS, T.: Caillois's "Man, Play, and Games": An Appreciation and Evaluation. In *American Journal of Play*, 2010, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 157-185.

Fortnite: BR as Spectacle

The connection between FBR and spectatorship is well-documented.[82] Many streamers became famous by playing FBR, while there is a certain interrelation between the game's appeal and the rise of streaming services, like *Twitch*.[83] Fortnite's viewership is evident also in its capacity as an eSports game. The 2019 Fortnite World Cup was viewed by 23,000 physical spectators and 1.5 million home viewers as players competed for a 30 mil. USD price pool, the largest in eSports history until that moment.[84] M. Carter et al. situate the game's appeal within this spectatorship culture, commenting on its spectator mode: after a player dies during the game, they do not immediately leave the game; instead, they continue watching the game being played following the avatar of the player who killed them "and following that, who killed that player, until the end—providing the vicarious experience of a high-skilled victory".[85]

The appeal of watching FBR being played is, as argued, intrinsically linked to its function as a simulated sacrificial rite. As per R. Girard, all sports and games exhibit this, but in the case of FBR, this is more substantial due to its gameplay as a survival game. It is an experience akin to watching the gladiators as part of *panem et circenses* in Roman antiquity fight, often for their lives.[86] There are obvious differences in terms of representation and the verisimilitude of the spectacle.[iii] In FBR, there is no overt violence. It contains cartoonish visuals, a vibrant colour palette, hip music, and catchy dance moves that the avatars perform after a victory. Unlike other games, there is no blood or gore; a fact which affects the parents' consent as to its appropriateness for their children.[87] When players die, they simply disappear from view.

Yet the spectacle of sacrifice does not need to be graphic to perform its cultural function discussed here. In ancient Greek tragedy, death is an off-stage occurrence.[88] This does not mean that those plays do not incorporate death and sacrifice as part of their spectacle. According to R. Girard's surrogate victim argument, sacrificial rites derive from the rivalry caused when two or more members of the society desire the same unshareable object. The appropriate resolution to that is the removal of the rivals. This act of removing is inherently violent, even more when it equals death. Of course, in digital games, like FBR, this is no actual death.[89] It is, however, a phenomenological death.[90] When the player is killed they are forced to stop being a player and regresses to the status of a viewer; obliged to witness someone acting without their being able to participate. In terms of R. Girard's

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82   See also: KING, R., DE LA HERA, T.: Fortnite Streamers as Influencers: A Study on Gamers' Perceptions. In *The Computer Games Journal*, 2020, Vol. 9, No. 4, p. 349-368.

83   For example, see: ANDERSON, K. E.: Getting Acquainted with Social Networks and Apps: Figuring Out Fortnite in (Hopefully) Less Than a Fortnight. In *Library Hi Tech News*, 2019, Vol. 36, No. 9, p. 11-16.

84   PEREZ, M.: *Fortnite' World Cup: By the Numbers.* Released 26th July 2019. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mattperez/2019/07/26/fortnite-world-cup-by-the-numbers/?sh=167846516be0/>.

85   CARTER, M. et al.: Situating the Appeal of Fortnite Within Children's Changing Play Cultures. In *Games and Culture*, 2020, Vol. 15, No. 4, p. 462.

86   For more information, see: KNAPP, R.: *Invisible Romans*. London : Profile Books, 2011.

87   CARTER, M. et al.: Situating the Appeal of Fortnite Within Children's Changing Play Cultures. In *Games and Culture*, 2020, Vol. 15, No. 4, p. 461.

88   See: PATHMANATHAN, R. S.: Death in Greek Tragedy. In *Greece & Rome*, 1965, Vol. 12, No 1, p. 2-14.

89   See also: LEINO, O. T.: Death Loop as a Feature. In *Game Studies*, 2012, Vol. 12, No. 2. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <http://gamestudies.org/1202/articles/death_loop_as_a_feature>.; GIBSON, M., CARDEN, C.: *Living and Dying in a Virtual World: Digital Kinships, Nostalgia, and Mourning in Second Life*. New York, NY : Springer, 2018.; SCHOTT, G. R.: That Dragon Cancer: Contemplating Life and Death in a Medium That Has Frequently Trivialised Both. In CARTER, M., GIBBS, M. R., O'DONNELL, C. (eds.): *DiGRA '17 – Proceedings of the 2017 DiGRA International Conference*. Melbourne : DiGRA, 2017, p. 1-10.

90   For example, see: NTELIA, R. E.: Death in Digital Games: A Thanatological Approach. In *Antae Journal*, 2015, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 90-100.

theory, the dead player is no longer able to satisfy their mimetic desire; they are bound to desire with no means to achieve their goals, which is the discerning feature of violence exercised against the sacrificeable victim.

Even when death is symbolic, as in the case of FBR, it still possesses an absolute quality: the game stops for the player, forever lost, until a new game begins and thus a new experience of it. In this light, the spectacle of FBR is as violent as ever, erotic even. R. Girard himself makes the connection between eroticism and violence, but it is in the work of G. Bataille that the two are interwoven. In "Hegel, Death and Sacrifice", Bataille comments on how the idea of death may multiply the pleasure of the senses: "I go so far as to believe that, under the form of defilement, the world (or rather the general imagery) of death is at the base of eroticism".[91] From all experiences of death, G. Bataille discerns the most potent in sacrifice, because it is the closest one can come to one's own death: "It is the death of another, but in such instances, the death of the other is always the image of one's own death".[92] As such, sacrifice is imbued with eroticism: "The association from ancient poetry is very meaningful; it refers back to a precise state of sensibility in which the sacrificial element, the feeling of sacred horror itself, joined, in a weakened state, to a tempered pleasure; in which, too, the taste for sacrifice and the emotion which it released seemed in no way contrary to the ultimate uses of pleasure".[93]

Representation, uncontestably, plays an important role in the erotic dimension of the spectacle of sacrifice. This is more evident in the movie Battle Royale, in which the camera acts per the scopophilic male gaze:[94] dead bodies of girl students are shown penetrated by sharp, phallic objects,[95] while there are frequent zoom-ins on the schoolgirls' naked legs under the short skirts of their uniforms. FBR does not entail this pornographic depiction of death[96] as other digital games do.[97] This diminishes the erotic pleasure of the spectacle, but it does not remove its functionality and effect. From another perspective, it is actually augmented because the player can become both the sacrificed victim but also the sacrificer, a duality that further accentuates the game's instrumentality as a Bildungsspiel.

In other forms of mediated representations of sacrificial rites, the spectator and the victim are ontologically distinguished, irrespective of whether a psychological identification takes place or not. The audience is clearly distinct from Katniss in The Hunger Games and Noriko of Battle Royale. In the case of FBR, the spectator can participate themselves in the game. This dual capacity is a medium intrinsic affordance, which occurs because the player can play the game and also watch others play it, either due to the spectator mode after they die in the game or through streaming. The spectacle in games is afforded at another level as well. The player, by controlling an avatar to play the game, acts and watches themselves act at the same time. They are the victim in the enactment of the sacrificial rite who needs to compete against others to survive while simultaneously they are also the spectator and orchestrator of this enactment.

In this sense, the game manifests itself as a 'Bildungsartefact' more so than the Bildungsroman. On one hand, it appropriates the conditioning of the player following the prescripts of the cultural order. The player has to play the game by competing with other

91   BATAILLE, G.: Hegel, Death and Sacrifice. In *Yale French Studies*, 1990, Vol. 42, No. 78, p. 23.
92   Ibidem, p. 24.
93   Ibidem, p. 23.
94   MULVEY, L.: *Visual and Other Pleasures*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 1989, p. 14-26.
95   FUKASAKU, K. (Director): *Battle Royale*. [Blu-Ray]. Tokyo : Toho Company, 2000.
96   For more information, see: GORER, G.: The Pornography of Death. In *Encounter*, 1955, Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 49-52.
97   Remark by the author: See M. B. Adams's analysis of the trope of female sacrifice in the deaths of Lara Croft in the 2013 *Tomb Raider* game.; For more information, see: ADAMS, M. B.: Andromeda on the Rocks: Retreading and Resisting Tropes of Female Sacrifice in Tomb Raider. In *Kinephanos*, 2017, Vol. 9, No. 1 – Special Issue: Gender Issues in Video Games, p. 103-126. [online]. [2022-01-21]. Available at: <https://www.kinephanos.ca/2017/andromeda-on-the-rocks/>.

players in a survival challenge as this is understood as a sacrificial rite of passage. This conditioning does not demand any narrative because the players execute the enactment themselves: by playing the game they perform within, accept, and perpetuate this violent discourse. On the other hand, while in a digital game the freedom to act against the code of the design is much more limited than in a physical sport or game, there is still room for personal flair, specifically in the social interaction between players. Thus, the game also possesses the transgressive potential of antagonising and breaking the hegemonic paradigm, which is integral to the genre of Bildungsroman.

More so, the Bildungsprocess of the players is twofold because they also witness it as spectators. At first glance, this may seem to oppose and challenge R. Girard's hypothesis of the surrogate victim, since for R. Girard a prerequisite of sacrifice is for the victim to be distant from the society; having a participant who is the spectator of their own sacrifice in the form of a rite of passage seems contradictory if not schizophrenic. There is, however, an important degree of distance retained, which preserves the functionality of sacrifice as ordained by R. Girard; a material distance that is. While the player shares with their avatar a virtual subjectivity,[98] the avatar retains a distinct ontology from the standpoint of the player. This distinction is different from other media because it follows a dynamic structure. The player perceives the avatar both as an object and as an extension of their subject and this connection fluctuates and changes between the two points of subjective and objective avatarial manifestation throughout the gameplay.[99] This dynamicity allows the player to perceive themselves as their avatar and at the same time as separate from them. Therefore, the player's Bildung is not impeded but instead accentuated by playing the game, enabling the emergence of a medium-specific application of the concept, that of the Bildungsspiel.

Conclusion

In this article, FBR is examined as an example of Bildungsspiel. The term is employed as a medium-specific appropriation of the Bildungsroman. Bildungsroman, as a literary genre, focuses on coming-of-age stories, in which the protagonists have to undergo literal or figurative rites of passage as manifestations of their trajectory from children to adults. This trajectory is accompanied by social conditioning, during which the individual accepts the prescripts of the society they belong to. Through their challenges, they prove that they are ready to accept, condone, and preserve these prescripts as true members of this society.

Building on the sacrificial hypothesis of R. Girard, the article sees rites of passage as primarily sacrificial rites. As R. Girard explains, rites of passage are appropriate enactments of sacrifice because they predominantly involve children; individuals that are still not quite part of the society while bearing great resemblance to it. Sacrificial rites are then a successful means of violence mitigation. Society chooses a surrogate victim, a victim who is not an equal part of society and thus its sacrifice will remain unpunished, severing the vicious cycle of violence, temporarily at least. In rites of passage that enact sacrificial

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98   For more information, see: GUALENI, S., VELLA, D.: *Virtual Existentialism: Meaning and Subjectivity in Virtual Worlds*. Basingstoke : Springer Nature, 2020.

99   See: VELLA, D.: Player and Figure: An Analysis of a Scene in Kentucky Route Zero. In BENJAMINSSON, U., LANKOSKI, P., VERHAGEN, H. (eds.): *Proceedings of Nordic DiGRA 2014 Conference*. Visby : DiGRA, 2014, p. 1-21. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/nordicdigra2014_submission_2.pdf>.

rites, the victims need to compete with each other performing the sacrifice themselves thus keeping the violence further from society. FBR is a simulated sacrificial rite of passage, in which the players must fight each other till the last person remains standing.

As argued, this is not merely due to the fact that FBR's design is inspired by popular Bildungsromane concerning sacrificial rites of passage, The Hunger Games and Battle Royale that is. More so, it is due to its gameplay, which, more directly than other games, invites the players to re-enact a sacrificial rite of passage. The player has to compete with other players and sacrifice their own innocent self in the process, their self before violence. As such, the game indoctrinates the player in the prescripts of the violent society which dictates the existence of the game in the first place. The game, therefore, has a socially educational – or Bildungs – function. Indeed, the game accentuates its capacity as a 'Bildungsartefact' because the player is the one performing the actions themselves rather than experiencing a recounting of the process.

Furthermore, FBR possesses the medium-intrinsic singularity that the spectator and the spectacle of the sacrifice become one; namely, the player, who watches themselves being offered as a sacrifice while trying to overcome the trial and come out alive as a hailed and revered member of the adult society. This quality enforces the function of the Bildungsroman when it comes to BR games like Fortnite. Even though the game is more resistant to intervention due to the rigidity of its code, it still affords player innovation and agency, especially combined with its spectatorship dimension. For this, in BR games there is a medium-specific expansion and development of the tradition of Bildungsromane or coming-of-age stories in a genre that, in this article, is termed Bildungsspiel.

Notes

i   This can be exemplarily witnessed in the case of *Lord of the Flies*.[100] R. Bregman makes the case that while the famous book by W. Golding pictures a gruesome and violent course of human coexistence when children are forced to survive pitted against nature, when a group of real children was actually castaway on a deserted island, they developed a peaceful and caring community, which secured their survival until they were saved.[101] W. Golding's account, despite being fictional, is considered to be a truthful depiction of our prone-to-violence disposition. Yet this is a cultivated and persevering narrative that, not only need not be the only possible outcome, but it is most likely not. R. Bregman challenges this false preconception further in his book.[102]

ii The connection between festival and sacrificial games can also be made in the case of FBR. The game has been argued to resemble a virtual playground more than a battle arena, a digital space in which children can go and meet their friends without the supervision of their parents, much like a skate park.[103] Notably, players can enjoy social events, like the live concert by DJ Marshmello, a Fortnite player himself,

100   For more information, see: GOLDING, W.: *Lord of the Flies*. New York, NY : Berkley, 1959.
101   BREGMAN, R.: *The Real Lord of the Flies: What Happened When Six Boys Were Shipwrecked for 15 Months?*. Released 9th May 2020. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/may/09/the-real-lord-of-the-flies-what-happened-when-six-boys-were-shipwrecked-for-15-months>.
102   See also: BREGMAN, R.: *Humankind: A Hopeful History*. London : Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020.
103   STUART, K.: *Fortnite: A Parents' Guide to the Most Popular Video Game in Schools*. Released on 7th March 2018. [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/games/2018/mar/07/fortnite-battle-royale-parents-guide-video-game-multiplayer-shooter>.; HASSAN, A.: *Fortnite Is a Social Space the way Skateparks and Facebook Used to Be*. Released on 12th December 2018. [online]. [2022-01-21]. Available at: <https://qz.com/quartzy/1493147/fortnite-a-social-space-like-facebook-and-skateparks-once-were/>.

which was attended by over than 10 million users.[104] During the live show, the battle mechanics were disabled allowing the players to enjoy the music and perform dance sequences with their avatars to it.

iii Indeed, spectatorship is a very big part of the narrative in both Hunger Games and Battle Royale. In the latter book, BR is described as follows: "In a nutshell, let's see Battle Royale is—you know how your usual pro wrestling match is one on one or between paired up partners, well with Battle Royale, ten or twenty wrestlers all jump into the ring. And then you're free to attack anyone, one on one, or ten against one, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter how many wrestlers pin someone down. [...] Then there's only one player left in the ring, and he's the winner. He wins. He's given a huge trophy and prize money. Get it? Huh? What about players who've been friends? Well, at first, of course they help each other out. But in the end they have to fight each other. You have to follow the rules. Which also means you get to watch some rare matches".[105] From the above quote, one can surmise the simple rules of BR: many contesters fight each other until there is only one left standing. The other important aspect of BR is that the spectacle it offers is an intrinsic part of the event. That is not to say that for other events viewership is not as integral. The difference is that BR matches are designed as such to allow rare spectacles to occur. In the original wrestling BR, it is fights between friends. In the book's narrative, the rarity comes from the fact that it is now high-school students that have to fight each other, to the death all the more. In The Hunger Games series, randomly selected underage participants have to kill each other until only one survives. As such, even though BR did not start from an event involving children, its appeal as a form of spectacle increases all the more when children are sent to kill each other and die in a sort of sacrificial rite. Including child sacrificial rites shows the extent of society's degradation. If a society demands such a violent event as the sacrifice of children to break the cycle of violence, it can be inferred how much social cohesion has deteriorated.

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