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**VIDEO GAMES AS PEDAGOGICAL TOOLS
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION: A
CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF OUTLAST
AND WHISTLEBLOWER**

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*Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.*

- Naomi Shihab Nye, "Kindness"

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Abstract

If learning is most powerful when it moves from the mind to the body, could video games be the missing bridge between knowledge and a felt understanding of human rights? This thesis investigates whether video games can be established as effective pedagogical tools for human rights education (HRE). Traditional HRE approaches often rely on textual materials and formal instruction, which can limit learners' emotional engagement and empathy. By critically examining the survival horror games *Outlast* and its sequel *Whistleblower*, this study evaluates how interactive digital environments might foster a deeper, embodied understanding of human rights violations and ethical responsibility.

This study employs a combination of qualitative content analysis, cultural analysis and ludonarrative criticism to examine how *Outlast* and *Whistleblower* communicate human rights themes through narrative and gameplay. It is supported by theoretical frameworks in experiential learning.

The analysis reveals that *Outlast* and *Whistleblower* effectively immerse players in experiences of vulnerability by simulating systemic human rights abuses. This immersive engagement fosters empathy and critical reflection, thereby bridging gaps often present in traditional human rights education.

I conclude that video games have a unique potential as interactive pedagogical tools capable of imparting HRE. While this thesis focuses on *Outlast* and *Whistleblower*, the findings suggest extensive applicability for digital games as learning environments. Future research could explore diverse genres to further establish video games within human rights pedagogy as an independent field of study.

Keywords: video games, human rights education, immersive engagement, *Outlast*, *Whistleblower*.

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
AR	Augmented Reality
CAT	Convention Against Torture
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DLC	Downloadable Content
HRE	Human Rights Education
HRET	United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
UDBHR	Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNGP	United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
VR	Virtual Reality

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Introduction

What if the games we play could become classrooms for the most pressing questions of our time? What if they could teach us about fear, freedom, dignity, and human rights? In a world saturated with digital media, video games have emerged as one of the most potent narrative forms of the 21st century. They can no longer be trivialised or relegated to “juvenile” leisure. Instead, they have matured into complex art forms capable of exploring the world around us with a depth that rivals literature and cinema. In this evolving landscape, the potential of video games as tools for human rights education demands serious consideration.

The concept of human rights education has its roots in the aftermath of the Second World War, when the international community, led by institutions such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe, sought to ensure that the atrocities of genocide and totalitarianism would never be repeated. These bodies established legal obligations for states while also emphasising the educational responsibility to foster respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. However, despite decades of formal efforts, HRE often struggles to penetrate beyond classrooms and documents. Traditional approaches are critiqued for being didactic and abstract.¹

In parallel, video games have developed into rich narrative environments capable of engaging players cognitively. Unlike passive media forms, games demand participation, decision-making, and immersion.² This interactivity creates a unique pedagogical opportunity: the possibility of transforming abstract human rights principles into lived experiences. By requiring players to inhabit morally ambiguous worlds and confront scenarios that evoke empathy, horror games offer ground for such transformative learning.

This thesis focuses on *Outlast* (2013) and its downloadable content, *Whistleblower* (2014), as a case study to critically examine how horror video games can serve as tools for human rights education. Developed by Red Barrels, *Outlast* plunges players into Mount Massive Asylum, an “abandoned” psychiatric hospital where corporate greed and systemic abuses unfold in

¹ Felisa Tibbitts, ‘Evolution of Human Rights Education Models’, in *Human Rights Education: Theory, Research, Praxis*, eds. M. Bajaj et al. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 93.

² James Paul Gee, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

nightmarish detail.³ The player gets trapped in a labyrinth of terror that forces confrontations with questions of bodily autonomy, freedom, and the limits of human dignity. *Whistleblower*, a prequel expansion, deepens this narrative by allowing players to experience the events leading up to *Outlast*.⁴

On the surface, these games might appear merely as entertainment designed to provoke fear and adrenaline. However, when they are examined from a human rights perspective, they reveal a chillingly realistic amalgamation of violations: forced medical experimentation, torture, arbitrary detention, corporate corruption, and the disregard of personal autonomy. The asylum becomes a site of unrestrained violence, despite being a space ostensibly dedicated to healing. This echoes historical and contemporary realities in which vulnerable populations are dehumanised and exploited under the guise of science or security.⁵

So then, what educational potential do horror video games like *Outlast* hold in engaging with human rights themes? This is the central research question driving this thesis. By examining *Outlast* not merely as a game but as a cultural text and “pedagogical artifact”, I argue that such media can provoke critical reflection on systemic abuses and stimulate empathy, thus contributing to the goals of human rights education. This thesis seeks to push the boundaries of what is considered a legitimate site for human rights learning and advocacy. In doing so, I aim to contribute to the growing scholarly discourse that recognises video games as valuable and valid pedagogical tools of human rights education.

As methodology, this study employs a hybrid approach to capture the multi-dimensional nature of *Outlast* as both a narrative text and an interactive experience. It combines qualitative content analysis, cultural analysis, and ludo-narrative criticism to interrogate how narrative elements, gameplay mechanics, and aesthetic choices coalesce for maximum impact. Qualitative content analysis allows for a granular examination of character arcs, environmental storytelling, and in-game documents, revealing sub-textual commentaries on power, autonomy, and institutional violence.⁶ Cultural analysis situates the game within historical and socio-political contexts by drawing connections to real-world events. Ludo-narrative criticism, a term coined by Clint

³ *Outlast* (Montreal: Red Barrels, 2013).

⁴ *Outlast: Whistleblower* (Montreal: Red Barrels, 2014).

⁵ Andrew Scull, *Madness in Civilization: A Cultural History of Insanity* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

⁶ Margrit Schreier, *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice* (SAGE, 2012).

Hocking, focuses on the interplay between narrative and gameplay, highlighting moments where player agency either reinforces or subverts narrative themes.⁷ By combining these methodologies, the study offers a multidimensional analysis that not only decodes the game's content but also interrogates its capacity to act as a catalyst for affective learning. At certain stages of the writing process, artificial intelligence tools were utilised to assist with brainstorming and refining structure. All substantive content and analysis remains my own. Throughout this thesis, references to legal frameworks will be drawn exclusively from universal human rights instruments, such as those of the United Nations, and regional instruments of the Council of Europe.

This thesis does not claim that *Outlast* was designed explicitly as a tool for human rights education. Rather, it explores the pedagogical potential that emerges when players engage critically with its content. As Tibbitts emphasises, it depends not only on the content but also on the methods and contexts of delivery.⁸ Video games offer a compelling context where ethical dilemmas and human rights violations are not abstractly discussed but experienced.

The structure of this thesis reflects its exploratory capacity. The first chapter comprises a comprehensive literature review, situating this study within existing scholarship on human rights education, gamification, and pedagogical theory. This chapter critically engages with debates around the affective dimensions of learning, the limitations of traditional HRE approaches, and the emerging field of game-based learning. It examines multiple perspectives of integrating video games into educational frameworks.

The second chapter offers an in-depth overview of the *Outlast* universe. It begins with a summary of the four games (*Outlast*, *Whistleblower*, *Outlast II* and *The Outlast Trials*) to provide necessary narrative and thematic context. The focus then narrows to a detailed exploration of *Outlast* and *Whistleblower*, including their setting, narrative, key characters, and the distinctive aesthetic choices that shape their tone.

⁷ Clint Hocking, 'Ludonarrative Dissonance in Bioshock', *Click Nothing* (2007), <https://clicknothing.typepad.com/click_nothing/2007/10/ludonarrative-d.html.> accessed 10 June 2025.

⁸ Felisa Tibbitts, 'Evolution of Human Rights Education Models', 76.

The third chapter conducts a comprehensive thematic and pedagogical analysis of human rights violations within the *Outlast* universe. It delves into issues such as torture, medical experimentation, the erosion of bodily autonomy, corporate accountability, and the dynamics of surveillance and control, situating these within ethical and legal frameworks. Here, in-game documents, environmental storytelling, and character dialogues are meticulously examined alongside relevant human rights instruments. At the same time, it evaluates whether and how the game can be integrated into both formal and informal human rights education contexts. Ultimately, it analyses potential learning outcomes while addressing possible limitations.

The fourth chapter presents a comparative discussion, situating *Outlast* alongside other socially and politically engaged video games such as *This War of Mine*, *Papers, Please*, and *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*. By comparing their approaches to narrative, ethics, and player engagement, the chapter highlights both commonalities and divergences in how games can function as vehicles for social critique and education.

Finally, the thesis concludes with a synthesis of key findings, a reflection on methodological and theoretical contributions, and suggestions for future research. The annexes provide supplementary materials to support the analysis and offer additional resources for readers interested in deeper engagement with the primary materials.

Ultimately, this thesis contends that video games, far from being frivolous diversions, can serve as powerful vehicles for human rights education. This argument is not merely about defending the artistic merit of video games but about recognising their potential as transformative educational tools in an era marked by digital saturation and moral complexity. If human rights education is to remain relevant and impactful, it must expand beyond classrooms and policy circles into the cultural spaces where meaning is increasingly made and contested.

In making this argument, this thesis hopes to provoke new conversations that take seriously the emotional and imaginative labour of learning about human rights in the context of video games. Can we afford to ignore the pedagogical power of games when they are already shaping how millions engage with questions of power, agency, and morality? If we are to truly build a culture of human rights, perhaps it is time to turn towards the screens where players confront horrors, and emerge with new understandings of what it means to be human.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1 Human Rights Education

What does it mean to teach human rights in a world where rights are so often abstract ideals rather than lived realities? Human rights education is more than a pedagogical exercise or curriculum topic. It is a project of transformation. At its core, HRE seeks to empower individuals not merely to know their rights but to feel their weight, to recognise their fragility, and to act when they are denied. The United Nations defines HRE as “education, training and information aimed at building a universal culture of human rights”.⁹ But this formal language conceals a more radical ambition: to cultivate a global consciousness grounded in dignity, equality, and justice.

Emerging in the aftermath of World War II and shaped by the horrors that gave rise to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), HRE was initially conceived as a safeguard against future atrocities. The concept began to take more formal shape during the 1970s and 1980s, especially within the frameworks of UNESCO and various non-governmental organisations. This was in response to increasing recognition that legal instruments alone were insufficient to prevent human rights violations. HRE was promoted as a means of cultivating a culture of human rights, particularly through school curricula and community-based education, with early programmes developing in Latin America, parts of Europe, and later spreading globally.¹⁰ It was further institutionalised during the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2004), which provided a global impetus for integrating human rights into formal and non-formal educational systems.¹¹

⁹ United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training*, A/RES/66/137, 2011.

¹⁰ Susan Garnett Russell and David F. Suarez, ‘Symbol and Substance: Human Rights Education as an Emergent Global Institution’, in *Human Rights Education: Theory, Research, Praxis*, eds. M. Bajaj et al. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 23 - 24.

¹¹ United Nations, *Final Report on the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2004)*, UN Doc A/59/525/Rev.1 (2005).

Scholars such as Felisa Tibbitts¹² and Monisha Bajaj¹³ have since mapped the evolution of HRE across legal, civic, and transformative dimensions. While the legal model emphasises awareness of international human rights instruments and obligations, the civic approach focuses on democratic participation and citizenship. The transformative model, perhaps the most urgent in today's context, seeks to challenge structural inequalities and nurture agency, particularly among marginalised communities.¹⁴

Yet, for all its promise, HRE remains unevenly implemented and conceptually contested. Among major criticisms is the fact that much of the mainstream literature privileges Western liberal frameworks, often universalising norms without sufficient cultural contextualisation.¹⁵ Another concern is the persistent disconnect between knowledge and action, i.e., knowing one's rights does not necessarily translate into the capacity or willingness to defend them. Moreover, in conflict or authoritarian contexts, HRE may be actively suppressed or manipulated, raising urgent ethical questions about its politicisation.¹⁶

Nonetheless, HRE retains its critical importance. In an era marked by rising authoritarianism, climate collapse, digital disinformation, and dehumanising regimes, the role of education in shaping critical, and empathy-oriented citizens cannot be overstated. It is here that the potential of innovative pedagogies, such as digital media and video games, deserves serious consideration. If HRE is to move beyond abstract legalism and reach those alienated from traditional forms of education, it must evolve.

This thesis places itself within that evolution. HRE, after all, need not be confined to classrooms or textbooks. It arises from the deeply emotional, visceral and unsettling experiences that compel players to confront injustice firsthand.

¹² Felisa Tibbitts, 'Understanding What We Do: Emerging Models for Human Rights Education', *International Review of Education* 48, no. 3-4 (2002)

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/251349286_Understanding_What_We_Do_Emerging_Models_for_Human_Rights_Education> accessed 05 May 2025.

¹³ Monisha Bajaj, 'Human Rights Education: Ideology, Location, and Approaches', *Human Rights Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (2011)

<https://repository.usfca.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=soe_fac> accessed 15 May 2025.

¹⁴ Tibbitts, 'Understanding What We Do', 164 - 166.

¹⁵ George Andreopoulos and Richard Pierre Claude, eds., *Human Rights Education for the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

¹⁶ Audrey Osler and Hugh Starkey, *Teachers and Human Rights Education*, 2nd ed. (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 2010), 32 - 35.

1.1.1 Goals of Human Rights Education

What should human rights education aim to achieve? This deceptively simple question reveals the ideological and practical tensions at the core of HRE. Is it enough for HRE to foster knowledge of rights, or should it go further? Should it go so far as to cultivate empathy, prompt activism, and unsettle systems of power? At its best, HRE is not merely an educational project but a political one. It does not simply inform students of rights; it enables them to interrogate their realities and demand justice.

International frameworks, such as the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011), define the goals of HRE in terms of promoting a universal culture of human rights through teaching, learning, and practices consistent with the principles of equality, dignity, freedom, non-discrimination, and participation.¹⁷ The Declaration highlights three core objectives: fostering knowledge and understanding of human rights; developing skills and attitudes that uphold those rights; and empowering individuals to apply them in their own lives and communities.¹⁸ These aims signal a shift from static learning to dynamic engagement.

However, these ambitions are far from realised universally. Scholars such as Hugh Starkey and Audrey Osler argue that policy frameworks tend to promote a technocratic, often depoliticised vision of HRE. Despite this, its emancipatory potential lies in linking rights knowledge with civic agency and democratic participation.¹⁹ In other words, the ultimate goal of HRE should be to produce critical thinkers capable of challenging oppression, as opposed to a compliant population.

Others like Michalinos Zembylas and André Keet propose a more “radical” goal. HRE must address not only interpersonal or legal rights violations but structural forms of violence embedded in social, economic, and political systems.²⁰ This framework of critical human rights education advocates for a pedagogy that goes beyond inclusion and representation and makes space for dissent, resistance, and decolonisation. This approach reframes the “goal” of HRE from transmission to transformation.

¹⁷ UN General Assembly, *Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training*, A/RES/66/137.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, art 2.

¹⁹ Osler and Starkey, *Teachers and Human Rights Education*.

²⁰ Michalinos Zembylas and André Keet, *Critical Human Rights Education: Advancing Social-Justice-Oriented Educational Praxes* (Cham: Springer, 2019).

Critically, such aspirations are often constrained by institutional inertia, curriculum limitations, and political resistance. Empirical studies show that in many contexts, HRE is still treated as a tokenistic subject, often abstracted from the lived experiences of learners.²¹ The result is a gap between the expansive vision of HRE as transformative praxis and its implementation as checkbox citizenship training. This gap is particularly relevant when considering innovative pedagogical tools - like video games, which may be uniquely positioned to bridge cognitive and critical domains.

In the context of this thesis, understanding the contested goals of HRE is foundational. If the ultimate aim of human rights education is to not just inform but transform, then the tools we employ must be equally dynamic. *Outlast*, with its capacity to unsettle, provoke, and disturb, may paradoxically align with the deeper aims of HRE, not despite its horror, but because of it.

1.1.2 Formal Education vs. Non-Formal Education vs. Informal Education

Human rights education unfolds within diverse educational contexts, each characterised by varying degrees of structure and formality. These contexts - formal, non-formal, and informal - offer distinct avenues for engaging with human rights principles.

Formal human rights education is typically delivered within structured educational settings such as schools, universities, and professional training programmes. It is characterised by organised curricula, set learning objectives, and often culminates in certification or accreditation. In these environments, learners engage with human rights through textbooks, lectures, and assessments that emphasise knowledge transmission, legal frameworks, and civic responsibilities. While formal HRE is fundamental for disseminating accurate information and fostering a culture of rights awareness, it is not without critique. Scholars note that formal settings may risk reducing human rights to abstract principles divorced from lived experience, thereby limiting emotional engagement and critical reflection.²² Moreover, rigid curricula and standardised assessments can inhibit creativity and reduce space for learners' voices and contextual realities.

²¹ Tibbitts, 'Evolution of Human Rights Education Models', 69 - 95.

²² Ibid.

In contrast, non-formal human rights education occurs outside the formal classroom but remains organised and intentional. Examples include workshops, community initiatives, youth organisations, and activist training programmes. These spaces often employ participatory pedagogies designed to empower learners as agents of change rather than passive recipients of information.²³ In non-formal HRE, the emphasis shifts towards dialogue, critical thinking, and experiential learning. Such settings can integrate arts, theatre, storytelling, and digital media to cultivate empathy, solidarity, and a deeper understanding of injustice. Crucially, non-formal education embraces a learner-centred approach that respects cultural contexts and values diverse knowledge systems. However, non-formal education can face challenges in scalability, sustainability, and formal recognition, sometimes limiting its reach and influence in policy and institutional spheres.

Meanwhile, informal human rights education encompasses the unstructured, often subconscious ways in which individuals absorb knowledge, attitudes, and values related to human rights through everyday life. This includes exposure to media narratives, family discussions, social interactions, and cultural consumption. In today's digital era, informal education increasingly occurs through social media, news outlets, films, and video games - all of which are platforms that shape public consciousness in subtle but powerful ways.²⁴ Unlike formal or non-formal settings, informal education lacks deliberate curricula or trained facilitators, but its impact on socialisation and value formation is profound. Informal learning can reinforce prevailing social norms or, conversely, serve as a site of contestation and change. Its amorphous nature poses difficulties for measurement and integration into policy but also provides unparalleled opportunities for innovative pedagogies that reach beyond traditional classrooms.

The boundaries between these three modes are porous, often overlapping and interacting in complex ways. Monisha Bajaj has emphasised the importance of recognising this “educational ecology” in HRE, arguing that human rights pedagogy must be multifaceted and responsive to learners’ lived realities.²⁵ This conception challenges the tendency to prioritise formal education as the sole legitimate site of learning. Instead, it calls for a recognition that

²³ Bajaj, ‘Human Rights Education’, 481 - 506.

²⁴ Tibbitts, ‘Evolution of Human Rights Education Models’, 69 - 95.

²⁵ Bajaj, ‘Human Rights Education’, 495 - 498.

meaningful engagement with human rights involves affective, experiential, and dialogical dimensions that flourish especially in non-formal and informal spaces.

Despite the promise of diverse educational approaches, literature reveals persistent gaps, particularly concerning how HRE can integrate affective engagement, trauma-informed pedagogy, and critical media literacy. Scholars like Bajaj, Cislighi and Mackie bring attention to the need to move beyond cognitive knowledge towards fostering empathy and action.²⁶ This shift is essential in understanding the pedagogical potential of horror games such as *Outlast*, which use narrative, atmosphere, and emotional challenge to destabilise players and provoke reflection on issues of violence and human rights abuses.

In sum, appreciating the distinctions and interplay among formal, informal, and non-formal human rights education enriches our grasp of how learning unfolds and where innovative tools might best intervene. This theoretical foundation is vital for situating *Outlast* within the spectrum of HRE and framing its critical examination as a novel pedagogical experiment that bridges multiple modes of learning.

1.1.3 The Importance of Affective Engagement and Empathy in Human Rights Education

At its core, HRE is not merely about imparting legal knowledge or historical facts. It is about cultivating a moral imagination that recognises the dignity and suffering of others. But how do we foster this deeper, emotional engagement with human rights? Scholars increasingly argue that cognitive learning alone is insufficient. What is essential for transformative learning in HRE is affective engagement- the capacity to feel, empathise, and emotionally connect with others.

Affective engagement is often described as the “heart” of human rights learning. Zembylas, for instance, stresses that HRE must move beyond the didactic transmission of information to include experiences that humanise distant suffering and connect learners to real-world injustices.²⁷ This emotional dimension fosters what Tibbitts calls “Values and Awareness

²⁶ Monisha Bajaj, Beniamino Cislighi and Gerry Mackie, *Advancing Transformative Human Rights Education: Appendix D to the Report of the Global Citizenship Commission*. (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2016).

²⁷ Michalinos Zembylas, ‘Emotions, Critical Pedagogy, and Human Rights Education’, in *Human Rights Education: Theory, Research, Praxis*, eds. Monisha Bajaj et al. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 52.

Approach”. It is an approach that does not just teach about rights but internalises them as part of one’s moral framework.²⁸ Affective learning can happen through storytelling, testimonies, artistic expression, or critical dialogue. These are all tools that allow students to reflect on injustice not as an abstract condition, but as a lived, human reality.

One of the most widely cited models in this context is Freire’s concept of conscientisation. This concept elucidates the development of critical consciousness that merges awareness with action.²⁹ For Freire, education that is emotionally disconnected from learners’ realities risks reproducing dominant ideologies instead of challenging them. Thus, for HRE to be truly liberatory, it must evoke emotional resonance alongside critical analysis. Studies in non-formal and community-based HRE settings confirm this. Programs that incorporate affective components (e.g., personal narratives of refugees, simulated trials, or empathy-building exercises) tend to foster longer-lasting attitudinal change than those rooted in lectures or law-heavy modules.³⁰

Moreover, neuroscience and psychology lend support to these pedagogical insights. Research shows that emotional experiences tend to consolidate memory and increase learner motivation.³¹ Empathy activates mirror neurons and creates psychological proximity, making it more likely that students feel a sense of moral urgency about rights violations, even those occurring far from their own lives. Therefore, the affective pathway is not just “soft” pedagogy; it is a deeply cognitive route to meaningful understanding and engagement.

In the context of digital media and gamified learning, this emphasis on empathy is particularly important. Unlike textbooks or traditional lectures, interactive formats like video games can simulate emotional states such as fear, vulnerability, hope, despair and make the consequences of human rights violations felt profoundly. This is why games like *Outlast*, with their immersive horror mechanics, can be considered as unconventional but potentially powerful HRE tools. By unsettling players emotionally, such games can provoke reflection on power, violence, and marginalisation in ways that purely rational discourse often cannot. The

²⁸ Tibbitts, ‘Evolution of Human Rights Education Models’, 76.

²⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. by Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

³⁰ Michalinos Zembylas, ‘Emotions, Critical Pedagogy, and Human Rights Education’, 53.

³¹ Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and Antonio Damasio, ‘We Feel, Therefore We Learn: The Relevance of Affective and Social Neuroscience to Education’, *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 1.1 (2007), 3 - 10.

challenge, of course, lies in ensuring that such affective engagement is ethically anchored and critically guided.

In sum, the affective dimension of HRE is foundational. Empathy is not an alternative to knowledge; it is the condition that gives that knowledge moral weight. As we move toward more experiential and multimodal forms of education - including digital and game-based learning - understanding and leveraging emotional engagement becomes not just pedagogically useful, but ethically necessary.

1.2 Gamification and Pedagogy

What happens when the mechanics of play enter the realm of pedagogy? Can a points system awaken a sense of justice, or do leader boards trivialise moral complexity? These questions cut to the heart of how we think about education, motivation, and meaning. In the last decade, “gamification” has made its way from tech boardrooms to classrooms and civic institutions. Defined broadly, gamification refers to the integration of game elements into non-game contexts to encourage engagement and participation. This includes scoring systems, levels, and challenges.³² But in the context of HRE, this buzzword must be approached with critical care.

Much of the enthusiasm for gamification stems from its motivational promise. Drawing on behavioural psychology, especially Skinnerian ideas of operant conditioning, game mechanics are designed to reward desired behaviours and sustain interest through cycles of feedback.³³ At first glance, this seems compatible with educational aims, i.e. sustained focus, participation, problem-solving. But HRE is not limited to the transmission of information. We are cultivating ethical sensitivity, critical consciousness, and a willingness to confront discomfort. Can these things be achieved through badges and tokens?

A common criticism is that gamification risks instrumentalising education. By placing value on external rewards such as points, ranks and achievements, the intrinsic motivation is undermined.³⁴ Particularly within HRE, there is a danger of turning injustice into a “level to beat”, rather than a reality to be interrogated. The risk is not just trivialisation, but

³² Sebastian Deterding and others, ‘From Game Design Elements to Gamefulness: Defining “Gamification”’, *Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek Conference*, 2011, 9 - 15.

³³ B. F. Skinner, *Science and Human Behavior* (New York: Macmillan, 1953).

³⁴ Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A’s, Praise, and Other Bribes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993).

desensitisation. As Caponetto, Earp, and Ott observe, without careful design and reflection, gamification may “encourage strategic behaviour rather than ethical reasoning”.³⁵

Yet, to dismiss gamification entirely would be a mistake. When thoughtfully employed, it can provide powerful experiential learning tools. A simulation that immerses students in the bureaucratic maze of an asylum system, like in *Outlast*, can evoke not only intellectual understanding but emotional resonance. Here, the game mechanics are not distractions but mirrors. They do not reward players for solving injustice but compel them to feel it. This is where gamification moves beyond mere technique and becomes a pedagogical encounter. Ultimately, the challenge is not whether to use gamification in HRE, but how. Its use must be grounded in pedagogical intentionality. It must be coupled with debriefings, reflections, and dialogue. Otherwise, we risk replicating the very systems of detachment that human rights education seeks to dismantle. As gamification enters the classroom, the question remains: will it serve as a tool for empathy or efficiency?

1.2.1 Gamification vs. Serious Games vs. Educational Games

The vocabulary surrounding game-based learning often invites confusion. Distinguishing between gamification, serious games, and educational games is essential to understanding how video games can serve as pedagogical tools, especially within the context of HRE. As mentioned in the previous subsection, gamification refers broadly to the application of game elements to non-game contexts, aiming to enhance engagement and motivation.³⁶ By contrast, serious games are designed with a primary purpose beyond entertainment, often tackling social, educational, or training objectives through immersive gameplay.³⁷ Educational games, a subset of serious games, specifically focus on teaching academic content or skills.³⁸

Each of these approaches carries unique pedagogical potentials and limitations. Gamification may boost motivation but can risk trivializing complex human rights issues if reduced to mere

³⁵ Ilaria Caponetto, Jeffrey Earp and Michela Ott, ‘Gamification and Education: A Literature Review’, in *European Conference on Games Based Learning*, ed. by Maja Pivec and Dirk Ifenthaler (Berlin: Academic Conferences International Limited, 2014), 50 - 57.

³⁶ Deterding et al., ‘From Game Design Elements to Gamefulness’, 9 - 15.

³⁷ David R Michael and Sande Chen, *Serious Games: Games That Educate, Train, and Inform* (Boston: Thomson Course Technology, 2006).

³⁸ Gee, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*.

point-scoring.³⁹ Serious games offer a richer narrative and interactive experience, fostering deeper understanding and reflection, yet they require careful design to avoid didacticism or unintended biases.⁴⁰ Educational games, while effective in conveying factual knowledge, sometimes struggle to elicit affective engagement or critical thinking beyond the classroom.⁴¹

In the context of this thesis, *Outlast* does not fit neatly into any single category. While it is not a traditional educational game, it shares qualities with serious games in how it prompts players to confront challenges linked to human rights violations. Its immersive horror narrative functions less as a didactic tool and more as a provocation. This nuanced categorisation foregrounds the importance of considering games as complex media capable of shaping moral and empathetic understanding.

1.2.2 The Power of Immersion, Interactivity, and Narrative

Games do not just tell stories - they let players live them. This fundamental shift from passive reception to active participation lies at the heart of video games' pedagogical potential. In contrast to traditional educational media like textbooks or lectures, games offer uniquely immersive experiences that blur the boundaries between learner and content. When designed deliberately, this immersion can foster not only cognitive engagement but also deep affective and ethical reflection.

Immersion, in the context of game studies, refers to the psychological sensation of being “inside” a game world. As Marie-Laure Ryan notes, immersive narratives “invite the user to mentally relocate to a different world and to enact agency within it”.⁴² This relocation is not just spatial or aesthetic; it is moral. Players are compelled to make decisions within systems that replicate power dynamics, marginalisation, or resistance. For instance, in both *Outlast* and *Outlast DLC*, the player is plunged into a hostile psychiatric asylum governed by exploitation, secrecy, and surveillance. While the game is not overtly pedagogical, its first-person perspective, lack of combat abilities and found-footage visual style constructs a disempowering

³⁹ Katie Seaborn and Deborah Fels, ‘Gamification in Theory and Action: A Survey’, *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* 74 (2015): 14 - 31.

⁴⁰ Djaouti et al., ‘Origins of Serious Games’, in *Serious Games and Edutainment Applications* (London: Springer, 2011), 25 - 43.

⁴¹ Arnab et al., ‘Mapping Learning and Game Mechanics for Serious Games Analysis’, *British Journal of Educational Technology* 45, no. 2 (2014): 345 - 367.

⁴² Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality 2: Revisiting Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 23.

environment that can provoke ethical discomfort and critical questioning. These sensations are not incidental. They are engineered through interactivity, and they have pedagogical implications.

Interactivity distinguishes games from other narrative media. As Janet Murray argues, interactivity in digital environments allows for “procedural authorship,” where meaning is co-created by the user’s choices.⁴³ This interactivity can heighten emotional resonance, as players become morally implicated in outcomes. Unlike films, where the audience is a witness, games make players responsible. This responsibility creates space for reflective learning, especially when a game subverts the illusion of control, challenges the player’s ethical frameworks, and/or denies them easy answers. Crucially, narrative is the conduit through which both immersion and interactivity gain ethical traction. Human rights education is fundamentally concerned with stories of victims, resistance and complicity. Games are uniquely suited to communicate such narratives as lived experiences.

As Tobias Staaby notes in his thesis on the use of digital games in education, games allow for moral testing in a simulated space, where empathy is built not through instruction but through experience.⁴⁴ In this sense, narrative games act as empathy laboratories. They create what Sherry Turkle calls “evocative objects”, interfaces through which players explore identity, morality, and social responsibility.⁴⁵ Yet, not all narratives are created equal. Critics caution that poorly constructed game narratives can trivialise suffering or reinforce problematic tropes. As Anita Sarkeesian and others have observed in her YouTube series, some mainstream games reproduce racist, sexist, or ableist tropes under the guise of ‘gritty realism.’⁴⁶ Therefore, the pedagogical use of narrative must be curated, contextualised, and critically unpacked. This rings especially true in educational settings.

For *Outlast*, this becomes a question of balance. The game does not offer solutions or heroic triumphs. Instead, it immerses the player in systemic horror: the terror of voicelessness, of

⁴³ Janet H. Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 152.

⁴⁴ Tobias Staaby, ‘Digital Game-Based Teaching - Exploring how digital games facilitate the necessary conditions for learning’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bergen, 2025).

⁴⁵ Sherry Turkle, *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

⁴⁶ Anita Sarkeesian, ‘Tropes vs Women in Video Games,’ *Feminist Frequency* (2013) <<https://feministfrequency.com/series/tropes-vs-women-in-video-games/>> accessed on 03 June 2025.

being hunted, of witnessing abuses without power to intervene. This instability, while distressing, mirrors the destabilisation central to transformative learning theory.⁴⁷ Rather than offering comfort or closure at the end, the game provokes discomfort and further conflict - an opening through which critical empathy might emerge.

Recent advancements in virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies offer an extension of these immersive and interactive possibilities. VR and AR elevate the sensation of embodiment and presence, thereby allowing learners to inhabit virtual spaces with a heightened immediacy. Unlike traditional screen-based experiences, these technologies can simulate environments and scenarios with such accuracy that players may develop a more profound understanding of the lived realities behind human rights issues.

For example, the VR game *The Inpatient* (2018) places players in a psychologically intense asylum setting, using immersive horror to provoke empathy and critical reflection.⁴⁸ However, the intensity of immersion also demands careful ethical consideration. Designers and educators must ensure accessibility, mitigate risks of re-traumatisation, and cultivate safe spaces for reflection.⁴⁹ As the technology rapidly evolves, VR and AR stand as promising yet complex tools that require further research to harness their pedagogical potential responsibly.

1.2.3 Community Learning in Games

Beyond the individual learning experience, video games possess significant potential to foster community-building and collective engagement, which are essential components of critical HRE. Multiplayer games and narrative-sharing platforms create interactive spaces where players do not merely consume content alone but participate in dialogue and shared storytelling. This social dimension transforms solitary gameplay into a form of collaborative reflection and activism, enabling players to negotiate and contest human rights themes collectively.

The recent game within the *Outlast* universe, *Outlast Trials* (2023), expands the series' pedagogical potential by incorporating cooperative multiplayer gameplay. Unlike the solitary

⁴⁷ Jack Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

⁴⁸ *The Inpatient* (Supermassive Games, 2018).

⁴⁹ Sathya Thangavel, Sharmila K and Sufina K, "Revolutionizing Education Through Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR): Innovations, Challenges and Future Prospects" (Asian Journal of Interdisciplinary Research, vol 8, no 1, March 4 2025), 1 - 28.

experience of its predecessors, *Outlast Trials* requires players to assist one another in completing tasks, protect teammates by distracting enemies, and navigate threats collectively.⁵⁰ By embedding teamwork and mutual support into gameplay, *Outlast Trials* illustrates how video games can model collaborative resistance and solidarity, reinforcing the idea that human rights learning is not solely an individual endeavour but also a social and collective process.

Such participatory experiences resonate with the core ethos of HRE, which values dialogue, inclusivity, and empowerment through shared understanding. Scholars like Sasha Barab and Kurt Squire argue that these collaborative digital environments function as “design-based research” sites where learners co-construct knowledge and meaning. This thereby deepens their engagement with complex social issues.⁵¹

Moreover, Celia Pearce’s work on emergent player communities demonstrates how multiplayer games foster empathy and collective identity, crucial for nurturing sustained interest in social justice.⁵² Integrating this communal aspect into human rights pedagogy expands the horizon of what video games can achieve, moving beyond isolated emotional impact toward sustained, dialogic learning processes.

1.3 Video Games as Art

Art has long been the cauldron in which societies test and transform their collective conscience. From Aeschylus to Ai Weiwei, art reflects collective values and holds a mirror up to the soul of a person. Therefore, the debate over whether video games qualify as art is not just a semantic skirmish; it is a radical rethinking of cultural agency in the digital age.

The classification of video games as art has been debated fiercely, but the case for their artistic legitimacy is compelling and increasingly recognized.⁵³ The United States National Endowment for the Arts began accepting video games as eligible for arts funding in 2011. This was a massive step in the direction of an affirmation of their cultural value.⁵⁴ In 2012, the

⁵⁰ *The Outlast Trials* (Montreal: Red Barrels, 2023).

⁵¹ Sasha Barab and Kurt Squire, “Design-Based Research: Putting a Stake in the Ground,” *Journal of the Learning Sciences* 13, no. 1 (2004): 1–14.

⁵² Celia Pearce, *Communities of Play: Emergent Cultures in Multiplayer Games and Virtual Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 112–118.

⁵³ “Video games as an art form,” Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Video_games_as_an_art_form.

⁵⁴ National Endowment for the Arts, “Arts in Media Guidelines,” 2011.

Smithsonian American Art Museum held the ground-breaking exhibition *The Art of Video Games*, showcasing games as works of visual and interactive creativity on par with painting, sculpture, and film.⁵⁵ Games such as *Journey* (2012), *Shadow of the Colossus* (2005), and *Gris* (2018) have been lauded not for their commercial success alone but for their aesthetic depth and soundscapes. These works transcend entertainment, precisely the emotional terrains that traditional art traverses.⁵⁶ Even mainstream titles like *The Last of Us* series (2013 - 2024) and *Until Dawn* (2015) blur the lines between cinematic storytelling and interactive drama.

UNESCO's interpretation of cultural rights, anchored in Article 15 of the ICESCR, declares the right to take part in cultural life and to access and contribute to artistic creation.⁵⁷ By this logic, if video games are art, they become a powerful medium through which individuals exercise and expand their cultural rights.

Moreover, the interactivity unique to video games allows them to transcend traditional representational forms. As philosopher Grant Tavinor argues, video games function as "action-based art," creating meaning through player agency and choice rather than static representation.⁵⁸

History shows us that art holds educational potential - as millennia of civic murals, protest songs, and political theatre have shown. If art can shape public consciousness, as John Dewey and Martha Nussbaum have each argued in their own ways,⁵⁹ then video games, as a form of art, inherently possess the capacity to educate. Through choices and immersion, games can transcend didactic instruction and instead forge experiences that compel moral inquiry and social empathy. In other words, they do not merely tell players about justice or dignity; they allow players to feel these concepts in their bones.

Thus, the syllogism emerges: if art educates and transforms, and video games are art, then video games can also educate and transform. They are capable of transmitting values and

⁵⁵ Smithsonian American Art Museum, *The Art of Video Games*, 2012.

⁵⁶ "Video games as an art form," Wikipedia.

⁵⁷ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 3 January 1976) 993 UNTS 3, art 15.

⁵⁸ Grant Tavinor, *The Art of Videogames*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

⁵⁹ John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 1934; Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, 2010.

illuminating human rights issues with an immediacy unmatched by other media. By recognizing games as art, we expand the cultural canon and open new frontiers for human rights education.

1.4 Games and Emotions

Emotions are not ancillary to learning, they are central. The idea that educational environments should prioritise rational detachment is increasingly challenged across disciplines, especially in human rights education. Video games, by virtue of their interactivity and sensory depth, offer unique affordances for evoking powerful emotional responses. But what kind of emotions do games evoke? And more importantly, how can these emotions be pedagogically harnessed?

Research in game studies and psychology has demonstrated that emotional engagement in games enhances retention, motivation, and empathy.⁶⁰ Emotional experiences in games shape cognition, memory, and meaning-making.⁶¹ When players navigate moral dilemmas, face consequences, or experience loss within a game, their emotional investment becomes entangled with their learning experience.⁶² In this way, games create what Jesper Juul calls “emotionally complex gameplay,” where feelings such as guilt, anxiety, or even grief become part of the player’s journey.⁶³

Trauma, too, plays a unique role. Some games deliberately confront players with uncomfortable truths or simulate situations that evoke fear, helplessness, or moral distress.⁶⁴ Successful horror games, in particular, are structured to destabilise emotional expectations, often eliciting fear, vulnerability, and existential unease. This is not just about jump scares. It is about creating an effective atmosphere that mirrors the chaos or powerlessness present in real-world human rights crises. Games like *Outlast*, for instance, immerse players in a world where ethics collapse, safety is absent, and survival becomes the sole imperative. Such

⁶⁰ Isbister, *How Games Move Us: Emotion by Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

⁶¹ Mijin Kim and Young Yim Doh, “Computational Modeling of Players’ Emotional Response Patterns to the Story Events of Video Games,” *IEEE Transactions on Affective Computing*, vol 8, no 2 (April 2017), 216 - 227.

⁶² Karen Schrier and David Gibson (eds), *Ethics and Game Design: Teaching Values Through Play* (Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference/IGI Global, 2010).

⁶³ Jesper Juul, *The Art of Failure: An Essay on the Pain of Playing Video Games* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

⁶⁴ Stefano Gualeni, Daniel Vella and Johnathan Harrington, “De-Rolling from Experiences and Identities in Virtual Worlds,” *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research*, 10 (2) (14 September 2017), 1 - 20.

emotional intensity, when critically unpacked, can deepen understanding of human suffering and systemic abuse.

Moreover, research suggests that music, sound design, and visual aesthetics in games serve as emotional signifiers that intensify immersion.⁶⁵ The eerie noises of an “abandoned” asylum coupled with the visual fragmentation of sanity contributes to a multisensory experience that speaks as much to the heart as to the intellect. In pedagogical terms, this is vital. Human rights education demands more than knowledge; it demands awareness that is felt.

Still, the use of emotion in games must be handled with care. When not supported by opportunities for reflection, strong emotional experiences can overwhelm, desensitize, or even distort understanding. A player might be deeply moved by a scene, but without space to process what that emotion means, its pedagogical value may be lost.⁶⁶ For emotional impact to become a tool for learning, it needs to be grounded in frameworks that invite critical thought, ethical questioning, and meaningful discussion. Only then can affect in gaming serve as more than a fleeting reaction; it becomes a doorway to deeper engagement.

1.4.1 Psychological Studies on Player Immersion, Empathy, and Trauma

If games are to be considered serious pedagogical tools, then understanding how they affect the minds of players is essential. Immersion, empathy, and trauma are not incidental by-products of gaming but central to the cognitive and emotional experiences that games create. Immersion, in particular, has been extensively studied as a cognitive and emotional state in which players lose awareness of the boundary between game and reality. Brown and Cairns define immersion as a graded process, beginning with engagement and potentially culminating in total absorption, or “presence,” where the game becomes experientially real for the player.⁶⁷ This deep level of absorption is critical in educational contexts because it fosters not just attention, but also affective resonance. When players identify with characters or experience simulated injustice first hand, the learning becomes lived rather than abstract.

⁶⁵ KC Collins, *Game Sound: An Introduction to the History, Theory, and Practice of Video Game Music and Sound Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).

⁶⁶ Karen Schrier, *Knowledge Games: How Playing Games Can Solve Problems, Create Insight, and Make Change* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016).

⁶⁷ Emily Brown and Paul Cairns, ‘A Grounded Investigation of Game Immersion’, *CHI '04 Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, (2004), 1297 - 1300.

Empathy has also been a major focus of game studies and psychology alike. Scholars like Bachen, Ramos and Raphael argue that digital games offer a unique platform for perspective-taking because they place the player inside another's world, both literally and narratively.⁶⁸ Unlike traditional media, games require decision-making, which means players are not simply observers but moral agents. Studies have shown that even short gameplay sessions can increase empathy levels when the game mechanics align with narrative themes of suffering, resistance, or marginalisation.⁶⁹ In the context of human rights education, this capacity to foster perspective-taking could be invaluable if wielded with care.

Yet the emotional power of games is not without risk. Increasingly, researchers have drawn attention to the traumatic potential of immersive gameplay. Game studies scholar Katherine Isbister notes that poorly designed emotional experiences can overwhelm players, especially when they depict violence or suffering without adequate narrative context or closure.⁷⁰ Similarly, psychological research into vicarious trauma and media consumption suggests that players exposed to repeated distressing content may experience symptoms similar to those found in secondary trauma victims.⁷¹ While this may appear counterproductive in an educational setting, some scholars argue that even discomfort has pedagogical value when it encourages critical self-reflection and ethical questioning.⁷² The key lies in framing. Trauma must be accompanied by context, dialogue, and debriefing in order to transform affect into awareness.

For a series like *Outlast*, which uses intense horror mechanics to evoke fear, vulnerability, and helplessness, this psychological research is particularly relevant. Understanding how players process emotional intensity and empathise with characters offers a critical lens through which its pedagogical potential must be evaluated. In sum, immersion and empathy can deepen engagement, but they are not educational by default. It is how these emotional responses are

⁶⁸ Christine Bachen, Pedro Hernández-Ramos and Chad Raphael, 'Simulating REAL LIVES: Promoting Global Empathy and Interest in Learning Through Simulation Games', *Simulation & Gaming*, 43.4 (2012), 437 - 460.

⁶⁹ Matthew D. Grizzard et al., 'Being Bad in a Video Game Can Make Us More Morally Sensitive', *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 17.8 (2014), 499 - 504.

⁷⁰ Isbister, *How Games Move Us*.

⁷¹ Tanya L. Hopwood and Nicola S. Schutte, "Psychological Outcomes in Reaction to Media Exposure to Disasters and Large-Scale Violence: A Meta-Analysis," *Psychology of Violence*, vol 7, no 2 (2017), 316 - 327.

⁷² Ossy Dwi E. Wulansari, Johanna Pirker, Johannes Kopf and Christian Gütl, "Video Games and their Correlation to Empathy: How to Teach and Experience Empathic Emotion," in *The Impact of the 4th Industrial Revolution on Engineering Education*, ed. Michael E. Auer, Hanno Hortsch and Panarit Sethakul (Cham: Springer, 2020), 151 - 163.

framed, reflected on, and connected to human rights narratives that determines whether trauma in gaming is transformative or merely exploitative. As this thesis will later argue, *Outlast* does not simply elicit fear. It situates players within the mechanics of dehumanisation itself, making the psychological stakes not just emotional but political.

1.4.2 Role of Music, Visuals, and Mechanics in Shaping Experience

What makes a game terrifying? In addition to the violence, it is deliberate orchestration of sound, sight, and interactivity to generate emotional intensity. In horror video games, music, visuals, and gameplay mechanics construct the experience. These aesthetic and technical elements work in concert to create a multisensory environment where dread is not just witnessed, but lived. Such a design is pedagogically potent.

Scholars of game studies have long noted that game soundtracks, particularly in horror games, are not merely atmospheric. Rather, they serve as active agents of psychological manipulation.⁷³ A low, droning score or sudden musical rupture can prompt anxiety before a threat even materialises. Players begin to associate certain auditory cues with danger, teaching them to anticipate suffering or loss. This kind of anticipatory dread, heightened by the lack of visual confirmation, activates the player's imagination, making them complicit in their own fear. Such emotional immersion, when reframed through a pedagogical lens, can be repurposed to explore concepts of human rights.⁷⁴

Similarly, visual aesthetics such as dim lighting, gore and claustrophobic environments shape the way players navigate space and interpret meaning. Horror games often limit vision intentionally, using darkness, oblique angles, or visual distortion to induce helplessness.⁷⁵ These techniques echo real-world conditions of dehumanisation, such as those found in prisons, psychiatric wards, or sites of war, where bodies are surveyed, obscured, or objectified.

Finally, game mechanics directly shape not only experience, but reflection. This includes how a player moves and acts. In *Outlast*, the player cannot fight. This mechanical helplessness reinforces feelings of exposure, dependence, and vulnerability.⁷⁶ In educational terms, such

⁷³ William Cheng, *Sound Play: Video Games and the Musical Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁷⁴ Schrier, *Knowledge Games*, 95 - 97.

⁷⁵ Bernard Perron, 'Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play' (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009).

⁷⁶ Miguel Sicart, *The Ethics of Computer Games* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).

mechanics can cultivate empathy for individuals who navigate systems of powerlessness in real life: refugees, patients in underfunded mental health systems, or detainees. These mechanics carry ideological implications, especially when the player is forced to survive within unjust, violent, or irrational institutions.

Together, music, visuals, and gameplay mechanics constitute an experiential pedagogy, which is a way of teaching through sensory disorientation and emotional impact. They create what David Theo Goldberg has called “zones of indistinction,” where the boundaries between horror and human rights violation collapse.⁷⁷ In doing so, they open affective pathways to ethical engagement, inviting players not to consume horror, but to feel implicated by it.

1.5 Representation of Violence in Games

The question of violence in video games has long sparked debate across disciplines. Yet, much of this discourse remains trapped in dichotomies: violence as either dangerous or cathartic, corruptive or harmless. However, the stakes are different for human rights educators. The concern is not merely whether games are violent, but how violence is aesthetically and politically represented, and what it means for learners who are invited not only to witness but to participate in it. What narratives are constructed through in-game violence? Whose suffering is foregrounded, whose is backgrounded, and what does this say about the moral universe the game constructs?

In the context of human rights education, violence in games cannot be dismissed wholesale, nor should it be embraced uncritically. Instead, we must ask whether violent representations in games can generate the kind of ethical discomfort that encourages reflection and disrupts moral complacency.

1.5.1 Ethical Implications of Violent Content

If education is meant to shape ethical sensibilities, then what are we to make of pedagogy that incorporates violence - not as a cautionary tale, but as an immersive, playable reality? The question is not just whether video games contain violence, but how that violence is

⁷⁷ David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 167 - 169.

contextualised and experienced. Within the context of HRE, this matters immensely. Violent imagery, when uncritically deployed, may desensitise players or reinforce harmful tropes. But when handled with deliberate intent, violence can serve as a powerful narrative device.

A vast body of scholarship has interrogated the effects of violent media on players, often through the lens of psychology or communication studies. Early critiques, such as those by Anderson and Bushman, argued that exposure to violent games increases aggression and diminishes empathy in players.⁷⁸ Yet such claims have faced significant methodological challenges, particularly regarding the long-term impact of gameplay and the role of player agency.⁷⁹ In contrast, contemporary scholars have begun to question the binary logic of “violence equals harm,” and instead examine the representational politics of violence. This includes what kind of violence is shown, against whom, and in what ideological context.

This shift is vital for HRE. When violence is embedded in historical, political, or institutional critique, as it often is in indie or horror games, it can confront players with uncomfortable truths about the world. For instance, in *Spec Ops: The Line* (2012), players are complicit in committing war crimes, only to realise their own ethical dissonance later in the narrative.⁸⁰ Here, violence functions pedagogically, not through moral clarity, but through moral ambiguity. It forces reflection on how systems of militarism and dehumanisation operate, and on the player's role within them.

In this sense, violence is not inherently unethical in educational games. The ethical stakes lie in its use. Is it gratuitous, or is it in service of a larger critical project? Is the player positioned as a sadistic agent, or as a witness to a broken world? Games like *Outlast* complicate this question further. The game's horror and unnerving imagery are not merely designed to frighten. They dramatise the consequences of unchecked bio-political experimentation and institutional abuse. Rather than trivialising violence, *Outlast* asks players to reckon with its roots and its consequences within carceral and medical systems.

⁷⁸ Craig A. Anderson and Brad J. Bushman, 'Effects of Violent Video Games on Aggressive Behavior, Aggressive Cognition, Aggressive Affect, Physiological Arousal, and Prosocial Behavior: A Meta-Analytic Review of the Scientific Literature', *Psychological Science*, 12, no. 5 (2001), 353 - 359.

⁷⁹ Christopher J. Ferguson et. al, “Violent Video Games and Aggression: Causal Relationship or Byproduct of Family Violence and Intrinsic Violence Motivation?” *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, vol 35, no 3 (2008), 311 - 332.

⁸⁰ Sicart, 'The Ethics of Computer Games', 8.

Of course, this does not absolve violent content from critique. Ethical concerns remain around the potential re-traumatisation of certain players, especially those with lived experiences of violence or oppression. The challenge, then, is not to sanitise games, but to develop critical literacies that enable players to interrogate the worlds they inhabit, even when those worlds are virtual. For HRE, this requires a nuanced ethical framework. This must be one that distinguishes between violence as performance and violence as critique. The former numbs; the latter illuminates. It is precisely in this delicate balance that games can paradoxically illuminate human rights by showing us what happens when they are stripped away.

1.5.2 Can Violence be Pedagogical?

At first glance, the idea that violence could teach us anything of moral value seems perverse. Education, particularly human rights education, is often framed in opposition to violence. Yet pedagogies rooted in lived experience, critical consciousness, and historical awareness must also grapple with the omnipresence of violence. The question, then, is not whether violence belongs in the pedagogical realm, but whether it can be meaningfully used to challenge injustice, reveal hidden power structures, and prompt critical reflection. Can mediated violence in games function as critique?

Felisa Tibbitts' "transformational model" of human rights education offers a compelling entry point.⁸¹ She argues that learners must not only gain knowledge about rights but also internalise human rights values and develop the skills to act against injustice. Within this model, affect and confrontation are not incidental, but necessary. Transformation rarely occurs through mere information transfer. It arises when learners are disrupted, unsettled, and forced to re-evaluate what they think they know. In this light, violent games that expose institutional cruelty or place players in morally ambiguous situations can serve as powerful vehicles for reflection and ethical growth.

Consider the horror game *Outlast* where while the violence in *Outlast* is extreme, it does not glorify brutality. Rather, it frames violence as institutional, concealed beneath a veneer of capitalistic rationality, corporate secrecy and medical progress. The real horror is in the systems that allow such violations to occur. The player's helplessness mimics the vulnerability of those

⁸¹ Tibbitts, 'Understanding What We Do', 168.

subject to institutional violence. This mechanic forces the player into a position of witness rather than perpetrator.

Such experiences align with what Megan Boler terms “pedagogies of discomfort.”⁸² According to Boler, transformative education must dislodge learners from comfort zones shaped by privilege and denial. Violent games that foreground structural harm may provoke precisely this kind of discomfort. When designed and framed with care, they can make abstract injustices feel embodied, without fetishising suffering. Naturally, this pedagogical potential hinges on critical framing. A game alone cannot educate; it must be situated within reflective practices that enable learners to deconstruct its meanings. This is where educators and facilitators bear responsibility. This responsibility does not exist as censorship, but as a way to cultivate the analytical tools necessary to interpret it. As such, the inclusion of violence in HRE need not be a contradiction. On the contrary, it may be an uncomfortable but vital strategy for addressing the very realities that human rights seek to transform.

1.5.3 How Horror Games Prompt Critical Reflection

The power of the horror genre does not hinge on merely frightening the consumer, but on unsettling and disorienting them as well. It does so by destabilising the boundaries between safety and threat, normalcy and madness, self and other. Consequently, horror video games offer a unique opportunity for critical pedagogy. Unlike passive consumption in film or literature, horror games place players in the centre of fear. This interactivity transforms dread into experience, and experience into reflection. In the context of human rights education, this affective dissonance of being disturbed can become a pedagogical tool when appropriately framed.

Isabel Pinedo suggests that horror disrupts rationalist narratives by forcing audiences to confront the irrational, the abject, and the marginalised.⁸³ This disruption opens up space for reflection on what societies deem monstrous, and why. In games like *Outlast*, the line between victim and perpetrator blurs. The horror does not lie in a supernatural evil, but in human cruelty systematised through institutions of science and corporations. The game’s design choices of no

⁸² Megan Boler, *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education* (New York: Routledge, 1999), esp. Chapter 8, “The Pedagogy of Discomfort.”

⁸³ Isabel Cristina Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997).

weapons, claustrophobic spaces and multidimensional antagonists provoke feelings of vulnerability and exposure. In fact, Freire's concept of *conscientização* is evoked here.⁸⁴ Players are not merely observing injustice; they are feeling their way through it. The panic of hiding in a locker while listening to distant footsteps is not just adrenaline. Who else must hide to survive? Who lives under constant surveillance or threat? This emotional engagement, when followed by debriefing or guided discussion, can lead to deeper understanding of structural violence and the mechanisms that sustain it.

Furthermore, horror's aesthetic of the deformed can foreground the dehumanisation that is often central to human rights abuses. Julia Kristeva's notion of the "abject" offers a useful theoretical lens here. According to Kristeva, abjection is "something rejected from which one does not part... [it] covers those fragile states where meaning collapses".⁸⁵ Games that make players confront abjection can illuminate how certain lives are rendered disposable. If approached carefully, such portrayals can challenge players to reconsider how marginalised people are treated in the real world, rather than reinforcing stigma.

However, the destabilising potential of horror should not be romanticised. Without proper framing, such games risk re-traumatising players or reproducing voyeuristic narratives of suffering. Their use in education demands sensitivity to the backgrounds and emotional states of learners. But if harnessed with care, horror games can go beyond entertainment to become experiential case studies in power, fear, vulnerability, and resistance, which are crucial dimensions of any critical human rights education.

1.6 Gaps in Literature and Research Justification

Despite growing academic interest in the pedagogical potential of games, the intersection of horror video games and human rights education remains markedly underexplored. The majority of scholarly work on educational gaming gravitates towards "serious games" or explicitly didactic simulations.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, horror games, particularly commercial ones like *Outlast*, are typically excluded from these discussions, dismissed as too grotesque for pedagogical use.

⁸⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 35 - 45.

⁸⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

⁸⁶ Catherine Beavis and Joanne O'Mara, 'Serious Play: Literacy, Learning and Digital Games', *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 54.8 (2011), 686 - 693.

This omission overlooks the genre's unique capacity to confront the psychological and ethical dimensions of human rights through engagement.

Existing literature tends to privilege cognitive or behavioural learning outcomes in game-based education, focusing on the transmission of knowledge or the development of technical skills.⁸⁷ However, as scholars like Felisa Tibbitts have argued, human rights education cannot be reduced to knowledge transfer; it must involve the cultivation of empathy, critical consciousness, and emotional investment.⁸⁸ Horror games, through their immersive narratives and visceral intensity, offer precisely the kind of affective disruption that can prompt players to question systems of power, confront discomfort, and engage with marginalised perspectives. Yet few studies have analysed how this emotional engagement might be pedagogically productive, especially in the context of non-formal human rights education.

Moreover, much of the research on violent video games is framed in reductive terms - does violence in games cause aggression in players?⁸⁹ This binary has dominated public discourse and policy debates, leaving little room for more nuanced explorations of how critically framed violence can provoke ethical reflection rather than desensitisation. There is a pressing need to rethink this framing, particularly when engaging with horror games that depict institutional violence, surveillance, dehumanisation, or trauma as systems to be resisted.

Finally, very few academic works engage with horror games as texts that mirror or critique real-world human rights issues. While there is an emerging body of work on the narrative structures and aesthetics of horror in film and literature, the medium of video games remains under-theorised in this regard. As interactive texts, games like *Outlast* create a unique emotional and ethical situation where players must feel consequences and survive under conditions that mimic those faced by people in dehumanising institutions. This experiential quality deserves scholarly attention, particularly from human rights educators seeking to move beyond abstract norms toward transformative engagement.

⁸⁷ Tobias Staaby, "Still in Another Castle. Asking New Questions about Games, Teaching and Learning," *gamevironments*, 15(15) (2021), 1 - 20.

⁸⁸ Felisa Tibbitts, 'Evolution of Human Rights Education Models', 76.

⁸⁹ Christopher J. Ferguson, 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: A Meta-Analytic Review of Positive and Negative Effects of Violent Video Games', *The Psychiatric Quarterly*, 78.4 (2007), 309 - 316.

This thesis therefore seeks to fill a critical gap: to explore how video games, when critically analysed and pedagogically contextualised, can serve as tools for human rights education. By focusing on *Outlast*, it aims to provoke new conversations at the intersection of ethics, affect, and pedagogy.

Chapter 2: Overview of the *Outlast* Universe

2.1 Summary of the *Outlast* Series

What happens when horror is not a distant spectacle, but something that demands your participation? When the line between observer and perpetrator begins to dissolve? *Outlast*, developed by Red Barrels, is not simply a game about monsters or madness.⁹⁰ It is a disturbing meditation on surveillance, medical violence, and institutional complicity, where the player is not invited to fight, but only to witness, flee, or hide. Before analysing the pedagogical potential, it is necessary to understand the universe in which *Outlast* unfolds.

The *Outlast* franchise spans over a decade of horror storytelling, encompassing four major releases - *Outlast* (2013), its prequel *Whistleblower* (2014), *Outlast 2* (2017), and *The Outlast Trials* (2023).⁹¹ It is also accompanied by two comic series, *The Murkoff Account* (2016 - 2017) and *The Murkoff Collection* (2023 - Present).⁹² Though differing in tone and setting, each entry is united by a shared thematic core. This core is the Murkoff Corporation, a fictional but accurate representation of trans-national companies that merge corporate secrecy with unethical violence. Murkoff is more than just a recurring antagonist. It is a narrative structure and the omnipresent logic that links all the horrors players encounter.

In *Outlast*, we follow investigative journalist Miles Upshur as he breaks into Mount Massive Asylum, a remote psychiatric facility in Colorado. What begins as an exposé soon becomes a descent into chaos. The asylum is overrun by escaped patients, experiments have gone awry, and an “otherworldly” entity by the name “Walrider” stalks the halls. *Whistleblower*, the game that serves as both prequel and epilogue, offers the other perspective. Here, we follow Waylon Park, a Murkoff software engineer who leaked the asylum’s secrets to Miles Upshur. If *Outlast* is a story of discovery, *Whistleblower* is one of moral awakening. Together, they form a tightly woven narrative that centres not on supernatural evil, but on systemic and corporate abuse and what it costs to expose it.

⁹⁰ *Outlast*.

⁹¹ *Outlast:Whistleblower*; *Outlast 2* (Montreal: Red Barrels, 2017); *The Outlast Trials*.

⁹² JT Petty and Alexandre Bonami, *The Murkoff Account* (Red Barrels Comics, 2016–2017); JT Petty and Alexandre Bonami, *The Murkoff Collections* (Red Barrels Comics, 2023 - Present).

The subsequent games expand the universe both thematically and temporally. *Outlast 2* trades asylum walls for the isolated landscape of rural Arizona. The story revolves around Blake and Lynn Langermann, a journalist couple investigating the murder of a pregnant woman, who uncovers a fanatical cult hiding atrocities in plain sight. The game is more symbolic than its predecessors, tackling religious extremism, psychological trauma, and the violence of belief. While it retains the core mechanics of helplessness and flight, *Outlast 2* shifts its central themes from institutional horror to existential dread.

The Outlast Trials functions as a narrative prequel set during the Cold War. Here, players participate in unethical psychological trials conducted by Murkoff on unwitting test subjects. Unlike earlier titles, *Trials* introduces multiplayer elements, turning solitary fear into collective paranoia. Although less narratively linear, it offers valuable insight into Murkoff's history. This is specifically highlighted in its experimentation with mind control, psychological manipulation, and the production of obedience.

Supplementing these games is *The Murkoff Account*, a digital comic series that bridges the narrative gaps between *Outlast*, *Whistleblower*, and *Outlast 2*. Told through the perspectives of Pauline Glick and Paul Marion from Murkoff's Insurance Mitigation Department, it reveals the corporation's frantic attempts to contain the fallout of Mount Massive and secure their expanding projects.⁹³ Additionally, *The Murkoff Collections* is a comic book series that acts as a narrative tie-in to *The Outlast Trials*. Told from the perspective of Clyde Perry - an agent in Murkoff's Collections Department and later Director of Historical Refinement - it explores his transformation from loyal corporate operative to a figure complicit in shaping and erasing Murkoff's history.⁹⁴ Through classified memos, surveillance transcripts, and confidential correspondence, the series deepens the lore and exposes the transnational, bureaucratized nature of the violence at play.

This thesis focuses primarily on *Outlast* and *Whistleblower* because they provide the most sustained narrative of complicity, resistance, and institutional horror. The interconnected structure offers an opportunity to witness how systems of power maintain control through language, surveillance, and bodily domination. These games are not abstract horror; they're

⁹³ Petty and Bonami, *The Murkoff Account*.

⁹⁴ Petty and Bonami, *The Murkoff Collections*.

visceral and grounded in realism. In Galloway's terms, the player is not a viewer but an actor; one who must enact the uncovering of human rights abuses without the abstraction or distance.⁹⁵

In the sections that follow, this chapter will provide a more detailed examination of the core of *Outlast* and *Whistleblower*. From the architecture of Mount Massive to the camera the player must use to see in the dark, every element is loaded with symbolic and emotional weight. To ask what *Outlast* teaches is premature until we first understand its method and how it forces us to listen.

2.2 Exploring *Outlast* and *Whistleblower*

There is a difference between discovering horror and deciding to reveal it. Where *Outlast* drops the player into the unknown, *Whistleblower* hands them the burden of conscience. Together, these two games construct an intertwined and immersive storyline. The player is thrust into an experience of institutional horror and expected to survive within a system that punishes morality. In a medium saturated with combat and conquest, what makes these games so deeply unsettling is their refusal to grant the player any real power. There is no way to fight back. Only to flee, to hide, and to record. Survival is not earned through dominance, but through endurance.

The first game, *Outlast* (2013), begins with a simple act of investigation. Miles Upshur, a freelance journalist, receives an anonymous email exposing human rights violations at Mount Massive Asylum.⁹⁶ When he arrives, however, the institution is already in ruin. The staff have been brutally murdered, the patients - called Variants - are roaming freely, and the walls are marked by blood and biblical phrases. As Miles progresses through the administration block, he's assaulted by Chris Walker, a towering inmate who violently throws him into the asylum's depths. There, he encounters "Father" Martin, a self-proclaimed prophet who believes Miles was divinely sent to witness the horrors of the institution and the "Gospel" of the Walrider.

Trapped inside, Miles attempts to escape, only to be repeatedly hindered by security systems and Martin's own interventions. As he follows trails of blood and scripture deeper into the asylum, he uncovers the chilling premise. Mount Massive is not simply an asylum; it is the site

⁹⁵ Alexander R. Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 91 - 102.

⁹⁶ *Outlast* (Red Barrels, 2013) [in-game document: "The Whistleblower"]; see Annex 1.1.1 for transcript.

of covert biomedical experiments conducted by the Murkoff Corporation under the guise of psychiatric care. In an effort to control human consciousness, Murkoff subjects patients to invasive procedures in the Morphogenic engines that leave them physically mutilated and psychologically shattered.⁹⁷ Its outcome: the Walrider, a volatile nano-technological entity hosted by a patient named Billy Hope.

Armed with nothing but a handheld camcorder, the player navigates the chaos, relying on night vision to see in the dark. This mechanic is a narrative decision. To see, one must record, and to record, one must look. The result is an uncomfortable intimacy: players are forced to stare directly into atrocity.⁹⁸

As Miles navigates the wreckage and runs from hostile Variants, he is mutilated by Dr. Richard Trager, a former Murkoff executive turned sadistic “surgeon”, and stalked by inmates like the Twins and Walker. Father Martin eventually leads him to the asylum chapel, where he immolates himself in a religious display, having declared Miles a messianic witness. But instead of freedom, Miles descends further, literally, into the underground laboratory, the true heart of Murkoff’s operation.

There, he learns that while the Walrider may appear spectral, the horror is strictly material. As Dr. Rudolf Wernicke, the project’s Nazi-era architect, insists, it is not supernatural⁹⁹, but a product of human engineering, sustained by Billy Hope’s lucid dreaming. The body becomes the vessel of technological violence. Murkoff’s research is not just unethical - it is ideologically coherent. Its experiments aim to quite literally turn patients into productive units. As Trager puts it: “The consumer is now the means of production.”¹⁰⁰ This logic is not his invention, but an echo of Rudolf Wernicke’s true goal, which is to make the human body itself a nanite-producing machine.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ *Outlast: Whistleblower* (Red Barrels, 2014) [in-game document: “Lesser Known Ecological Aspects of Humanity”]; see also Annex 1.2.1 for transcript.

⁹⁸ Brendan Keogh, *A Play of Bodies: How We Perceive Videogames* (MIT Press, 2018), 64 - 68.

⁹⁹ *Outlast* (Red Barrels, 2013) [in-game audio log: “Wernicke Exit Interview” Recreation Hall]; see Annex 3.1.1 for transcript.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Trager, in-game dialogue, *Outlast* (Red Barrels, 2013); see Annex 3.1.2 for transcript.

¹⁰¹ Rudolf Wernicke, in-game dialogue, *Outlast*; see Annex 3.1.3 for transcript.

Dr. Wernicke - who is discovered to be alive, even though legally “dead”¹⁰² - instructs Miles to kill Hope and end the experiment. After barely succeeding, Miles hobbles to the exit only to be gunned down by Murkoff forces at Wernicke’s command. As he collapses and the screen fades to black, Wernicke’s stunned whisper “Gott in Himmel. You have become the Host.” precedes the screams of soldiers being slaughtered. The implication is chilling: Murkoff’s perfect host has just walked out the front door.

Whistleblower (2014) takes us behind the curtain. Set before, during, and after the events of *Outlast*, the game places us in the shoes of Waylon Park, the whistleblower who sent the tip that drew Miles to the asylum.¹⁰³ As a software engineer working for Murkoff under a two-week contract, Waylon begins as an insider. Initially complicit through proximity, Waylon’s awakening begins when he witnesses first-hand the brutal experimentation inflicted upon inmates. His conscience leads him to leak internal data to Simon Peacock and Miles Upshur, triggering swift and brutal retaliation. Caught by Murkoff’s Executive Vice President Jeremy Blaire, Waylon is committed as a patient and subjected to the very experiments he once unintentionally helped facilitate.

After the Walrider escapes containment and chaos erupts across the facility, Waylon seizes his chance to flee. Just like Miles, he is armed only with a camcorder. His journey through the asylum is marked by encounters with other Variants, including the cannibalistic Frank Manera, the “Groom,” Eddie Gluskin, Chris Walker, and even Jeremy Blaire - all of whom relentlessly try to kill him. Each section of the facility reveals new layers of institutional decay and violence, until Waylon finally nears the exit, bloodied and limping.

But escape offers no closure. In one final confrontation, a mortally wounded Blaire tries to kill Waylon to silence him, only to be intercepted by the Walrider - who is now hosted by Miles Upshur. Waylon escapes in Miles’ Jeep, bearing witness to the Walrider emerging from the asylum behind him. In the game’s epilogue, we find Waylon at a computer, preparing to upload the footage to VIRALeaks. He is warned by Simon Peacock, the website’s creator, of the horrible repercussions if he follows through with the exposé. Waylon chooses to upload, sealing his fate as the screen fades to black. Waylon Park’s journey is one of transformation -

¹⁰² *Outlast* [in-game document: “Dr. Wernicke Obituary”]; see Annex 1.1.2 for transcript.

¹⁰³ *Outlast*, “The Whistleblower”; see Annex 1.1.1 for transcript.

from silent technician to active resistor. Unlike Miles, whose arrival is a descent into the dark, Waylon's narrative is one of betrayal from within. He knew what Murkoff was doing, but not what it would cost to expose it.

Together, these two narratives form a circular loop: the insider and the outsider. Their fates are intertwined through plot and affect. Both are powerless, yet necessary. Both are punished for their proximity to the truth. And crucially, both compel the player into complicity. By stepping into their roles, the player is made to feel the claustrophobia of institutions that silence dissent. This is done not just through violence, but through the slow erosion of agency. What emerges is not just a horror story, but an interrogation. *Outlast* and *Whistleblower* ask: what does it mean to witness? What are the ethics of recording trauma? And can this knowledge protect anyone or does it merely endanger those who carry it?

2.3 The Architecture of the *Outlast* and *Whistleblower* Universe

2.3.1 Narrative

To understand *Outlast*'s narrative weight, it is important to begin with its most human elements: the bodies that move through it. Contrary to most video games of this genre, these are not superheroes or soldiers. They are witnesses.

As aforementioned, the protagonist of the first game is Miles Upshur. According to the beta version of the Whistleblower document, it is revealed that Miles originally worked as a regular journalist for an unknown company before being fired, as a result of posting "unacceptable" material regarding the situation in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁴ The prologue at the beginning of the game reveals that Miles' ambition eggs him to risk everything and dig into stories that no other journalists dare to.¹⁰⁵ Besides this, the audience learns very little about him. He has no voice, no vivid backstory, and his character can only be ascertained by examining what is seen through his eyes and what he writes in his notebook. His silence is a narrative device, rather than an omission.¹⁰⁶ Miles acts as a cipher onto which we project our moral reactions. The silence of the protagonist forces the player to rely on behavioural cues to intuit his character. In Miles's

¹⁰⁴ *Outlast Wiki*, 'Miles Upshur', *Outlast Wiki* (Fandom), <https://outlast.fandom.com/wiki/Miles_Upshur#cite_note-Beta-4> accessed 10 June 2025.

¹⁰⁵ *Outlast* (Red Barrels, 2013) [in-game prologue sequence]; see Annex 3.1.4 for transcript.

¹⁰⁶ Griffin, L., 'Outlast: Peak and Decline', *The Fandomentials*, 7 February 2019, <<https://www.thefandomentials.com/outlast-peak-and-decline/>> accessed 8 May 2025.

case, this silence often speaks in sharp, jarring motions. Unless specifically slowed down by player controls, he slams doors and lockers with the urgency of someone on the edge of panic. These actions paint a portrait of a man spiralling into a space where survival overrides subtlety. His cynicism bleeds through in his journal entries and his body language. What makes Miles compelling is not his heroism, but his helplessness coupled with his cynical wit.¹⁰⁷

The second is Waylon Park, the protagonist of *Whistleblower*. We begin *Whistleblower* at the moment of his betrayal, watching him type the email that seals both his and Miles' fates. Unlike Miles, Waylon has a family - a wife and two sons, who's revealed through his notes¹⁰⁸ and this tether to the outside world makes his descent feel all the more brutal. In contrast to Miles, Waylon moves through the asylum with a kind of strained gentleness. He never slams doors, even under pressure. Additionally, his notes hint at this quiet humanity. Throughout his survival in the asylum, reading the notes can show how Waylon clings to the memories of his wife and children as his anchor, and sole reason for survival.¹⁰⁹ These differences in the behaviour of Miles and Waylon gesture toward two different ways of inhabiting horror. If Miles is the outsider looking in, Waylon is the insider trying to claw his way out.

At the centre of it all is Mount Massive Asylum, a sprawling, privately run psychiatric facility in the mountains of Colorado.¹¹⁰ Originally built in the early 20th century and later repurposed by the Murkoff Corporation under the flimsy guise of "charity"¹¹¹, the asylum is less a setting than a character. Its walls are layered with architectural contradictions of clinical sterility bleeding into gothic ruin. Through the protagonist's camcorder, we see bloodstains, religious graffiti, flickering lights, and rooms left in disarray by violence that occurred minutes before our arrival.¹¹²

The true antagonist, however, is not the asylum or even its violent inhabitants. It is the Murkoff Corporation, the transnational private contractor behind Project Walrider. Through recovered documents, scattered recordings, and environmental storytelling, we learn that Murkoff has

¹⁰⁷ *Outlast* [in-game note: "Death of Trager"]; see Annex 2.1.1 for transcript.

¹⁰⁸ *Outlast: Whistleblower* [in-game note: "A Radio in the Prison"]; see Annex 2.2.1 for transcript.

¹⁰⁹ *Outlast: Whistleblower* [in-game notes: "Satisfaction", "An Easy Way Out"]; see Annex 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 for transcripts.

¹¹⁰ See Annex 4, Fig. 1 : Mount Massive Asylum, Colorado.

¹¹¹ *Outlast* [in-game note: "Mount Massive Asylum"]; see Annex 2.1.2 for transcript.

¹¹² Petty and Bonami, *The Murkoff Account*, Issue 3 (2016), 4 - 5.

been using vulnerable patients as test subjects in a military experiment aimed at weaponising human consciousness.¹¹³ The project centres on a phenomenon known as the Morphogenic Engine, a process that forcibly manipulates brainwave patterns to collapse psychological boundaries. The process relies on extreme visual and auditory stimuli designed to induce powerful dream states; as Dr Wernicke states, "only a test subject who [has] witnessed enough horror [is] capable of activating the engine."¹¹⁴ Patients are further subjected to psychochemical agents and inserted into spherical fluid-filled chambers, their bodies connected to life support tubes and injected with precursor molecules.¹¹⁵ These molecules are then assembled by the patient's own cells into nanites, which are microscopic machines that transform them into a living host for the Walrider swarm. Those unable to endure this process suffer severe lesions and tumour-like growths, their bodies grotesquely reshaped for the sake of corporate ambition.¹¹⁶ The aim is to produce a controllable entity, the Walrider, a nanite swarm linked to a human host that could potentially act as a super soldier for military operations.¹¹⁷ *Whistleblower* is crucial here. While *Outlast* focuses on Miles' investigation, *Whistleblower* lifts the veil on Murkoff's corporate and scientific operations. It reveals that patients were dosed with psychochemicals, subjected to psychological torture, and systematically dehumanised in the name of profit.¹¹⁸ The documents, notes, and even dialogues experienced during gameplay suggest that death and madness were not accidents but collateral and budgeted for.¹¹⁹

2.3.2 Setting

It is not incidental that *Outlast* takes place within the walls of an abandoned psychiatric facility. Mount Massive Asylum is a system, not just a setting. Its design is pedagogical in itself: a lesson in claustrophobia and confusion. Unlike the open-world build of other games, here the player is funnelled through corridors, air vents, and locked wards that mimic the experience of containment.¹²⁰ The building folds in on itself like a labyrinth of control, constantly reminding the player that they are inside something designed to keep people in. Red Barrels intentionally designed *Outlast* and its sequel to evoke the sensation of confinement. Philippe Morin,

¹¹³ *Outlast* [in-game documents: "MKULTRA Program Excerpt," "Project Walrider Profitability Report"]; see Annex 1.1.3 and 1.1.4 for transcripts.

¹¹⁴ *Outlast*, "Wernicke Exit Interview"; see Annex 3.1.1 for transcript.

¹¹⁵ See Annex 4, Fig. 2 : William "Billy" Hope in the Morphogenic Engine.

¹¹⁶ *Outlast: Whistleblower*, "Lesser Known Ecological Aspects of Humanity"; see Annex 1.2.1 for transcript.

¹¹⁷ *Outlast Wiki*, 'Murkoff Corporation', *Outlast Wiki* (Fandom), <https://outlast.fandom.com/wiki/Murkoff_Corporation> accessed 24 June 2025.

¹¹⁸ *Outlast: Whistleblower*, "Lesser Known Ecological Aspects of Humanity".

¹¹⁹ *Outlast*, "Project Walrider Profitability Report".

¹²⁰ See Annex 4 , Fig. 3 : Corridors in Mount Massive Asylum.

co-founder of Red Barrels, described the games as “mak[ing] you feel like a rat in a maze, without any knowledge of what’s outside the maze,” signalling a deliberate move away from open environments to reinforce claustrophobic tension through level design.¹²¹

But this isn’t just about spatial anxiety. The architecture of the asylum reflects the moral architecture of the game’s universe, with doors locking behind you, elevators stalling, and stairways collapsing. There is no freedom of movement, only permission. And in *Outlast*, permission is given by power. The design of Mount Massive is a tutorial in disempowerment. The player, like Miles and Waylon, is made to feel watched and punished.

This sense of vulnerability is intensified by the game’s aesthetic choices. The entire experience unfolds in first-person perspective, heightening immersion and limiting the player’s field of vision to what the characters themselves can see.¹²² Crucially, the player has no weapons or means of physical defense; survival hinges on stealth, flight, and the limited use of a camcorder with night vision.¹²³ This camcorder viewfinder adds a voyeuristic texture to the visuals, emphasised by a desaturated colour palette that lends it a “found-footage” feel and mirrors the asylum’s decay and moral rot.¹²⁴

Sound design further amplifies the atmosphere. Eerie silence is interrupted by distant screams, creaking doors, and the heavy breathing of the player character, creating a soundscape that weaponises absence and uncertainty. The soundtrack is unsettling, relying on ambient noise and sporadic bursts of discordant music to unsettle.

Darkness becomes both a hiding place and a hazard. The game uses its environment to simulate the psychological effects of institutionalisation such as paranoia, helplessness, and the loss of orientation. Mount Massive never truly functioned as a place of healing. Rather, it masked institutional violence behind the veneer of care. Despite being a “charitable” psychiatric facility, there are few signs of care, highlighted by the patients’ cells, and the rooms covered

¹²¹ Philippe Morin, quoted in *Outlast 2* Wikipedia entry, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outlast_2> accessed 2 June 2025.

¹²² See Annex 4, Fig. 4: First person view of Trager in *Outlast*.

¹²³ *Outlast*, Prologue; see Annex 3.1.4 for transcript.

¹²⁴ See Annex 4, Fig. 5: Night vision view of camcorder in the Sewers.

in blood.¹²⁵ Its ruins only make visible what was always true: that patients here were subjects, just data points in a larger machinery of control and erasure.

Like all institutional spaces, the asylum is impersonal. But in *Outlast*, this impersonality is weaponised. The uniformity and “sterility” of the rooms, walls, and hallways strip the player of both orientation and identity. The various divisions in the asylum such as the Male Ward, Female Ward, Prison Block, Vocational Block, Recreation Area, etc., though labelled, offer no real variation in experience.¹²⁶ They are all interchangeable spaces of neglect and violence. The only part of the facility that appears maintained is the underground laboratory, where high-ranking Murkoff personnel operated and the most advanced stages of the Morphogenic Engine experiments took place.¹²⁷ This spatial hierarchy reveals the game's deeper message: care and cleanliness are reserved not for the vulnerable, but for the powerful. Architecture becomes a language of worth, and some lives are clearly worth more than others.

2.3.3 Character Sketches

Beyond Miles and Waylon, whose perspectives guide us through Mount Massive’s horrors, the *Outlast* universe teems with figures who refuse to be mere monsters or villains. Instead, they haunt the margins of institutional violence, systemic abuse, erasure, and capitalistic greed. Their relevance lies not in their realism but in their symbolic potential as agents of affective learning.

Chris Walker, often referred to as "Strongfat," is a towering ex-military figure whose violent behaviour stems from unresolved trauma and obsessive adherence to containment protocol.¹²⁸ His brutal actions throughout *Outlast*, including ripping heads off to prevent potential Walrider hosts, are driven not by sadism, but by a twisted sense of duty. His PTSD, amplified through dream therapy and psychochemical treatments, renders him both monstrous and tragic. Despite relentlessly hunting Miles, Walker's intentions seem protective for the greater good. Miles, while continually hiding and running from him, picks up on this¹²⁹ and even shows sympathy in his death- a far cry from his nonchalant cynicism.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ See Annex 4 , Fig. 6: Prison Block cells.

¹²⁶ See Annex 4, Fig. 7: Male Ward and Female Ward in Mount Massive Asylum.

¹²⁷ See Annex 4, Fig. 8: Underground laboratory.

¹²⁸ Petty and Bonami, *The Murkoff Account*, Part 1.

¹²⁹ *Outlast* [in-game note: “Total Security”]; see Annex 2.1.3 for transcript.

¹³⁰ *Outlast* [in-game note: “Death of the Soldier”]; see Annex 2.1.4 for transcript.

Father Martin Archimbaud sees himself not as a patient, but as a prophet of the Walrider. His faith, emerging from the wreckage of institutional neglect and failed therapy, is not ironic.¹³¹ His deteriorating mental state perceives the nanite technology as God.¹³² Martin reconfigures *Outlast*'s horror into sacred narrative, guiding Miles via blood-written scripture¹³³ and orchestrating his own crucifixion as a ritual offering.¹³⁴ In his eyes, Miles is not just a witness, but an anointed “apostle” who will spread the truth of the Gospel.¹³⁵

Trager is one of the most scarily coherent antagonists in *Outlast*. He is a former Murkoff executive turned deranged “surgeon,” whose madness is not a break from reality but its hyper-rational extension. Prior to his incarceration, Trager was the head of Business Development. Even in captivity, his obsession with profit persists, reimagining mutilation as efficiency: “cutting corners” becomes a literal practice.¹³⁶ He collects severed parts as “assets,” including Miles’ fingers, which he talks about selling.¹³⁷ Trager's fixation on biology, money, and power converge in his parody of medical care. Unlike other variants, he remains articulate, self-assured, and disturbingly charming, treating torture as customer service.

Nicknamed “The Groom,” Eddie Gluskin embodies a disturbing mix of charm and brutality. A serial killer with a wedding fixation, he stalks Waylon Park through *Whistleblower* in search of a “perfect bride”, which is a role he forces upon male victims through mutilation.¹³⁸ Beneath his courteous speech and crooned love songs lies a history of sexual abuse, denial, and obsession with traditional family ideals.¹³⁹ His interviews with Murkoff staff reveal delusion and deception. Gluskin invents idyllic childhood memories and feigns progress in the Morphogenic program, eager to tell his doctors what they want to hear.¹⁴⁰ Unlike other

¹³¹ *Outlast* [in-game document: “Father Martin, Finger Painter”]; see Annex 1.1.5 for transcript.

¹³² *Outlast* [in-game document: “The Gospel of Sand”]; see Annex 1.1.6 for transcript.

¹³³ See Annex 4 , Fig. 9: Father Martin’s messages written in blood on the walls. *Content warning: Graphic violence and gore.*

¹³⁴ *Outlast* [in-game document: “Our Own Personal Cavalry”]; see Annex 1.1.7 for transcript.

¹³⁵ *Outlast* [in-game document: “The Gospel of Judas”]; see Annex 1.1.8 for transcript.

¹³⁶ *Outlast* [in-game document: “Project Walrider Cost Report”]; see Annex 1.1.9 for transcript.

¹³⁷ Trager, dialogue, *Outlast*; see Annex 3.1.2 for transcript.

¹³⁸ *Outlast: Whistleblower* [in-game document: “The Groom”]; see Annex 1.2.2 for transcript.

¹³⁹ Eddie Gluskin, in-game dialogue, *Outlast: Whistleblower*; see Annex 3.2.1 for transcript.

¹⁴⁰ *Outlast: Whistleblower* [in-game document: “Project Walrider Patient Status Report of Eddie Gluskin”]; see Annex 1.2.9 for transcript.

Variants, Gluskin is not incoherent but driven by a warped moral logic. He desires love, legacy, and purity, even as he annihilates the bodies of those he claims to cherish.¹⁴¹

William “Billy” Hope, the first host of the Walrider, exemplifies Murkoff’s ruthless exploitation of vulnerable individuals. Unlike most asylum inmates, Billy was mentally stable before his mother sold him to Murkoff for financial gain.¹⁴² Subjected to the Morphogenic Engine, Billy became a violent vector for chaos, triggering the asylum’s downfall while trapped in a forced lucid dream to sustain the Walrider’s power.¹⁴³ His death, caused by disabling his life-support¹⁴⁴, transfers the Walrider’s destructive force to Miles Upshur, extending the cycle of trauma.

Within the *Outlast* universe, the term "Variant" is used to refer to the mutated and violent patients and test subjects who roam Mount Massive Asylum, embodying the consequences of Murkoff’s brutal experimentation and neglect.¹⁴⁵ Unlike the main characters who carry detailed backstories and individual motives, Variants primarily function both as obstacles and as haunting reminders of human suffering twisted by abuse. A key dynamic in their interaction with the protagonists lies in appearance. Miles Upshur, dressed as an outsider investigating the asylum, is frequently mistaken for Murkoff personnel.¹⁴⁶ This triggers immediate aggression from most Variants. In stark contrast, Waylon Park’s patient clothing grants him invisibility. Despite his actual role as a Murkoff employee, Variants often treat him with less/no hostility. This ironic reversal highlights how survival in Mount Massive depends heavily on surface identities, as perceived by others.

Among the most notable Variants is Frank Manera, a sadistic cannibal who chases Waylon with a chainsaw in the first half of *Whistleblower*.¹⁴⁷ His physical deterioration and obsessive dream states, that are fixated on consuming blood from the chests of sleeping men, expose the

¹⁴¹ See Annex 4, Fig. 10:Gluskin’s “surgical chamber”. *Content Warning: Graphic violence and body horror.*

¹⁴² Petty and Bonami, *The Murkoff Account*, Part 3, 21.

¹⁴³ *Outlast* [in-game document: “Project Walrider Patient Status Report for William Hope”]; see Annex 1.1.10 for transcript.

¹⁴⁴ Wernicke, dialogue, *Outlast*; see Annex 3.1.3 for transcript.

¹⁴⁵ Variant, in-game dialogue, *Outlast*; see Annex 3.1.5 for transcript.

¹⁴⁶ Variant, dialogue, *Outlast*; see Annex 3.1.6 for transcript.

¹⁴⁷ Frank Manera, in-game dialogue, *Outlast: Whistleblower*; see Annex 3.2.2 for transcript. *Content Warning: Graphic violence and cannibalism.*

sickening desires that the Morphogenic Engine not only fails to suppress but dangerously amplifies.¹⁴⁸

The Twins, conjoined siblings who stalk both Miles and Waylon with synchrony, wield a sardonic wit that renders them all the more disturbing.¹⁴⁹ Though they initially express violent intent toward Miles, their eventual restraint reveals their allegiance to Father Martin.¹⁵⁰ This reframes them as agents within a warped spiritual hierarchy, instead of mere killers.

Miles encounters a strikingly unique Variant, referred to as the Pyromaniac, in *Outlast* while trying to exit the compound to meet Father Martin. He sits in the middle of the room that he lit on fire, waiting patiently for his death. Unlike most Variants, the Pyromaniac articulates his rage with clarity. His arson is not a random act of violence, but a conscious act of protest against Murkoff's abuse and society's neglect of the institutionalised.¹⁵¹

Finally, Dennis, a Variant with dissociative identity disorder, provides a chilling portrait of fractured identity. He leads the player, like many patients before, to Eddie Gluskin, showing his role as a dangerous intermediary.¹⁵² However, as a patient, he is no exception to Murkoff's exploitation and negligence. His medical condition was discarded as malingering, and he was subjected to continual shock therapy.¹⁵³

Though Variants lack the narrative depth of key characters, their function as embodiments of violence, mental illness, and corporeal horror makes them essential pedagogical provocateurs. Through their varied forms of demeanour, they reveal the multiple dimensions of dehumanization and resistance throughout *Outlast*'s narrative.¹⁵⁴

Jeremy Blaire, Murkoff's Executive Vice President and head of Mount Massive Asylum, is a ruthless and sadistic corporate overseer dedicated to keeping the Morphogenic Engine

¹⁴⁸ *Outlast: Whistleblower* [in-game document: "Project Walrider Patient Status Report for Frank Manera"]; see Annex 1.2.3 for transcript.

¹⁴⁹ The Twins, in-game dialogue, *Outlast*; see Annex 3.1.7 for transcript.

¹⁵⁰ The Twins, dialogue, *Outlast*; see Annex 3.1.8 for transcript.

¹⁵¹ Pyromaniac, in-game dialogue, *Outlast*; see Annex 3.1.9 for transcript.

¹⁵² Dennis, in-game dialogue, *Outlast: Whistleblower*; see Annex 3.2.3 for transcript.

¹⁵³ *Outlast: Whistleblower* [in-game document: "Patient Dennis"]; see Annex 1.2.4 for transcript.

¹⁵⁴ *Outlast: Whistleblower* [in-game note: "Varying Effects"]; see Annex 2.2.4 for transcript.

experiments secret at any cost.¹⁵⁵ He mocks and violently suppresses whistleblowers like Waylon Park, personally assaulting him to maintain control.¹⁵⁶ Though physically capable and dangerously cunning, Blaire ultimately fails and is killed by the Walrider - an ironic, but fitting death.

Dr. Rudolf Wernicke, a Nazi scientist brought to the U.S. under Operation Paperclip¹⁵⁷, is officially dead, as per a legal document from 2009.¹⁵⁸ However, in reality, he was quietly recruited by Murkoff to lead Project Walrider and oversee the Morphogenic Engine experiments at Mount Massive Asylum.¹⁵⁹ Known for his pragmatism, he warns of the folly in trying to control such powerful nanotechnology but continues the experiments driven by profit.¹⁶⁰ Despite brief appearances, Wernicke is portrayed as a pessimistic and calculating figure who attempts to contain the Walrider threat by instructing Miles Upshur to end the entity's host¹⁶¹, only to later attempt silencing Miles himself. He is presumably dead, as it's implied he falls victim to the very forces he helped unleash.

Simon Peacock is a former Murkoff employee/test subject who later becomes an independent journalist and founder of VIRALeaks, dedicated to exposing the corporation's unethical experiments.¹⁶² Haunted by his past involvement, Peacock risks his safety to reveal Murkoff's abuses and provides critical information to whistleblowers like Waylon Park. Despite being targeted by Murkoff agents, he evades capture and uses manipulation and leverage to further his mission.¹⁶³ Peacock operates from the margins and is a liminal figure whose insider knowledge and outsider tactics make him a threat to Murkoff.

Together, these figures embody the complex interplay of trauma, power, and dehumanization that defines the Mount Massive Asylum. Their fractured psyches and moral corruption illuminate the devastating human cost behind Murkoff's relentless pursuit of profit and control. This, thereby, sets the stage for a deeper exploration of *Outlast*'s themes.

¹⁵⁵ *Outlast: Whistleblower* [in-game note: "Jeremy Blaire"]; see Annex 2.2.5 for transcript.

¹⁵⁶ Jeremy Blaire, in-game dialogue, *Outlast: Whistleblower*; see Annex 3.2.4 and 3.2.5 for transcripts.

¹⁵⁷ *Outlast* [in-game document: "Project Paperclip Excerpt"]; see Annex 1.1.11 for transcript.

¹⁵⁸ *Outlast* [in-game document: "Dr. Wernicke Death Certificate"]; see Annex 1.1.12 for transcript.

¹⁵⁹ Variant, dialogue, *Outlast*; see Annex 3.1.10 for transcript.

¹⁶⁰ Wernicke, dialogue, *Outlast*; see Annex 3.1.3 for transcript.

¹⁶¹ Wernicke, dialogue, *Outlast*.

¹⁶² Petty and Bonami, *The Murkoff Account*, Part 4, 11.

¹⁶³ Petty and Bonami, *The Murkoff Account*, Parts 4 and 5.

Chapter 3: Thematic and Pedagogical Analysis of *Outlast* and *Whistleblower*

Video games are often dismissed as mere entertainment, yet what if they could do much more? What if they could serve as immersive spaces where human rights violations are felt and critically examined? *Outlast* and its DLC, *Whistleblower*, provide a powerful site for such exploration. This chapter analyses *Outlast* and *Whistleblower* along two dimensions - thematic and pedagogical - thereby examining how their narrative, aesthetics, and mechanics embed human rights themes and ethical learning. As Felisa Tibbitts emphasises, human rights education must go beyond raising awareness; it must cultivate critical reflection and inspire transformative responses.¹⁶⁴ Without this, can education truly empower learners to confront and challenge injustice? By unpacking the themes within *Outlast*, this chapter lays the groundwork for understanding the pedagogical potential of the game.

3.1 Potential Meanings and Allegories

3.1.1 Asylum-Industrial Complex as Metaphor

At first glance, the Mount Massive Asylum in *Outlast* appears as a classic horror backdrop: dark corridors, shadowy figures, and gory violence. However, beneath the surface lurks a profound allegory that critiques an entire system of control and dehumanisation. Drawing inspiration from the concept of the prison-industrial complex¹⁶⁵, this thesis proposes the term “asylum-industrial complex” to describe the profit-driven entanglement of private healthcare, psychiatric institutionalisation, and the marginalisation of individuals deemed mentally “unfit.” In *Outlast*, the asylum functions not as a space of healing, but as a corporate laboratory in which bodies are manipulated for research, profit, and control.¹⁶⁶

The Murkoff Corporation’s control over the facility shows how privatisation of care often amplifies harm rather than alleviates suffering. Patients are treated as expendable data points and experimental subjects, not as rights-bearing individuals.¹⁶⁷ This portrayal reflects real-world critiques of privatised mental health institutions, where the prioritisation of cost-

¹⁶⁴ Felisa Tibbitts, “Human Rights Education,” in *Encyclopedia of Peace Education*, ed. Monisha Bajaj (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2008) 99 - 108, here 103.

¹⁶⁵ Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 84 - 104.

¹⁶⁶ *Outlast* [in-game note: “I’m Inside”] see Annex 2.1.5 for transcript.

¹⁶⁷ *Outlast*, “Project Walrider Profitability Report”; see Annex 1.1.4 for transcript; Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage, 1988).

efficiency frequently leads to neglect, forced treatment, and denial of agency.¹⁶⁸ The experimentation and brutal conditions depicted in the game may seem far-fetched, yet they resonate with documented abuses in many institutional settings worldwide.

Connecting this allegory to human rights law, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is particularly instructive. The CRPD explicitly condemns the institutionalisation of persons with disabilities and affirms their rights to autonomy, legal capacity, and health without coercion. In *Outlast*, these protections are stripped away at every turn, in direct contradiction to Article 12 (Equal Recognition Before The Law) Article 15 (Freedom From Torture or Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment), Article 16 (Freedom from Exploitation, Violence and Abuse), Article 17 (Protecting The Integrity of the Person) and Article 25 (Health).¹⁶⁹ This portrayal highlights the persistent gap between international human rights standards and lived realities. The denial of legal capacity and bodily autonomy within *Outlast*'s asylum¹⁷⁰ allegorises a societal failure to respect the inherent dignity of persons labelled as disabled or mentally ill.

Furthermore, the “asylum-industrial complex” metaphor reveals how “invisibilisation” operates as a form of structural violence.¹⁷¹ Those confined within Mount Massive are effectively erased from public view, their suffering hidden behind corporate secrecy.¹⁷² This erasure reflects real-world tendencies to marginalise vulnerable populations, rendering them invisible to society and justice mechanisms alike. Therefore, the game’s immersive horror becomes a form of critical exposure that invites players to confront the systemic abuses that are often overlooked.

3.1.2 Power and Surveillance

From the moment Miles Upshur steps through Mount Massive’s gates, the player is plunged into a regime of near-constant surveillance, with cameras tracking every inch of the place. Even the so-called “therapy” is mechanised and administered with electricity and algorithm. What emerges is a chilling portrayal of what Michel Foucault called “disciplinary institutions”: social structures designed to train individuals through specific techniques of power, aiming to create

¹⁶⁸ Erving Goffman, *Asylums* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961).

¹⁶⁹ United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, 2006, arts 12, 15, 16, 17 and 25.

¹⁷⁰ Variant, dialogue, *Outlast*; see Annex 3.1.5 for transcript.

¹⁷¹ Pyromaniac, dialogue, *Outlast*; see Annex 3.1.9 for transcript.

¹⁷² *Outlast*, “Project Walrider Profitability Report”.

“docile bodies” that are unconditionally obedient.¹⁷³ The asylum becomes a laboratory for biopower.¹⁷⁴

Murkoff’s obsession with documentation and “treatment outcomes” reveals the logic of a panoptic institution where the possibility of being watched is enough to ensure submission. Echoing Foucault’s reading of Bentham’s panopticon, *Outlast*’s asylum thrives on the internalisation of power where patients are restrained both physically and existentially.¹⁷⁵ Some comply out of fear and desperation¹⁷⁶ while others, broken by invasive procedures and the Morphogenic Engine, no longer remember what resistance would mean.¹⁷⁷ In either case, the body is no longer sovereign; it is a specimen.

At the helm of this machinery is Dr. Rudolf Wernicke whose presence in the game is more than fictional horror. It gestures toward real-world historical alliances between state power and scientific abuse. In *Outlast*, Wernicke is a symbol of institutionalised moral decay. Can scientific expertise, stripped of ethical responsibility, be distinguishable from complicity? His authority flows from institutional sanction, echoing Arendt’s notion of the banality of evil.¹⁷⁸ Through him, Murkoff inherits the long, dark legacy of state-scientific complicity. This ranges from eugenics to involuntary sterilisation and MKUltra experiments.

3.1.3 Real-World Parallels

Outlast’s most harrowing power lies in its chilling realism. The horrors it portrays are not distant fiction, but echoes of documented atrocities. The Morphogenic Engine, with its mind-control frequencies and mutilative procedures, alludes directly to MKUltra, the CIA’s covert mind-control programme that experimented with LSD, electro-shock and sensory deprivation on unwitting subjects.¹⁷⁹ Predecessor programmes like Project Bluebird and

¹⁷³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 138 - 169.

¹⁷⁴ Wernicke, dialogue, *Outlast*; see Annex 3.1.3 for transcript.

¹⁷⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195 - 228.

¹⁷⁶ Variant, dialogue, *Outlast*.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Penguin Books, 2006).

¹⁷⁹ Stephen Kinzer, *Poisoner in Chief: Sidney Gottlieb and the CIA Search for Mind Control* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2019).

Artichoke laid the groundwork for decades of clandestine torture as “interrogation techniques” in the name of national security.¹⁸⁰

Across Europe, state-sanctioned experiments took darker turns. Under Aktion T4, Nazi doctors murdered persons with disabilities under the guise of “healthcare” and bureaucratic efficiency.¹⁸¹ Even after the war, psychiatric wards continued forced sterilisation, long-term isolation, and unethical treatments.¹⁸²

Further reinforcing this lineage of violence, the visual design of the Variants in *Outlast* and *Whistleblower* - shaved heads, starved frames, uniform-like patient clothing - evokes harrowing images of prisoners in Nazi concentration camps. Their stripped individuality and reduction to mere experimental bodies recall the dehumanising logic of the Holocaust. Dr. Rudolf Wernicke’s background as a Nazi scientist anchors these aesthetics in a documented history of medicalized cruelty. By foregrounding these references, *Outlast* compels players to confront how easily modern institutions can inherit and adapt such brutal legacies.

In the United States, the Tuskegee Syphilis Study (1932–1972) exposed how racial hierarchy and medical authority could combine into grave injustice. Hundreds of Black men were denied treatment and information so that syphilis could be observed untreated.¹⁸³ While playing *Outlast*, Miles comes across a patient who whimpers, “They made me do it... They said they had debts, things to pay. My medicines, without insurance.” The dialogue demonstrates how economic precarity, like in the Tuskegee Study, is weaponised to coerce participation. Meanwhile, early-2000s CIA black sites became modern chambers of torture. Waterboarding, prolonged isolation, and psychological terror were justified under euphemisms like “enhanced interrogation.”¹⁸⁴ In each case, medical or scientific processes were weaponised, undercutting informed consent and bodily integrity. This directly goes against Articles 1 and 2 of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or

¹⁸⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, *Project BLUEBIRD: Interrogation Techniques* (declassified memorandum, 1950), CIA Reading Room, <<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP83-01042R000800010003-1.pdf>> accessed 15 June 2025.

¹⁸¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Aktion T4: The Nazi Euthanasia Program*.

¹⁸² John Foot, *The Man Who Closed the Asylums* (London: Verso, 2015).

¹⁸³ Susan M. Reverby, *Examining Tuskegee* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2009).

¹⁸⁴ U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Study of the CIA’s Detention and Interrogation Program* (2014).

Punishment,¹⁸⁵ and Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.¹⁸⁶ *Outlast* collapses these moments into one chilling narrative where a corporate site masquerades as a hospital and bodies become raw data.

3.2 Realism or Speculation?

3.2.1 The Hyperreal Horror

The horror of *Outlast* is often dismissed as too extreme to be taken seriously. Walls splattered with blood, patients reduced to frenzy and gore galore. Surely this is an exaggeration. But is it? The game's impact lies in its ambiguous realism. This essentially means that while it appears implausible, it manages to feel disturbingly familiar. The aesthetic is not speculative fantasy, but rather what Jean Baudrillard would call hyperreality. It is a simulation that is "more real than the real," and the line between fact and fiction dissolves.¹⁸⁷

Baudrillard argued that contemporary media doesn't reflect reality but replaces it, manufacturing simulations that feel more authentic than lived experience.¹⁸⁸ *Outlast* stages this process brilliantly. It bombards the player with imagery so excessive that it seems implausible. And yet, it draws from documented atrocities. The lack of consent and the medical torture are all disturbingly real. If *Outlast* seems "unbelievable," it is because the real world has already normalised the unbelievable. The horror is just an amplification of what already exists.

One of the most striking ways *Outlast* blurs the line between reality and simulation is through its use of the found footage aesthetic, captured through the protagonist's handheld camcorder. This mechanic is more than a visual gimmick. It is central to the game's simulation of witnessing. By forcing the player to view much of the horror through the lens of a recording device, the game mimics documentary realism, invoking the stylistic tropes of war journalism, undercover exposés, and vérité horror. What the player sees, and chooses to record, reflects the ethic of observation. In this way, *Outlast* weaponises hyperreality.

¹⁸⁵ Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (adopted 10 December 1984, entered into force 26 June 1987) 1465 UNTS 85, arts 1 - 2.

¹⁸⁶ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171, art 7.

¹⁸⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.

¹⁸⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 6 - 7.

3.2.2 Ethics Code Born from Atrocity

In the aftermath of World War II, the world was confronted with the unspeakable abuses of Nazi doctors - experiments without consent, sterilisation campaigns, and deliberate infliction of suffering in the name of scientific advancement. The response was the Nuremberg Code (1947), a watershed document that declared, unequivocally, that “the voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential.”¹⁸⁹ In *Outlast*, these hard-won principles are violated with surgical precision. Patients are subjected to experimental procedures with neither disclosure nor consent in the name of “therapy.” For instance, one document reads: “Violence among patients is increasing as the Morphogenic Engine Therapy gets closer to producing working models... control and profit remain assured.”¹⁹⁰ The terminology recalls bureaucratic medical cruelty where human beings are treated as data points.

Yet even as this principle became the moral bedrock of modern medicine, state complicity in unethical science persisted. *Project Paperclip*, launched in the same postwar period, saw the U.S. government secretly recruit over 1,600 Nazi scientists to work in American institutions, bypassing accountability in the name of Cold War advancement.¹⁹¹ This project is referenced in *Outlast* and is the bedrock of Wernicke’s employment in Murkoff. The U.S. government in *Outlast* grants him asylum and access, mirroring how real Operation Paperclip scientists were shielded from justice.¹⁹²

The betrayal of Nuremberg’s spirit necessitated further intervention. In 1964, the World Medical Association adopted the Declaration of Helsinki, establishing more robust principles for research involving human subjects.¹⁹³ It emphasised consent, independent ethical review and the primacy of the subject’s welfare over scientific interest. Still, abuses continued. The infamous Tuskegee Study ran until 1972 - long after both Nuremberg and Helsinki. The Belmont Report (1979) followed, outlining the three core principles of modern bioethics: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.¹⁹⁴ These principles would later be formalised and

¹⁸⁹ *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals under Control Council Law No. 10*, Vol. 2 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1949), “Nuremberg Code”.

¹⁹⁰ *Outlast*, “Project Walrider Profitability Report”; see Annex 1.1.4 for transcript.

¹⁹¹ Annie Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip: The Secret Intelligence Program That Brought Nazi Scientists to America* (New York: Little, Brown, 2014).

¹⁹² *Outlast* [in-game document: “Project Paperclip Excerpt”]; see Annex 1.1.11 for transcript.

¹⁹³ *World Medical Association, Declaration of Helsinki – Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects* (1964, last revised 2013).

¹⁹⁴ *The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, The Belmont Report* (Washington, DC: US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979).

expanded through the influential work of Beauchamp and Childress in the book “Principles of Biomedical Ethics” (1979).¹⁹⁵ This consolidated respect for autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice as the cardinal pillars of biomedical ethics.

Over time, these ethical imperatives were codified into legal frameworks, transforming bioethics into biolaw. Landmark instruments include Article 7 of the ICCPR (1966)¹⁹⁶, the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (Oviedo Convention, 1997)¹⁹⁷, and the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (2005)¹⁹⁸. In this way, ethical codes once born from atrocity evolved into enforceable international legal commitments.

Outlast's fictional universe exposes the fragility of these principles when confronted with power and profit. The horrors of Mount Massive Asylum are not merely speculative. They are examples of what happens when ethics are drafted only after harm has occurred.

3.3 Specific Human Rights Themes in *Outlast*

3.3.1 Medical Experimentation and Bodily Autonomy

In *Outlast: Whistleblower*, the violation of bodily autonomy is bureaucratically sanctioned. Consider the pivotal moment when Waylon Park is confronted by Murkoff executive Jeremy Blaire after being discovered as the source of the leak. What follows is a performance of corporate coercion:

Blaire: "I'm afraid that we're going to have you committed. Mr. Park, will you willingly submit to forced confinement? Did you hear that, agent?"

Security Guard: "He said *yes*, Mr. Blaire."

Blaire: "Great. Oh, and...Did I just hear Mr. Waylon Park volunteer for the Morphogenic Engine program?"

Security Guard: "That's what I heard, Mr. Blaire."

¹⁹⁵ Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (Oxford University Press 1979)

¹⁹⁶ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171, art 7.

¹⁹⁷ Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Dignity of the Human Being with regard to the Application of Biology and Medicine (adopted 4 April 1997, entered into force 1 December 1999) ETS No 164 (Oviedo Convention).

¹⁹⁸ Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (adopted 19 October 2005) UNESCO Doc SHS/EST/05/CONF.204/CLD.1.

Blaire: "That was brave, indeed, Waylon. The Murkoff Corporation and the onward march of science both appreciate your bravery and sacrifice. Maybe you could administer Mr. Park here a light anesthetic?"

Security Guard: "Gladly."

(Waylon Park is then punched unconscious.)

What we witness here is a commentary on how systems of power falsify agency. Blaire's mocking tone emphasises the theatricality of informed consent within the asylum. Shortly after, Blaire sends a corporate memo reframing Park's "resignation" as a symptom of mental illness, and blatantly threatening his family with crippling medical debt should they choose to challenge Murkoff's narrative.¹⁹⁹ What is this if not a case study in the erasure of agency through bureaucratic sleight-of-hand?

The single line, "The Murkoff Corporation and the onward march of science both appreciate your bravery and sacrifice" echoes the darkest chapters in medical history. Consider the Guatemala syphilis experiments (1946–48), in which U.S. researchers deliberately infected over 1,300 unwitting subjects (including psychiatric patients and prisoners) with syphilis and gonorrhoea.²⁰⁰ These experiments abandoned informed consent, prioritising data over dignity. In Holmesburg Prison (1951–74), Dr. Albert Kligman used inmates as "acres of skin" for chemical and dermatological tests. The resulting dioxin exposures infamously left prisoners scarred or sick, yet the experiments continued under official sanction.²⁰¹ In the "Monster Study" (1939), researchers at the University of Iowa induced stuttering in orphaned children by cruelly criticising their speech.²⁰² During the Cold War, Operation Sea-Spray (1950) saw the U.S. military release *Serratia marcescens* bacteria over San Francisco, poisoning citizens and killing at least one person, all in the name of bioweapons research.²⁰³ These betrayals of

¹⁹⁹ *Outlast: Whistleblower* [in-game document: "Resignation of Waylon Park"]; see Annex 1.2.5 for transcript.

²⁰⁰ Susan M. Reverby, "'Normal Exposure' and Inoculation Syphilis: A PHS 'Tuskegee' Doctor in Guatemala, 1946–48", *Journal of Policy History*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2011), 6 - 28.

²⁰¹ Allen M. Hornblum, *Acres of Skin: Human Experiments at Holmesburg Prison* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

²⁰² Meghan, "The Monster Study: How Doctors Tortured Orphans in the Name of Medicine," *CVLT Nation*, 18 July 2024, <<https://cvltnation.com/the-monster-study-how-doctors-tortured-orphans-in-the-name-of-medicine/>> accessed 20 June 2025.

²⁰³ Helen Thompson, "In 1950, the U.S. Released a Bioweapon in San Francisco," *Smithsonian Magazine*, 6 July 2015, <<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/1950-us-released-bioweapon-san-francisco-180955819/>> accessed 20 June 2025.

bodily autonomy were systematically justified by institutional power and scientific rationalisation. They demonstrate how vulnerable bodies are repeatedly treated as resources for “progress.”

Inside Mount Massive Asylum, patients are subjected to inhuman forms of experimentation: lobotomies, shock therapy, hormone interference, and psychochemical injections that leave their bodies deformed, combustible, and broken.²⁰⁴ The documents speak of female employees experiencing fatal psychosomatic pregnancies,²⁰⁵ of patients like Dennis, misdiagnosed and electroshocked due to disbelief in their condition,²⁰⁶ and of “scientific” justifications for mutilation couched in corporate language.²⁰⁷

All of this contravenes the standards set by international instruments. Article 7 of the ICCPR (1966) prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.²⁰⁸ Articles 1 and 2 of the Convention Against Torture (1984) reinforce this absolute prohibition.²⁰⁹ The Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (1997) further demands primacy of the human being over the interests of science or society, emphasising informed consent and protection of dignity.²¹⁰ Articles 15, 16, and 25 of the CRPD (2006) prohibit medical or scientific experimentation without free and informed consent, demand protection from all forms of exploitation and abuse, and mandate non-discriminatory, respectful health care.²¹¹ Finally, Article 6 of the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (2005) reiterates that autonomy and dignity are non-negotiable. Consent must be prior, free, and informed.²¹² Yet in *Outlast*, the very language of medicine becomes a smokescreen for systemic harm.

²⁰⁴ *Outlast: Whistleblower* [in-game documents: “Lesser Known Ecological Aspects of Humanity”, “God and Family”]; *Outlast* [in-game documents: “Variant Postmortem”; “You Promised Me A Rose Garden”, “MKULTRA Program Excerpt”]; see Annex 1.2.1, 1.2.6, 1.1.15, 1.1.16 and 1.1.3 for transcripts.

²⁰⁵ *Outlast: Whistleblower* [in-game document: “Miscarried Profits”]; see Annex 1.2.7 for transcript.

²⁰⁶ *Outlast: Whistleblower*, “Patient Dennis”; see Annex 1.2.4 for transcript.

²⁰⁷ *Outlast: Whistleblower* [in-game document: “Three Blind Dreamers”]; see Annex 1.2.8 for transcript.

²⁰⁸ ICCPR, art 7.

²⁰⁹ Convention against Torture, arts 1–2.

²¹⁰ Oviedo Convention.

²¹¹ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (adopted 13 December 2006, entered into force 3 May 2008) 2515 UNTS 3, arts 15, 16, 25.

²¹² Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights, art 6.

What makes *Outlast* all the more disturbing is not just the violence itself, but the fact that it is systematised and rendered profitable. At Mount Massive, the scalpel is not held by doctors but by corporate ambition. The patient is no longer a person, just a resource.

3.3.2 Torture of Individuals and Violence Against Women

In *Outlast* and *Whistleblower*, some of the most harrowing depictions of violence are not orchestrated by the faceless institution of Murkoff, but by individuals who have internalised and reproduced its logic. Figures like Richard Trager and Eddie Gluskin are products of a dehumanising system that sees bodies as disposable. This raises the question: what happens when human beings are perceived as raw material for experimentation or profit?

What makes the arcs of Trager and Gluskin especially unsettling is the pervasive misogyny that operates even in the total absence of female characters. This is a game filled with men, and yet violence against women spills into the narrative. Trager's backstory reveals that he raped his female colleague Michelle Haas and coerced her into an abortion under the threat of termination.²¹³ Additionally, he spikes the mitigation team head Pauline Glick's drink with Rohypnol after a dinner, presumably for sexual assault.²¹⁴ When exposed, he calls Haas and Glick "lying bitches" and violently stabs Haas in the stomach²¹⁵ - an act that literalises male violence against reproductive bodies. He is then seamlessly absorbed into the Murkoff asylum as a patient and his actions are rendered invisible by institutional coverup.²¹⁶ Even as an inmate, Trager's language remains gendered in its cruelty. His mutilation rituals, though inflicted on male bodies, follow a disturbingly symbolic sequence: "Fingers first, then balls, then tongue."²¹⁷ It is dismemberment as castration, and an act of dominance that exposes the entanglement of gender and pain.

Eddie Gluskin also embodies a warped form of masculinity that seeks to dominate and possess. Traumatized by sexual abuse at the hands of his father and uncle in his childhood, Gluskin re-narrates his past through fantasies of marital bliss and fatherhood. Before institutionalisation,

²¹³ Petty and Bonami, *The Murkoff Account*, Part 2, 16.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

²¹⁷ *Outlast* [in-game note: "Organized Torture"]; see Annex 2.1.6 for transcript.

he was already a misogynistic serial killer.²¹⁸ After exposure to the Morphogenic Engine, he becomes something even more monstrous: a murderer who reconfigures male bodies into mutilated “brides” to fulfil a fantasy of heterosexual domesticity.²¹⁹ “Whatever story he’s telling himself,” Waylon Park writes in his notes, “he’s not making women to bear his children, he’s making women to kill them.”²²⁰ The game offers no real women, but Gluskin’s violence is nonetheless gendered. His obsession with domesticity²²¹, his disgust at rejection²²² and his inability to see women as anything other than vessels for his legacy²²³ echo real-world patterns of femicide and coercive control. And in the absence of actual women, these patriarchal fantasies metastasise. Gluskin redirects his misogyny onto the bodies of men. He warps them into impossible ideals and then punishes them for failing to fulfill his vision.²²⁴

These visual motifs - mutilated “brides”, a makeshift altar, a constructed birth scene, and mannequins dressed in wedding attire - are not included for their shock value, but because they lay bare the symbolic infrastructure of Gluskin’s violence. As Julia Kristeva argues, the abject is that which “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules”.²²⁵ In *Whistleblower*, the abject manifests not only as graphic bodily harm, but as the symbolic collapse of gender and the consequences of its reconstruction. Through Gluskin’s staged tableaux of love and legacy, *Outlast* critiques how patriarchal violence thrives even in the absence of women. It lives in the stories men tell themselves, and the bodies they destroy to make those stories real.

3.3.3 Corporate Accountability

The Murkoff Corporation in *Outlast* stands as a stark parallel to real multinational corporations implicated in grave human rights abuses. Murkoff embodies the perils of corporate overreach when profit-driven motives override ethical constraints.

²¹⁸ *Outlast: Whistleblower*, “Project Walrider Patient Status Report Of Eddie Gluskin”; see Annex 1.2.9 for transcript.

²¹⁹ See Annex 4, Fig. 10: Gluskin’s Domain. *Content Warning: Graphic mutilation, gendered body horror, and representations of sexual violence.*

²²⁰ *Outlast: Whistleblower* [in-game note: “Blue Beard’s Wives”]; see Annex 2.2.6 for transcript.

²²¹ Gluskin, dialogue, *Outlast: Whistleblower*; see Annex 3.2.1 for transcript.

²²² *Ibid.*, see Annex 3.2.6 for transcript.

²²³ *Ibid.*, see Annex 3.2.7 for transcript.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, see Annex 3.2.6 for transcript.

²²⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 4.

In *Outlast*, the reduction of patients to expendable test subjects reflects historical and ongoing patterns in which corporate entities exploit vulnerable populations for economic gain. This commodification of human bodies mirrors documented instances where corporations and states collude to obscure accountability through complex legal structures and political influence.²²⁶

As Miles Upshur notes in *Outlast*, "Murkoff's longtime M.O. has been to profit off the exploitation of supposed charity. Fuck the third world and bankroll another billion".²²⁷ This reflects a common practice among real-world pharmaceutical and biotechnological giants that conduct exploitative trials in the Global South under the pretext of "charitable" medical intervention. A real world instance of this would be Pfizer's 1996 Trovan clinical trial in Nigeria, where children were subjected to unconsented drug experiments leading to deaths and disabilities.²²⁸

In *Whistleblower*, Waylon Park confronts the moral bankruptcy of Murkoff's profit-driven experimentation, describing it as "inhumane bullshit greed-driven moral genocide".²²⁹ The "Project Walrider Profitability Report" document from *Outlast* further confirms that every violent experiment is financially quantified, with patient suffering weighed against future earnings.²³⁰ In the Murkoff Comics, the Mitigation Department is described as damage control designed to "minimise economic fallout". They are not there to protect lives or uphold ethics; "they are here to make sure it doesn't cost the company any more than it has to."²³¹ Similarly, Johnson & Johnson's protracted litigation over talcum powder's alleged carcinogenic effects highlights how companies often prioritize reputation over transparency and victim justice.²³²

Furthermore, documents such as "Miscarried Profits" and "Beyond Hope" from *Whistleblower* show how Murkoff sees employees and patients alike as disposable experimental fodder.²³³

²²⁶ Ruggie, John. *Just Business: Multinational Corporations and Human Rights* (W.W. Norton, 2013).

²²⁷ *Outlast*, "I'm Inside"; see Annex 2.1.5 for transcript.

²²⁸ Jeanne Lenzer, "Secret report surfaces showing that Pfizer was at fault in Nigerian drug tests," *BMJ* (2006), <<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1471980/>> accessed 20 June 2025.

²²⁹ *Outlast: Whistleblower* [in-game note: "Down, Down, Down"]; see Annex 2.2.7 for transcript.

²³⁰ *Outlast*, "Project Walrider Profitability Report"; see Annex 1.1.4 for transcript.

²³¹ Petty and Bonami, *The Murkoff Account*.

²³² In re Johnson & Johnson Talcum Powder Products Marketing, Sales Practices and Products Liability Litigation, MDL No. 2738, Transfer Order (J.P.M.L. 15 December 2020), <<https://www.jpml.uscourts.gov/sites/jpml/files/MDL-2738-Tag-Along-Transfer-12-20.pdf>> accessed 20 June 2025.

²³³ *Outlast: Whistleblower* [in-game document: "Beyond Hope"]; see Annex 1.2.10 for transcript.

Jeremy Blaire even speculates about future uses for women's bodies to maximise profits- even if it's fatal.²³⁴ The fact that Billy Hope's mother was paid a premium to hand over her "healthy" son for experimentation reveals a chilling commodification of human life, mirroring real cases where economically vulnerable families are coerced into clinical trials with financial incentives.²³⁵

International legal frameworks have increasingly sought to address this accountability gap. The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council in 2011, establish that corporations bear a responsibility to respect human rights, avoid complicity in abuses, and provide remedy where harm occurs.²³⁶ However, this is just an example of the various soft-law documents concerning business and human rights. While non-binding, such guidelines represent a significant step towards laying down corporate duties beyond profit maximisation.

Despite this, enforcement remains patchy, with many corporations continuing to evade liability via legal loopholes. The infamous case of Shell's complicity in human rights abuses in the Niger Delta illustrates how corporate actors manipulate such gaps to their advantage.²³⁷

Ultimately, through its portrayal of Murkoff, *Outlast* offers a powerful critique of capitalist systems that prioritize profit over human dignity, revealing the devastating human cost of unchecked corporate power.²³⁸

3.3.4 Whistleblowing and Freedom of Expression

In the universe of *Outlast*, Waylon Park and Miles Upshur stand as the rare figures who choose conscience over complicity. They risk everything to expose the abuses festering behind Mount Massive. Their arcs are embodiments of the human right to report abuse, enshrined in international law yet imperilled by retaliation.

²³⁴ *Outlast: Whistleblower*, "Miscarried Profits"; see Annex 1.2.7 for transcript.

²³⁵ Petty and Bonami, *The Murkoff Account*, Part 3, 21.

²³⁶ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights* (2011).

²³⁷ Amnesty International, "Nigeria: Shell Must Be Held Fully Accountable for Human Rights Harms Before Being Allowed to Sell Its Niger Delta Business," *Amnesty International*, 6 May 2024, <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/05/nigeria-shell-must-be-held-fully-accountable-for-human-rights-harms-before-being-allowed-to-sell-its-niger-delta-business/>> accessed 20 June 2025.

²³⁸ Harvey, David. *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* (Profile Books, 2010)

The game renders this tension with suffocating clarity. When Miles, after gathering horrifying evidence, attempts to leave, he is gunned down by Murkoff Hardline Security (M.H.S) on Wernicke's command as a final act to ensure containment.²³⁹ The M.H.S force is not a rogue group of violent enforcers but a legally sanctioned paramilitary wing, as evidenced by a warrant authorising "full access to all facilities" and requiring staff to "surrender all claims of litigation" against Murkoff regardless of responsibility.²⁴⁰ This legalised violence truly highlights the stakes of whistleblowing. When corporations can cloak violence in legality, truth-telling becomes an act of existential risk. Miles' fate is a bleak commentary on the dangers journalists face when confronting powerful systems. His story echoes the fates of investigative reporters around the world, from Jamal Khashoggi²⁴¹ to Daphne Caruana Galizia²⁴², who paid with their lives for exposing hidden atrocities.

Similarly, Waylon's desperate exit is interrupted by Jeremy Blaire's cunning attack, with him screaming "No one can know! No one!" as he tries to kill Waylon before the story can leave Mount Massive. After escaping, Waylon meets Simon Peacock, a former Murkoff employee turned information leak operator. Peacock's dialogue is chillingly explicit:

"You press that button, there's no going back, Mr. Park. [...] Once you click upload, your life is over. Everyone you love is fucked. But it's the right thing to do. Is hurting Murkoff worth that much to you?"

In this moment, the player is confronted with the existential stakes of whistleblowing and the irreversible breach. Peacock himself is a reference to Julian Assange, co-founder of WikiLeaks, reinforcing the game's critique of corporate and state secrecy.²⁴³ Like Assange, Peacock symbolizes the dangerous gamble inherent in revealing institutional wrongdoing. The exposé becomes the hunted.²⁴⁴

²³⁹ See Annex 4, Fig. 11: Miles Upshur being gunned down. *Content Warning: Graphic violence (firearms)*.

²⁴⁰ *Outlast* [in-game document: "Warrant for Seizure"]; see Annex 1.1.17 for transcript.

²⁴¹ Amnesty International, 'Saudi Arabia: Still No Justice for State-Sanctioned Murder of Jamal Khashoggi Five Years On' (28 September 2023) <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/09/saudi-arabia-still-no-justice-for-state-sanctioned-murder-of-jamal-khashoggi-five-years-on/>> accessed 20 June 2025.

²⁴² Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 'Daphne Caruana Galizia' (Global Assassination Witness)

<<https://assassination.globalinitiative.net/face/daphne-caruana-galizia/>> accessed 20 June 2025.

²⁴³ Simon Peacock', *Outlast Wiki* (Fandom)

<https://outlast.fandom.com/wiki/Simon_Peacock> accessed 10 June 2025.

²⁴⁴ Petty and Bonami, *The Murkoff Account*, Part 4.

The protagonists' notes echo this urgency and despair. Miles, ever the investigative journalist, writes: "A way out. If he's telling the truth, now I've got a way out. And a story to tell. He wants me to spread his gospel. I'll tell the whole fucking world."²⁴⁵ Elsewhere, he pleads, "Whoever finds my corpse—trust no one and tell everyone... Let the world know it is Murkoff's fault. Bury these bastards with my mutilated dead body."²⁴⁶ Meanwhile Waylon wrestles with regret over his initial caution: "My mistake was subtlety... I thought leaking information to a few journalists was the safer way... But I should have exposed what Murkoff is doing to the world, I should have shouted to anyone and everyone."²⁴⁷

In real life, whistleblowers face similar or even worse fates. Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights guarantees freedom of expression²⁴⁸, but in practice, whistleblowers are often treated as traitors rather than defenders of the public interest. Similarly, Article 19 of the ICCPR protects the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information of all kinds.²⁴⁹ The *García v. Spain* case before the European Court of Human Rights highlighted the tension between state confidentiality and individual moral agency, ultimately underscoring that freedom of expression includes the right to disclose wrongdoing when it serves the public interest.²⁵⁰

Further, the UN Guidelines on the Protection of Whistleblowers explicitly state that whistleblowers "shall not be subjected to retaliation, or any form of detriment," and affirm the importance of protecting not just the individual whistleblower but also their families and associates from reprisals.²⁵¹ Yet, as Simon warns Waylon, these guidelines remain fragile ideals in the face of "twitchy and malicious corporate paranoiacs with resources you're too moral to imagine."

What is the price of truth in a world rigged to destroy those who dare to speak it? The game does not offer easy heroics. Instead, it reveals the haunted aftermath of ethical defiance.

²⁴⁵ *Outlast* [in-game note: "The Passion of Father Martin"]; see Annex 2.1.7 for transcript.

²⁴⁶ *Outlast* [in-game note: "Under the Mountain"]; see Annex 2.1.8 for transcript.

²⁴⁷ *Outlast: Whistleblower*, "A Radio In The Prison"; see Annex 2.2.1 for transcript.

²⁴⁸ Council of Europe, *European Convention on Human Rights* (as amended), Rome, 4 November 1950, art. 10.

²⁴⁹ ICCPR, art 7.

²⁵⁰ European Court of Human Rights, *García v. Spain*, no. 39420/15, Judgment of 22 February 2022.

²⁵¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Resource Guide on Good Practices in the Protection of Reporting Persons (Whistleblowers)* (Vienna: UNODC, 2015).

3.4 Horror, Violence and Ethical Pedagogy

In any critical discussion of horror media, the question inevitably arises: Is the violence necessary? Or, does it serve a purpose or simply indulge in spectacle? At the heart of this debate lies the concept of representational ethics. This is a framework that interrogates not only what is shown but why and how it is shown. Representational ethics demands that creators consider the moral weight of their images and the potential impact on audiences. It insists that representation is never neutral; it is always a choice that shapes collective imaginaries and social consciousness.²⁵²

In *Outlast* and *Whistleblower*, violence is omnipresent. Mutilated bodies hang like deformed marionettes, hallways drip with blood and every corner of Mount Massive Asylum is saturated with human ruin. At first glance, it is easy to dismiss this aesthetic as a cynical attempt that purely exists for shock value. Yet, to do so would be to misread the deeper moral architecture.

The violence in *Outlast* is not an invitation to voyeuristic pleasure but a demand for moral reckoning. The camera acts as a fragile intermediary between player and world by becoming a tool of forced witnessing. Unable to avert their eyes, the players must document and ultimately internalise the suffering they encounter. The narrative design does not permit easy detachment.

Furthermore, consider the repeated emphasis on dismemberment. These are not random acts of cruelty but deliberate symbolic dismantlings of agency and identity. Trager's gleeful "fingers first, then balls, then tongue" is a precise blueprint for reducing a human being to voiceless, impotent flesh.²⁵³ Rather than being a byproduct of cheap thrills, the player's horror becomes a site for ethical self-interrogation.

Moreover, the violence is explicitly tied to institutional complicity and corporate greed. The Murkoff Corporation does not simply allow violence; it orchestrates and profits from it. This reframes every moment of gore as an indictment of structures that commodify human suffering. The player is not asked to celebrate the phenomena but to understand its systemic roots. This

²⁵² Teresa Macías, "Between Violence and Its Representation: Ethics, Archival Research, and the Politics of Knowledge Production in the Telling of Torture Stories," *Intersectionalities: A Global Journal of Social Work Analysis, Research, Polity, and Practice*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2016): 20 - 45.

²⁵³ *Outlast*, "Organized Torture"; see Annex 2.1.6 for transcript.

is a stark reminder that in the real world, bodies are similarly exploited in the name of “progress,” “security,” or “profit.”²⁵⁴

Philosopher Susan Sontag famously warned against the risk of compassion fatigue when confronted with images of atrocity, arguing that repeated exposure can numb moral responsiveness.²⁵⁵ *Outlast*, however, wagers that horror might pierce this numbness rather than reinforce it. This wager is deeply tied to affective neuroscience. The limbic system, particularly the amygdala and hippocampus, plays a central role in processing fear, memory, and empathy.²⁵⁶ Emotional arousal can strengthen memory consolidation, making experiences “stick” more powerfully than dry facts alone. By plunging the player into embodied terror, *Outlast* leverages this neurological reality to move beyond abstraction.

This pedagogical gamble echoes Michalinos Zembylas’s concept of “pedagogies of discomfort,” where emotional unease is not a failure but a precondition for ethical learning.²⁵⁷ It is through being unsettled that players are pushed to confront their capacity for empathy.

Here, the game’s first-person perspective is crucial. Unlike third-person war games where players often inhabit empowered soldier-avatars who dominate and control, *Outlast* forces the player into vulnerability. There are no weapons, no armor and no power fantasies of heroic conquest. Instead, the player is a hunted witness. This radical vulnerability creates a sense of shared exposure that fosters a deeper ethical resonance. The violence becomes not a performance for the player’s pleasure, but a threat to their own imagined safety.

This effect is even evident in contemporary player responses: in a recorded gameplay of *Whistleblower*, a player initially claims to feel “desensitised,” only to later exclaim, “I don’t feel desensitised anymore because I’m horrified now.”²⁵⁸ The sequence with Eddie Gluskin

²⁵⁴ *Outlast: Whistleblower* [in-game note: “What Fresh Hell”]; see Annex 2.2.8 for transcript.

²⁵⁵ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Picador 2003).

²⁵⁶ Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* (Simon & Schuster 1996); Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (Harcourt 1999).

²⁵⁷ Michalinos Zembylas and Elena Papamichael, “Pedagogies of Discomfort and Empathy in Multicultural Teacher Education,” *Intercultural Education* 28, no. 1 (2017): 1–19.

²⁵⁸ REACT, ‘*DEATH DO US PART - OUTLAST: Whistleblower - Part 4 (REACT: Gaming)*’, YouTube (3 July 2014)

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lk6YUE7eAqA&list=PLX50TElqxBEUm57MaIz4aYANMFb7n4W4H&index=13>> at 14:27, accessed 27 June 2025.

thus functions as a jolt, reminding the player or viewer that horror can still break through our protective shells of fatigue. Thus, to ask whether the violence in *Outlast* is gratuitous is to misunderstand its didactic ambition.

3.5 Player, Agency and Moral Voyeurism

In *Outlast* and *Whistleblower*, the player is paradoxically everywhere and nowhere. They slip inside lockers, crawl under beds and peek through the flickering viewfinder of a camera. They are always close, but never able to intervene. This forced passivity transforms the player into a virtual bystander, mirroring the ethical tensions that haunt real-world journalism and human rights documentation.

Felisa Tibbitts' framework for human rights education insists that authentic learning requires moving from awareness to analysis and finally to action.²⁵⁹ Yet, in *Outlast*, the player is trapped at the stage of analysis, doomed to watch atrocities unfold without agency to stop them. The camera distances the player from immediate danger, but also implicates them as a recorder of horror. This echoes real-world dilemmas in conflict journalism, where the ethics of witnessing without intervening become an existential burden.²⁶⁰ When the journalist holds a camera instead of offering a hand, does documentation become a form of tacit endorsement?

Here, Ian Bogost's notion of "procedural rhetoric" offers a potent analytical lens.²⁶¹ Bogost argues that game mechanics themselves are arguments. They teach through rules rather than didactic statements. In addition to explicitly condemning Murkoff through Miles' and Waylon's notes, and various dialogues in-game, *Outlast* also condemns through procedural helplessness. The player cannot fight, save anyone or transform the world around them.

This ambiguity of agency is punctuated by rare moments of intervention, such as when Miles douses a destructive fire started by the Pyromaniac²⁶², kills Trager in an act of self-defence, and ends Billy Hope's tortured existence- the latter, which he describes in his notes as an act of 'kindness.'²⁶³ Yet, even these interventions are not triumphant moral victories. They are melancholic, instrumental, or outright scripted. By contrast, sequences like Waylon's helpless

²⁵⁹ Tibbitts, "Human Rights Education," 99 - 108.

²⁶⁰ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*.

²⁶¹ Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* (MIT Press 2007).

²⁶² *Outlast* [in-game note: "Let It Burn"]; see Annex 2.1.9 for transcript.

²⁶³ *Outlast* [in-game note: "Billy Hope"]; see Annex 2.1.10 for transcript.

surveillance of Gluskin's 'surgeries' from a locker or Miles' recording of Father Martin's self-immolation²⁶⁴ further shed light on the ethical weight of passive witnessing.

Moreover, this enforced voyeurism blurs the line between moral commentary and narrative neutrality. Does *Outlast* push players toward reflection, or does it merely exploit trauma for entertainment? The adrenaline-fueled gameplay threatens to override ethical analysis, as players scramble to survive rather than to think. Yet, moments of forced slowness such as recording events, reading patient files, and reading Miles' and Waylon's notes agonising over what they document puncture the rush and drag players into uncomfortable self-reflection.

At its most effective, *Outlast* succeeds in forcing players to confront the ethics of looking. However, *Outlast* ultimately stops short of offering concrete pathways to action, thereby stalling Tibbitts' educational trajectory at the threshold of analysis. The player emerges shaken but disempowered, haunted by the question: what now? In this unresolved tension lies the game's sharpest pedagogical edge. It reveals the limits of passive witnessing and suggests that true solidarity requires moving beyond observation to intervention. And this is a leap the game can only gesture toward, but not deliver.

3.6 The Sound Of Horror

If the visuals of *Outlast* and *Whistleblower* teach us to look, then their sound design demands that we feel. Horror games have long understood what philosophers and neuroscientists alike confirm- emotion is fundamental to cognition. The limbic system, which is basically an ancient seat of fear and memory, learns as much from a shiver as from a sentence. In *Outlast* and *Whistleblower*, composer Samuel Laflamme's score and the meticulous soundscapes serve as a kind of hidden pedagogue.

Silence is the most underrated instrument of horror. It becomes an acoustic negative space that sculpts terror from absence rather than presence. However, silence in Mount Massive is rarely complete. Players are haunted by echoes of unseen footsteps- an auditory hallucination that primes them for threats that may never materialise. It is an unsettling lesson in anticipation. Meanwhile, the distant clink of Chris Walker's chains or Frank Manera's buzzing chainsaw transforms each hallway into a gauntlet. An example of this is the waist-deep sewer water in

²⁶⁴ See Annex 4, Fig. 12: Father Martin's death. *Content Warning: Graphic violence.*

Outlast. Here, Miles is unable to see but forced to listen and the soundscape becomes the only navigation tool.

Even the broken alarm systems that wail throughout different wings of the asylum become part of this sonic landscape. They are not only disorienting but reflect a system in collapse, echoing the players' own destabilisation. The screams across the asylum are reminders that every wall hides a human catastrophe and no place is truly safe.

The games' chase themes are perhaps its most effective instrumentalisation of sound. Each antagonist is paired with a unique musical cue that operates as a psychological signature. Chris Walker's heavy, pounding percussion mimics the sense of an unstoppable force, while Eddie Gluskin's string crescendos mimic a human scream. Coupled with dialogues unique to each antagonist, these soundscapes encode the character's pathology into the player's mind.

Unlike passive media such as film and books, the interactivity of games intensifies these bodily responses. In comparison to visuals or text, sound pierces the player's defenses without consent. The heavy breathing and glitching static operate as mnemonic devices. Theorists call this "sticky feelings", ensuring that the trauma is not simply observed but metabolised.²⁶⁵ Moreover, research on music and emotion confirms that auditory stimuli engage neural pathways directly tied to fear, empathy, and memory, allowing sound to shape ethical reflection at a visceral level.²⁶⁶

This emotional manipulation serves a pedagogical function. Discomfort catalyses learning by confronting the player with unfiltered vulnerability. In human rights education, Zembylas's theory of "pedagogies of discomfort" suggests that unsettling emotions can push learners from passive awareness into ethical action.²⁶⁷ The symphony of horror in *Outlast* turns the player's flight response into a contemplative space.

When contrasted with other modalities, sound stands out as uniquely suited to ethical pedagogy. Visuals can be glanced away from and text can be skimmed but sound enters

²⁶⁵ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

²⁶⁶ Patrik N. Juslin and John A. Sloboda (eds), *Handbook of Music and Emotion: Theory, Research, Applications* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁶⁷ Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *The Ethics of Witnessing: The Holocaust in Polish Writers' Diaries from Warsaw, 1939–1945* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, June 2014).

involuntarily and collapses the safe boundary. Samuel Laflamme's score, with its jagged rhythms and dissonant layers²⁶⁸, transforms Mount Massive from a backdrop into a living, breathing entity.

3.7 Catharsis, Fear and Transformative Learning

In *Poetics*, Aristotle famously argued that tragedy evokes pity and fear, purging the audience of these emotions through catharsis.²⁶⁹ In horror, however, catharsis cannot be contained to a mere emotional cleansing. It is a confrontation with what society seeks to repress. Horror pushes us beyond mere sympathy into vulnerability. It forces us to inhabit the skin of the terrified rather than merely observe them.

Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory extends this notion into the realm of education.²⁷⁰ According to Mezirow, a "disorienting dilemma" is an experience so unsettling that it challenges one's existing assumptions. This is a prerequisite for transformative learning. By destabilising comfort zones, such dilemmas invite critical reflection and foster a re-examination of personal and societal values. The value of such transformation lies in reorienting one's moral and cognitive frameworks.

Educational psychology corroborates this link between emotional disturbance and learning.²⁷¹ Studies have shown that emotional arousal heightens memory retention. Therefore, experiences that provoke fear or anxiety are more neurologically "sticky" than purely intellectual content. In this light, horror games can become potent pedagogical tools, using dread as an accelerant for ethical reflection, apart from mere entertainment.

Outlast exemplifies this potential by positioning the player in an inescapable ethical labyrinth. It does not simply frighten for fright's sake. The abjection in the game creates precisely the kind of disorienting dilemma Mezirow describes. The player must simultaneously navigate both spatial and moral horror. What does it mean to survive when stripped of agency? How far

²⁶⁸ Samuel LaFlamme, background score for *Outlast* (Red Barrels, 2013) and *Outlast: Whistleblower* (Red Barrels, 2014).

²⁶⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin, 1996).

²⁷⁰ Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

²⁷¹ Linda J. Levine and Robin S. Edelstein, 'Emotion and memory narrowing: A review and goal-relevance approach' in *Cognition and Emotion: Reviews of Current Research and Theories*, eds. Jan De Houwer and Dirk Hermans (Psychology Press: Taylor and Francis Group, 2010).

can medical science go before it becomes an atrocity? In this context, horror becomes more than a genre. It transforms into a pedagogical crucible, forging ethical and emotional metamorphosis.

3.8 Narrative Storytelling

In *Outlast* and *Whistleblower*, narrative storytelling emerges through the layering of documents, environmental clues, and the frailty of the protagonist rather than through exposition. This architecture invites players into a process of piecing together truth from fragments - a method that mirrors investigative journalism and human rights documentation. This helps to focus on critical reflection, as opposed to passive consumption.

The scattered documents found throughout Mount Massive and the notes recorded by the protagonists are more than collectibles; they act as narrative devices that reveal the extent of Murkoff's abuses and the system's callousness. This form of environmental storytelling demands active interpretation, thereby prompting players to assume the role of an analyst. As each corporate memo or whispered dialogue accumulates, players exercise agency in constructing meaning. The process replicates real-world human rights investigations, where evidence must be sifted, contextualized, and corroborated. An excellent instance of this in-game is when Miles Upshur first finds a document about a disgruntled orderly, David Annapurna, who requests for reassignment after witnessing the ill-treatment of patients.²⁷² A few rooms later, Miles finds another document - a corporate email - that mentions that Annapurna has been institutionalised as a patient and should be subjected to therapy till his death.²⁷³ Piecing the two documents together makes the player realise how cruel and inhuman the actions of the corporation are against any person who voices dissent.

Additionally, the game's choice of a disempowered protagonist functions as a deliberate pedagogical strategy. Miles Upshur and Waylon Park are not invincible heroes. They are vulnerable and constrained by their own physical and psychological limits. This vulnerability situates players in a position of empathetic identification with the hunted rather than the

²⁷² *Outlast* [in-game document: "Request for Reassignment"]; see Annex 1.1.13 for transcript.

²⁷³ *Outlast* [in-game document: "Persecutorial Delusions"]; see Annex 1.1.14 for transcript.

hunter.²⁷⁴ Unlike many action games that celebrate player dominance, *Outlast*'s narrative forces the player to confront powerlessness as a lived reality.

3.9 How Necessary is Explicitness?

Should a video game explicitly declare its message, or can subtlety speak more powerfully? In the case of *Outlast*, the game never utters the words "human rights." It does not provide an overt moral lesson, nor does it offer a manifesto at the end summarising its stance. Yet, it is precisely in this narrative restraint that *Outlast* finds its pedagogical potency.

Didacticism can flatten complex ethical dilemmas into slogans. When players are handed a clear moral directive, they become passive recipients rather than active interpreters. *Outlast* resists this passivity. By refusing to preach, it forces players to wrestle with discomfort, piece together fragmented evidence, and draw their own conclusions. In this, the game embodies what educational theorist Felisa Tibbitts refers to as a "transformative" approach to human rights education.²⁷⁵

Subtlety invites interrogation rather than mere acceptance. As players run from Chris Walker or hide from Eddie Gluskin, they experience fear and indignity first-hand. This emotional immediacy transcends traditional pedagogy. It forges an understanding that no lecture could ever simulate.

Yet, this subtlety is not without risk. Ambiguity can enable misinterpretation. Some players may reduce *Outlast* to mere shock entertainment, missing its deeper critique of corporate power and biomedical exploitation. This is where the delicate balance lies. Subtlety empowers players to construct meaning, but it also demands a certain maturity and critical literacy that not all audiences possess. Ultimately, *Outlast* demonstrates that while explicitness is not always necessary, it can sometimes hinder pedagogical depth.

²⁷⁴ Katrine Tinning, *The Ambivalent Potentiality of Vulnerability: Museum Pedagogy in Exhibitions on Difficult Matters and Its Ethical Implications* (doctoral thesis, Lund University, 2017).

²⁷⁵ Felisa Tibbitts, 'Evolution of Human Rights Education Models', 77.

Chapter 4: Comparative Discussion

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.” — Maya Angelou.²⁷⁶

What happens when stories meant to be told are instead played? This thesis began with a radical proposition: that video games, particularly the *Outlast* series, can function as potent pedagogical tools for HRE. By leveraging vulnerability and immersion, such games force us to confront ethical conundrums that might otherwise remain abstract. Yet, to understand the full scope and limits of this proposition, we must situate *Outlast* and *Whistleblower* within a bracket of interactive narratives.

The necessity of comparative analysis in this context is moral and academic. Human rights are inherently universal, yet their violations are distressingly particular.²⁷⁷ It can be easily established that games become a digital experiment in moral philosophy. To compare each game is to explore the different routes through which human rights discourse can reach the player. Moreover, such a comparative approach draws light to the pedagogical responsibility of game designers and educators alike. If education is, as Paulo Freire asserts, never a neutral act but always an act of liberation or domination,²⁷⁸ then games as pedagogical media must be interrogated for their potential to liberate or mislead.

Outlast and *Whistleblower* remain the primary lens of this thesis not only because of their narrative depth and immersive horror mechanics but also because they dramatise the threshold where human dignity is reduced to experiment. Yet, their comparison against other games reveals both their strengths and blind spots in terms of pedagogical potential. For a well-rounded analysis, games are not just measured against one another, but also against the standards of human rights treaties, conventions and the moral standards of society in the 21st century.

4.1 Mapping Human Rights Landscapes Across Video Games

To make the argument that video games spill over the sole purpose of entertainment, it is crucial to trace how human rights emerge across different games and narratives. By doing so, we are

²⁷⁶ Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (New York, 1969).

²⁷⁷ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted 10 December 1948, UNGA Res 217 A(III)) preamble.

²⁷⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

able to see how players are invited to feel and question ethical dilemmas beyond observation.

4.1.1 Civil and Political Rights

Civil and political rights are often the first line of defence against authoritarianism and violence and video games offer interactive stages on which these rights are threatened or defended. Games such as *This War of Mine* and *PeaceMaker* force players to confront the ethical abyss of war from the hands of civilians and policymakers. In *This War of Mine*, players manage a group of civilians trapped in a besieged city, scavenging for food while deciding whether to steal from or help their neighbours.²⁷⁹ The constant struggle for scarce resources and the devastating toll of violence illuminate the right to life and the protection of civilians under the Geneva Conventions.²⁸⁰ *PeaceMaker*, by contrast, simulates the Israeli-Palestinian “conflict, placing players in leadership roles tasked with forging peace.”²⁸¹ It challenges the player to reconcile national security with human dignity, thereby advancing the discourse on the human right to peace.²⁸² Both games remind us that behind every statistic of war lies a web of moral choices. They highlight the right to life, as protected under Article 6 of the ICCPR, and the principle of distinction in international humanitarian law.²⁸³

Equally revealing are games that explore the mechanics of surveillance and authoritarianism. In *Papers, Please*, the mechanics of stamping passports become a theatre of state control. As an immigration officer, the player must choose between compassion and compliance, often at the expense of their family's welfare.²⁸⁴ The constant threat of audits and punishments highlights the erosion of privacy and freedom of movement, namely resonating with Articles 12 and 13 of the UDHR and Article 13 of the ICCPR.²⁸⁵ Similarly, *Beholder* thrusts players into the role of a landlord coerced into spying on tenants for a totalitarian regime.²⁸⁶ The moral tension between obedience and subversion forces players to wrestle with questions of privacy

²⁷⁹ *This War of Mine* (11 bit studios, 2014).

²⁸⁰ Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (adopted 12 August 1949, entered into force 21 October 1950) 75 UNTS 287.

²⁸¹ *PeaceMaker* (ImpactGames, 2007).

²⁸² UN General Assembly, *Declaration on the Right of Peoples to Peace* (adopted 12 November 1984) UN Doc A/RES/39/11.

²⁸³ ICCPR, art 6; International Committee of the Red Cross, *Distinction* (ICRC, October 2010) <https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/war-and-law/03_distinction-0.pdf> accessed 1 July 2025.

²⁸⁴ *Papers, Please* (3909 LLC, 2013).

²⁸⁵ UDHR arts 12 and 13; ICCPR, art 13.

²⁸⁶ *Beholder* (Warm Lamp Games, 2016).

and the basic human longing for dignity. In these games, surveillance is not an Orwellian abstraction but a daily ritual.

Perhaps nowhere is the manipulation of individual agency more chilling than in *We Happy Few*. Here, enforced positivity becomes the dystopian state's most potent weapon. Citizens are forced to consume “Joy” pills to maintain a facade of happiness, transforming freedom of thought into a performative prison.²⁸⁷ This chilling premise evokes Article 18 of both the UDHR and ICCPR, which guarantee freedom of thought and conscience.²⁸⁸ The game allegorises societies that privilege sanitized “happiness” over truth. It can be understood as a dramatised metaphor echoing contemporary anxieties about censorship and propaganda.

Satire has long served as a stealth weapon in the defence of civil and political rights. By exaggerating reality, it reveals truths too uncomfortable to state plainly. In *Destroy All Humans* (1 and 2), alien invader Crypto’s escapades mock Cold War paranoia, state surveillance, and the absurdities of military propaganda.²⁸⁹ By portraying humanity through the eyes of an outsider, the game lampoons the moral contradictions of American exceptionalism and the cult of national security. Similarly, the *Grand Theft Auto* series deploys satire to expose the corruption within modern societies. The various installations tackle issues from police brutality and systemic racism to hyper-consumerism and the vapid sensationalism of mass media.²⁹⁰ In these worlds, every billboard and radio station is a twisted mirror reflecting our cultural failures. These games rely on laughter and exaggeration to peel back the layers of denial that shield societies from confronting their own injustices. This is a protection of the vital right to freedom of expression enshrined in ICCPR Art. 19.²⁹¹

4.1.2 Identity and Structural Discrimination Rights

Games often become living laboratories where players confront the many faces of discrimination and exclusion. In *Detroit: Become Human*, the plight of androids operates as an extended metaphor for systemic discrimination, borrowing the language and imagery of civil rights struggles.²⁹² Players confront segregation, exploitation, and the question of

²⁸⁷ *We Happy Few* (Compulsion Games, 2018).

²⁸⁸ UDHR art 18; ICCPR, art 18.

²⁸⁹ *Destroy All Humans!* (Pandemic Studios, 2005); *Destroy All Humans! 2* (2006).

²⁹⁰ *Grand Theft Auto* series (Rockstar games, 1997-present).

²⁹¹ ICCPR, art 19.

²⁹² *Detroit: Become Human* (Quantic Dream, 2018).

sentience as a rights-bearing condition. This is resonant with Article 26 of the ICCPR on non-discrimination.²⁹³ Meanwhile, *Mafia III* tackles anti-Black racism head-on, placing players in the shoes of Lincoln Clay, a Black Vietnam veteran navigating a violently segregated 1960s New Orleans-inspired city.²⁹⁴ The game refuses to sanitise racial violence, confronting players with institutional discrimination and hate crimes.²⁹⁵ In both cases, players are situated within lived experiences of marginalisation.

The violence faced by women is no less sharply rendered. Games such as *Tomb Raider* confront players with Lara Croft's vulnerability in a landscape saturated with male violence.²⁹⁶ The implied threat of sexual assault during her early capture scene is an unflinching invocation of gender-based violence. *Life is Strange* explores sexual assault and victim blaming through the character of Kate Marsh, forcing players to navigate ethical choices that echo real-world struggles for consent and justice.²⁹⁷ *Outlast 2* intensifies this theme within Temple Gate, where women - including minors - are systematically raped and killed by Sullivan Knoth and his followers under the pretext of religion.²⁹⁸ The deuteragonist Lynn Langermann's trauma is hinted at through her hesitation to describe Knoth's so-called "examination," which brands her as "pregnant" and marks her for ritual violence. Her silent dread embodies the horror of sexual violation as a tool of religious and patriarchal domination. These scenarios illuminate the core commitments of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Istanbul Convention, both of which demand active protection of women against violence and uphold their right to bodily integrity.²⁹⁹

Disability is also reclaimed from the margins in games such as *The Vale: Shadow of the Crown*, a landmark game designed to be played without visuals, inviting players to rely entirely on auditory and haptic feedback.³⁰⁰ By casting the protagonist as blind, the game dissolves optical dominance and affirms the agency of those historically excluded from gaming spaces.

²⁹³ ICCPR, art 26.

²⁹⁴ *Mafia III* (Hangar 13, 2016).

²⁹⁵ Nathan Grayson, "Mafia III: The Kotaku Review" *Kotaku*, October 12, 2016

²⁹⁶ *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, 2013).

²⁹⁷ *Life is Strange* (Dontnod Entertainment, 2015).

²⁹⁸ *Outlast 2*.

²⁹⁹ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (adopted 18 December 1979, entered into force 3 September 1981) 1249 UNTS 13; Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (adopted 11 May 2011, entered into force 1 August 2014) CETS No 210.

³⁰⁰ *The Vale: Shadow of the Crown* (Falling Squirrel, 2021).

Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice again resonates here, as it centres psychosis as an embodied reality and prompts reflection on stigma and internal experience. Both games engage the CRPD, particularly the right to accessibility enshrined in Article 9.³⁰¹ Through these narratives, disability is not a deficiency but just a difference.

Indigenous identity and cultural survival are brought to the forefront in *Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna)* which offers an intimate collaboration with the Iñupiat community, weaving traditional stories into a side-scrolling adventure that centres indigenous rights.³⁰² The game embodies the right to cultural life as protected under Article 15 of the ICESCR and affirms the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).³⁰³ Meanwhile, *Prey* (2017) subtly gestures to indigenous heritage through its protagonist Morgan Yu, whose name and background hint at cultural alienation and identity fragmentation.³⁰⁴

Finally, queer identities are normalised and celebrated across an evolving landscape of games. *The Last of Us Part II* normalises Ellie's queer identity without reducing her to it, representing sexuality as an ordinary facet of personhood.³⁰⁵ *Dream Daddy* shatters traditional family structures, offering positive depictions of queer fatherhood.³⁰⁶ *Tell Me Why* breaks further ground as the first major release with a transgender playable protagonist, engaging with trans identity in a narrative of family trauma and reconciliation.³⁰⁷ Together, these games embody Article 26 of the ICCPR and the Yogyakarta Principles, which articulate the application of human rights law to sexual orientation and gender identity.³⁰⁸

4.1.3 Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Economic, social, and cultural rights emerge vividly in games that grapple with the material conditions shaping human dignity and survival. In *Night in the Woods*, economic precarity is the quiet antagonist lurking behind every conversation and abandoned storefront.³⁰⁹ Through

³⁰¹ CRPD, art 9.

³⁰² *Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna)* (Upper One Games, 2014).

³⁰³ ICESCR, art 5; United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (adopted 13 September 2007) UN Doc A/RES/61/295.

³⁰⁴ *Prey* (Arkane Studios, 2017).

³⁰⁵ *The Last of Us Part II* (Naughty Dog, 2020).

³⁰⁶ *Dream Daddy: A Dad Dating Simulator* (Game Grumps, 2017).

³⁰⁷ *Tell Me Why* (Dontnod Entertainment, 2020).

³⁰⁸ ICCPR, art 26; Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (2007).

³⁰⁹ *Night in the Woods* (Infinite Fall, 2017).

Mae's eyes, players witness post-industrial decay and the hollowing out of working-class communities. This vividly illustrates Article 7 of the ICESCR on just and favourable work conditions and Article 11 on the right to an adequate standard of living.³¹⁰ *Disco Elysium* sharpens this critique, dissecting neoliberal ideologies, addiction, and the moral corrosion that accompanies structural poverty.³¹¹ In this universe, economic struggle is the marrow of character and choice. *Cart Life* deepens this exploration, depicting the struggles of street vendors balancing precarious jobs with personal crises.³¹² Its black-and-white aesthetic mirrors the starkness of economic survival, shedding light on the invisibilised labour that sustains urban life. Together, these games compel players to question what economic dignity really means and whose survival is privileged.

Environmental rights and ecological justice form a vital extension of this discourse. In *Until Dawn*, environmental ethics are woven subtly through its "butterfly effect" system.³¹³ If the player chooses to hurt an animal while controlling any of the main characters, there will be a consequence - some of which won't reveal itself until it's too late. These micro-narratives illustrate Principle 1 of the Stockholm Declaration, which enshrines the duty to protect all forms of life.³¹⁴ *Final Fantasy VII*'s struggle against Shinra's reckless exploitation of planetary energy resonates as an urgent allegory for corporate environmental malfeasance.³¹⁵ In *Horizon Zero Dawn*, the collapse and rebirth of ecosystems centre environmental stewardship and collective responsibility,³¹⁶ while *Endling: Extinction is Forever* renders ecological destruction heartbreakingly intimate by narrating it through the eyes of a mother fox protecting her cubs.³¹⁷ In each case, environmental collapse is not a distant dystopian fantasy but an invitation to reimagine justice beyond the human.

The right to bodily autonomy is a cornerstone of human dignity, enshrined in numerous legal frameworks including Article 3 of the UDHR and Articles 12 and 17 of the CRPD.³¹⁸ *The Outlast Trials* plunges players into a Cold War-era experimentation programme where

³¹⁰ ICESCR arts. 7 and 11.

³¹¹ *Disco Elysium* (ZA/UM, 2019).

³¹² *Cart Life* (Richard Hofmeier, 2011).

³¹³ *Until Dawn* (Supermassive Games, 2015).

³¹⁴ United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, 'Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm Declaration)', Principle 1, 1972.

³¹⁵ *Final Fantasy VII* (Square, 1997).

³¹⁶ *Horizon Zero Dawn* (Guerrilla Games, 2017).

³¹⁷ *Endling: Extinction is Forever* (Herobeat Studios, 2022).

³¹⁸ UDHR art 3; CRPD, arts 12 and 17.

vulnerable margins of the population - such as the mentally ill and the homeless - are recruited into “volunteering” under the false guise of employment by the Murkoff Corporation. These individuals are then treated as lab rats and subjected to fatal psychological and physiological conditioning.³¹⁹ Deprived of consent and identity, participants become raw material in an experiment, much like the multitude of unethical science experiments that happen to this day. Similarly, *The Inpatient*, a psychological horror prequel to *Until Dawn*, traps players within a 1950s sanatorium, where experimental treatments and memory manipulation blur the line between cure and control.³²⁰ Meanwhile, *Resident Evil* takes this critique to a global scale. The Umbrella Corporation’s bioweapon research epitomises the catastrophic consequences of unchecked corporate power that commodifies human bodies in pursuit of profit. The resulting viral outbreaks not only decimate cities but also erode public trust in science and governance.³²¹ These games together indict a medical-industrial complex that prioritises experimentation over ethics.

Closely intertwined with bodily autonomy is the portrayal of mental health. In *Hellblade: Senua’s Sacrifice*, players play as Senua, a warrior navigating a hallucinatory world shaped by psychosis.³²² The game’s innovative audio design includes voices whispering conflicting commands and intrusive thoughts. By forcing players to inhabit Senua’s disoriented subjectivity, it challenges the stigma surrounding mental illness and reaffirms the right to health as enshrined in Article 12 of the ICESCR.³²³ Meanwhile, the *Silent Hill* series explores mental trauma, guilt, and abuse through eerie landscapes that mirror the characters’ fractured psyches.³²⁴ It does not offer cheap horror but forces players to inhabit the terror of unresolved psychological wounds.

4.1.4 Rights of Vulnerable Populations

The plight of refugees and migrants emerges with urgent immediacy in games like in *Bury Me, My Love*. The harrowing journey of Nour, a Syrian woman in *Bury Me, My Love* personalises Article 14 of the UDHR - the right to seek asylum - and the protections of the 1951 Refugee

³¹⁹ *The Outlast Trials*.

³²⁰ *The Inpatient*.

³²¹ *Resident Evil* series (Capcom, 1996-present).

³²² *Hellblade: Senua’s Sacrifice* (Ninja Theory, 2017).

³²³ ICESCR, art 12.

³²⁴ *Silent Hill* series (Konami, 1999–2012).

Convention.³²⁵ Through text messages with her husband, the game humanises bureaucratic language, transforming "illegal migration" into a story of survival and love.³²⁶ *Papers, Please* returns here, portraying the painful liminality of migrants caught between survival and suspicion. *Path Out*, an autobiographical game depicting Abdullah Karam's escape from Syria, forces players to inhabit the emotional terrain of displacement.³²⁷ These narratives disrupt the sanitised statistics of forced migration, revealing the violence and resilience hidden behind each border crossed.

Children's rights and exploitation are powerfully confronted in *Outlast 2*, where young Jessica Gray's sexual abuse and cover-up murder by a priest point to the sickening reality of systemic abuse of children by religious authorities.³²⁸ Her presence in Blake's hallucinations is not a mere horror trope but an indictment of silence and betrayal. Meanwhile, *Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons* deals with the loss of parental care and child autonomy, urging players to confront the fragility and resilience of childhood.³²⁹ Together, these stories demand reflection on the rights of the child as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), especially Articles 19 and 34, which protect children from all forms of abuse and exploitation.³³⁰

In this comparative mapping, it becomes clear that games can function as platforms of moral imagination. If utilised effectively, they challenge players to reckon with what it means to uphold or betray human dignity.

4.2 Games as Ethical Failures

If games possess the power to illuminate human rights issues, they also hold the power to trivialise them. When done distastefully, the same mechanics that encourage empathy can become tools of desensitisation.

Several video games have crossed this ethical threshold. For example, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*'s infamous "No Russian" mission allows players to participate in a mass shooting

³²⁵ UDHR Art 14; Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 28 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954) 189 UNTS 137.

³²⁶ *Bury Me, My Love* (The Pixel Hunt, Figs, ARTE France, 2017).

³²⁷ *Path Out* (Causa Creations, 2017).

³²⁸ Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted 20 November 1989, entered into force 2 September 1990) 1577 UNTS 3, arts 6, 19.

³²⁹ *Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons* (Starbreeze Studios, 2013).

³³⁰ CRC, arts 19 and 34.

at the Moscow airport. While some argue that the scene critiques senseless violence, its shocking content is largely uncontextualised and fetishises the concept of terrorist attacks.³³¹ Additionally, players are given the option to skip the mission entirely. While this can be perceived as a positive step, the undertones of such a feature demonstrate that the mission exists purely for sensationalisation.

Games such as *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* and certain *Game of Thrones* adaptations also employ sexual violence in ways that border on gratuitous exhibition.³³² In these instances, sexual trauma is inserted as narrative shorthand to denote a brutal world, but without providing survivors meaningful agency or critique of the systems enabling such violence.

The *Grand Theft Auto* series is another example of this failure. It frequently sexualises and objectifies women, reducing them to strippers, sex workers, or expendable targets. Mechanics that allow players to assault or murder female NPCs after purchasing sexual services trivialise gender-based violence and commodify women's bodies for entertainment.³³³ Instead of encouraging reflection, *GTA* often frames such actions as humorous or consequence-free, reducing systemic misogyny to cheap entertainment.³³⁴

While some games mishandle human rights themes through clumsy storytelling or thoughtless design, others cross the line for pure gratification purposes. *No More Mercy*, a game briefly listed on Steam in 2024, allowed players to enact sexual violence against women and family members.³³⁵ Although the game was shortly pulled, such examples emphasise the urgent necessity for ethical accountability in game development and distribution. Developers and players of such games often cover behind the excuse of “freedom of expression,” weaponising this principle to justify showmanship of suffering - often against women.

Moreover, poverty and humanitarian crises are often used as design choices. In survival or post-apocalyptic games, images of emaciated children, devastated refugee camps, or bodies

³³¹ *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (Infinity Ward, 2009).

³³² *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt Red, 2015); *Game of Thrones: A Telltale Games Series* (Telltale Games, 2014–2015).

³³³ *Grand Theft Auto series* (Rockstar Games, 1997–present);

³³⁴ Amanda Philips, *Gamer Trouble: Feminist Confrontations in Digital Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 142 - 145.

³³⁵ *No More Mercy* (unreleased, briefly listed on Steam, 2024, later removed after public outcry).

piled in the streets become environmental “set dressing”. While this aestheticisation evokes compassion, it can also reduce complex socio-political tragedies to atmospheric flavour.

The horror genre, too, is not exempt. Games like *Outlast* risk slipping into indulgence when bodily violations and extreme degradation are presented without adequate thematic narrative. The thin line between confrontation and exploitation demands acute sensitivity. Otherwise, horror games can reproduce the very dehumanisation they ostensibly critique.

These examples remind us that representing human rights abuses is not inherently pedagogical. As educators and critics, we must insist that the portrayal of suffering is not a shortcut to emotional depth but a profound responsibility.

4.3 Comparing Genres of Video Games

While horror excels at the transformative affect through fear, it is only one facet of a much larger creative arsenal. Video games are a constellation of genres, each framing human rights narratives through distinct aesthetic and affective lenses. Role-playing and adventure games cultivate reflective moral agency. In *Disco Elysium*, players explore ethical dilemmas through conversation trees, slow narrative build-up, and layered character development. Such games excel in illustrating systemic discrimination, economic hardship, and existential doubt. Therefore, it creates a space where players can rehearse moral choices with relative safety.

By contrast, action games based on warzones often thrust players into moral minefields under extreme duress. While usually fast-paced, they still raise questions of *jus in bello*: civilian targeting, the ethics of preemptive strikes, and the psychological toll of combat.³³⁶ Here, human rights dilemmas erupt in split-second decisions.

Horror forces an encounter with the abject. It plunges the player into a state of reactive vulnerability, as opposed to thoughtful deliberation. In *Outlast*, the experience of being unarmed and forcibly confined transforms abstract notions into felt crises. Horror’s reliance on fear-induced embodiment foregrounds not only the right to security of person but also interrogates how easily dignity unravels under extreme duress.

³³⁶ International Committee of the Red Cross, *Jus ad bellum and jus in bello* (ICRC, 22 January 2015) <<https://www.icrc.org/en/law-and-policy/jus-ad-bellum-and-jus-bello>> accessed 29 June 2025.

However, horror's intensity can also limit reflection. While RPGs afford time to consider choices and consequences, horror often relies on survival instincts, potentially overwhelming critical thought. The genre can risk aestheticising trauma or normalising voyeuristic consumption of suffering if not carefully contextualised.

Thus, horror does not stand above or below other genres as a pedagogical tool. It stands apart. It is uniquely suited to evoke empathy through shared vulnerability, yet it must be complemented by genres that allow for critical distance and narrative contemplation. Therefore, a robust human rights pedagogy in games is not about simply selecting a single genre.

4.4 Positioning *Outlast* and *Whistleblower* Among Their Contemporaries

When considered alongside other socially conscious games of its era, *Outlast* and *Whistleblower* emerges as a deliberately unsettling outlier. While several narrative-driven titles invite players to empathise with marginalised figures or reflect on moral compromise, *Outlast* chooses to trap its audience within the violence of institutional abuse. This is done by stripping away choice, voice, and agency almost entirely.

Unlike *Papers, Please*, where moral erosion³³⁷ unfolds through administrative repetition and slow internalisation of state logic, *Outlast* and *Whistleblower* offer no such intellectual distancing. The experience is mediated through blood and fear. Where *Papers, Please* simulates complicity, *Outlast* simulates survival and the inability to intervene.

Detroit: Become Human frames systemic oppression within a clear narrative arc, where the player is empowered to push back against injustice. Despite its uneven handling of metaphor, the game posits a world in which resistance is possible.³³⁸ On the other hand, *Outlast* and *Whistleblower* deny even the fantasy of rebellion. This refusal to moralise or provide catharsis makes *Outlast* a far more disturbing experience.

³³⁷ Sicart, *The Ethics of Computer Games*.

³³⁸ Kishonna L. Gray, 'Gaming Out Online: Black lesbian identity development and community building in Xbox Live', in *Journal of Lesbian Studies* (2017), 1 - 15.

Even *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*, with its immersive rendering of psychosis, guides players toward understanding and recognition. It draws attention to inner suffering and the right to mental health by fostering empathetic identification with Senua.³³⁹ *Outlast* does the opposite. It removes the individual altogether. The protagonist is never given a full identity or interiority. Instead, he becomes a vessel through which violation is experienced, not explored.

There are times where *Outlast* and *Whistleblower* risk collapsing into aestheticised violence and suffering becomes a visual motif - especially when the players are unaware of the iceberg of lore fuelling the games. While this approach evokes themes of bodily autonomy, surveillance, and institutional rot, it also raises critical questions. Does the horror confront or commodify? Does it expose or exploit?³⁴⁰

Nonetheless, it is precisely this discomfort that grants the *Outlast* series its distinctive position. It does not aim to comfort. It places players in the position of the victims, where survival takes the front seat. In contrast to contemporary games that frame ethical engagement through choice or empathy, *Outlast* confronts players with a valuable and unsettling confrontation through powerlessness.³⁴¹

4.5 Integrating Video Games into HRE

While the use of video games in education traditionally centres on language acquisition, STEM, or cognitive skills, their capacity to evoke empathy, provoke critical reflection, and simulate complex social realities remains vastly underutilised within HRE.

In formal education settings, video games can transcend the limitations of conventional pedagogy by offering immersive experiences that complement theoretical learning. Games such as *Outlast*, *Papers, Please*, and *This War of Mine* expose players to nuanced scenarios, thereby embodying core human rights issues in a relatable manner. Educators can integrate curated gameplay excerpts alongside international human rights frameworks. Furthermore, students must be encouraged to critically interrogate the realities behind legal instruments and

³³⁹ Kelli N. Dunlap, 'Representation of Mental Illness in Video Games', *Proceedings of the 2018 Connected Learning Summit* (2018), 77 - 83.

³⁴⁰ Mark Steven, *Splatter Capital: The Political Economy of Gore Films* (Watkins Media, 2017).

³⁴¹ Tanya Krzywinska, 'Hands-On Horror', in *Digital Horror: Haunted Technologies, Network Panic and the Found Footage Phenomenon*, ed. by Xavier Aldana Reyes and Linnie Blake (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 93 - 108.

to engage emotionally with often abstract concepts. This approach resonates with the transformative model of HRE, which emphasises fostering agency and challenging structural inequalities rather than mere knowledge transmission.³⁴²

Beyond the classroom, video games hold particular promise within informal and non-formal educational contexts. Community workshops, youth programmes, and activist initiatives can harness the participatory and affective dimensions of games to catalyse dialogue and empower marginalised voices. Gameplay can be paired with discussions, creative reflections, or storytelling. This would help learners to connect the virtual experience with real-world struggles.

However, the intense emotional and thematic content of many games necessitates careful ethical consideration, including participant readiness, content warnings, and skilled facilitation to support learners' well-being. Not all games are appropriate for all audiences, and the affective intensity of certain narratives - as seen in *Outlast* - requires prompt contextualisation.

Ultimately, while video games are not the ultimate solution for the challenges of human rights education, their unique affordances position them as compelling, student-centred tools.. When thoughtfully integrated, they can improve critical engagement, enhance empathy, and nurture transformative learning that empowers participants to envision and enact human rights in practice.

4.6 Concluding Observations

Through this comparative discussion, it becomes evident that video games are not monolithic pedagogical instruments but multifaceted ethical laboratories. Each video game offers a distinct set of emotional, narrative, and mechanical approaches to human rights themes. *Outlast* and *Whistleblower*, when seen alongside other games, reveals both its innovative power to portray bodily autonomy and its potential pitfalls in sensationalising suffering. Ultimately, this chapter concludes that the pedagogical value of games lies not in their mere representation of human rights abuses but in how they prompt players to feel dignity and agency.

³⁴² Bajaj, "Human Rights Education", 481 - 508.

Conclusion

What happens when learning about human rights is no longer a passive act but an experience that challenges you from the inside? This thesis has explored how video games, using *Outlast* (2013) and *Whistleblower* (2014) as case studies, can go beyond traditional teaching methods to create spaces where players engage emotionally and intellectually with human rights issues. Far from being mere entertainment or escapism, these games reveal the potential of video games - across different genres - to become meaningful tools in human rights education, encouraging reflection on power, vulnerability, and resistance.

The following are the conclusions of this thesis:

- By connecting incidents within *Outlast*'s game world to real-world legal frameworks and documented human rights violations, the thesis throws light on how video games can offer a relevant space for reflecting on human rights abuses. In-game narratives echo established principles such as those found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention against Torture. Players are invited to critically assess these norms in immersive contexts.
- The use of horror aesthetics in *Outlast* serves a function beyond fear. Rather than simply provoking anxiety or shock, the game's unsettling atmosphere acts as a catalyst and pushes players to navigate complex ethical landscapes. This fosters a deeper understanding of foundational human rights concepts such as dignity, bodily autonomy, and the abuse of power. Yet, this potential requires careful framing to avoid re-traumatization or a voyeuristic fetishisation of suffering.
- Importantly, this thesis highlights that *Outlast* and *Whistleblower* are but case studies within a wider field of possibilities. Video games, regardless of genre, can perform varied roles as vehicles for social critique and education. Their interactive nature allows for experiential learning that traditional media cannot replicate, opening new pedagogical frontiers.
- The destabilising power of video games must not be romanticised or treated as a simple shortcut to engagement - especially those dealing with sensitive human rights themes.

Educators and scholars need to apply these tools with awareness of players' backgrounds and emotional capacities. This should be done to ensure that these experiences do not inadvertently reproduce harm. When handled with care, video games can serve as experiential case studies in power dynamics, vulnerability, and resistance, which are crucial dimensions of critical human rights education.

- The embodied experience of playing video games uniquely situates learners within human rights issues. Unlike passive media consumption, games require decision-making, exploration, and sometimes complicity in unethical scenarios. This prompts players to reflect on their own values and choices. This active engagement fosters critical thinking and emotional investment vital for transformative human rights education.
- *Outlast*'s narrative construction encourages players to piece together histories of abuse and resistance through its fragmented storytelling and environmental clues. This mirrors the investigative work often required in human rights advocacy. Such narrative techniques highlight the pedagogical potential of games to teach not just facts, but also skills of inquiry and critical analysis.
- The integration of legal documents, notes, and dialogues within *Outlast* grounds the game's fictional horrors in recognizable realities. This blending of fact and fiction facilitates a deeper understanding of systemic violence and institutional complicity. It can act as a crucial insight for learners confronting the often abstract concept of structural human rights violations.
- Video games also challenge conventional notions of spectatorship. By immersing players in the roles of victims, survivors, or even perpetrators, games complicate moral binaries and encourage nuanced understandings of agency and culpability. This complexity enriches human rights education by fostering empathy without simplifying narratives into the tired dichotomy of "heroes and villains".
- The pedagogical use of video games demands rigorous critical frameworks. Without careful contextualisation and debriefing, games risk reinforcing stereotypes or desensitising players to violence and suffering. The design of educational interventions

using games must therefore integrate trauma-informed practices and actively engage with players' emotional responses.

- In formal classrooms, games can complement legal and theoretical instruction by immersing students in lived experiences of human rights challenges. In informal and community-based contexts, video games offer participatory and engaging spaces for dialogue and reflection.
- Beyond individual learning, video games offer community-building potential. Multiplayer or narrative-sharing platforms can facilitate dialogue around human rights themes, transforming solitary play into collective reflection and activism. This social dimension aligns with the participatory ethos central to human rights education.
- The rapid evolution of video game technologies, including virtual and augmented reality, promises even more immersive and impactful human rights education experiences. Future research must explore how these technologies can enhance embodiment, presence, and empathy while maintaining ethical safeguards.
- Finally, establishing video games as legitimate pedagogical tools in human rights education challenges the boundaries of traditional academia. It calls for holistic collaboration between game designers, educators, human rights practitioners, and scholars to create meaningful learning environments.

In answering the research question, this thesis affirms that video games can indeed be established as legitimate pedagogical tools for human rights education. The immersive, affective, and interactive qualities of games like *Outlast* provide unique opportunities to engage learners in ways that complement and challenge traditional educational methods. This does not mean games should replace existing pedagogies, but rather that they should be recognised and developed as valuable additions to the field.

The promise of video games as sites of human rights learning is vast, yet still underexplored. This study contributes to the existing foundational work, inviting further research and practical experimentation to establish “video games as pedagogical tools for human rights education” as an independent discipline. Future research could focus on empirical studies assessing the actual

impact of specific games on learners' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to human rights. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable to understand the lasting effects of game-based learning in both formal and informal settings. Additionally, comparative research examining different genres and styles of games could help identify which game mechanics or narratives are most effective. Finally, interdisciplinary collaboration between educators, game designers, and human rights practitioners could advance the development of games specifically designed for educational purposes. Thereby, both engagement and transformative potential are maximised effectively.

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Annex 1: In-Game Documents

This section comprises all the documents collected during *Outlast (2013)* and *Outlast: Whistleblower (2014)*.

1.1 Outlast

1.1.1 Title: "The Whistleblower"

Transcript:

"September 17, 2013
From: 10260110756@mutemail.com
To: milesupshur@gmail.com
Subject: TIP / Illegal Activity at Murkoff Psychiatric Systems

You don't know me. Have to make this quick. They might be monitoring.

I did 2 weeks of software consult at MURKOFF Psychiatric Systems' facilities in Mount Massive. All sorts of NDA's I am very much breaking right now but seriously, fuck those guys.

Terrible things happening there. Don't understand it. Don't believe half the things I saw. Doctors talking about dream therapy going too deep, finding something that had been waiting for them in the mountain. People are being hurt and Murkoff is making money.

It needs to be exposed."

1.1.2 Title: "Dr. Wernicke Obituary"

Transcript:

"OBITUARY FROM
www.thedenvereagle.com/obituaries/obituary.aspx?page=life&story&pd=17827364905

Rudolf G. Wernicke

Dr. Rudolf G. Wernicke, age 90, passed away doing the work he loved on February 28th, 2009. He was born in 1918 in Munich, Germany, and achieved fame in the mathematic and scientific communities for a paper written with early computing pioneer Alan Turing. After a cloudy history with the German war effort, he emigrated to the United States in 1949 with a

visa from the State Department. Several decades of government research in Los Alamos led to New Mexico, where Dr. Wernicke retired to pursue landscape photography and care for his cats. He came to Colorado shortly after the turn of the millennium to pursue charitable work for the Murkoff Corporation. A statement from the company calls Dr. Wernicke "a true humanitarian with a generous spirit." He leaves no survivors."

1.1.3 Title: "MKULTRA Program Excerpt"

Transcript:

"MKULTRA program, CIA MORI doc no. 140401, pp. 1, 5, 9, excerpts

To: File

Subject: Special Research, Bluebird

I. General Problem

For the past several months Bluebird has been endeavoring to ascertain by research, study, instruction and some practice what value (if any) can be derived from SI [Sleep Instruction] and H [Hypnotic] techniques when applied to war and specific Agency problems.

3. Can we create by post-H control an action contrary to an individual's basic moral principles?

7. Can we guarantee total amnesia under any and all conditions.

8. Can we "alter" a person's personality? How long will it hold?

17. What are full details on a "sleep-inducing machine"?"

1.1.4 Title: "Project Walrider Profitability Report"

Transcript:

"From: Helen Granat

To: group8416@murkoffcorp.lu

Subject: Project Walrider On Site Inspection

Dear Sirs,

The full report pending, no immediate action is required on the part of The Murkoff Corp. The profit potential of PROJECT WALRIDER remains staggeringly high. The four fatalities contain enough ambiguous data to make any litigation, if evidence is correctly managed, impossible. PROJECT WALRIDER remains a dangerous initiative, and there will almost certainly be further casualties. As with the others, however, family and government interest in the patients is so low as to make any chance of legal actions vanishingly unlikely. Violence among patients is increasing as the Morphogenic Engine Therapy gets closer to producing working models, but a combination of physical and chemical restraints has proven sufficiently effective to assure continued control and profit.

Respectfully,

Helen Granat

Murkoff Legal Mitigation Dept."

1.1.5 Title: "Father Martin, Finger Painter"

Transcript:

"From: n.wolfram@murkoffcorp.us.com

To: h.granat@murkoffcorp.us.com

Subject: Patient Art Program / PATIENT "FATHER" MARTIN ARCHIMBAUD

Helen-

Dr. Zeichner gave me your info to contact regarding the cancelation of the arts program. My patient, Martin Archimbaud, has made enormous strides in his therapy on account of his finger painting. Just in the week since canceling the arts program, his schizoaffective assertions of some "higher calling" have accelerated enormously. Please, just let the man finger paint. The few dollars you're saving on temper paint is more than swallowed by the cost of Clozapine. I can't imagine the logic at play here, unless Murkoff WANTS our patients to become more disengaged from reality.

Please advise.
Dr. Neil Wolfram"

1.1.6 Title: "The Gospel of Sand"

Transcript:

"(Found scrawled in pencil on the back of an admittance form. Handwriting matches samples from patient "Father" MARTIN ARCHIMBAUD.)

This God is real. What we've mistaken so long for ghosts, spirits, madness. We were only willfully ignorant. The scales on Saul's eyes were fear, and when you see beyond it, you truly see. This is the gift of the Walrider. The Gospel of Sand. The greatest sin in the world is willful ignorance of God. To receive a revelation and not spread it to the waiting flock. This place... To stand in the way of salvation is a sin for which there is no punishment too great."

1.1.7 Title: "Our Own Personal Cavalry"

Transcript:

"I don't even know your name. But I've come to think of you as one of my blood, my Paul, I hope you don't mind. And I hope you don't indulge the vanity of self-pity, the fear that your suffering is more than others'. We all must endure this, and you are nearly done. There's no way to heaven but by the cross. And every man needs another to help drive the nails in. I am here for you. I am waiting up ahead."

1.1.8 Title: "The Gospel of Judas"

Transcript:

"I am an unworthy supplicant, who can serve our lord only by feeding our lord. Please take me, Walrider. Let my shepherd's Apostle see it and spread it with his lies for a greater truth. Your time upon the world has come. My

flesh longs for your beautiful wraith. My blood is filled with you and waiting to be set free. This is my prayer. Write your gospel in my flesh."

1.1.9 Title: "Project Walrider Cost Report"

Transcript:

"PATIENT STATUS REPORT

by Rick Trager

This patient also, unfortunately, didn't make it. I tried my best, but I'm just a doctor, not a miracle-worker. And I'm pretty new to this whole "doctor" thing, so I'm still working out all the kinks.

Anyhoo- somebody's gotta cut the fat from this PROJECT WALRIDER disaster. We've been bleeding money ever since this thing went tits up on account of that Billy kid. But I've managed to slim back personnel by more than eighty people. Which means short term savings in salary and long term savings in pension and health care costs.

AND I've been figuring out a lot about biology. I was on the fence about it before, but now I can say with absolute certainty that a person can't live without his kidneys. You learn something new every day."

1.1.10 Title: "Project Walrider Patient Status Report for William Hope"

Transcript:

"MURKOFF PSYCHIATRIC SYSTEMS

PROJECT WALRIDER

Mount Massive CO

Case Number: 174

Patient Initials: WPH, "Billy"

Consultation Dated: 2012.10.14

Initial Date of Patient Consult: 2009.04.12

Patient Age: 19

Gender: Male

Observing Physician: Dr. Carl Houston (DBNR)

THERAPY STATUS:

Patient claims to have progressed to self-directed lucid dream states. MORPHOGENIC ENGINE activity observed at unprecedented scale. Continuing stage 4 hormone schedule.

DIAGNOSTICS:

Spirometry revealed no bronchial accumulation.

Hematocrit centrifuge again failed to separate erythrocytes. Highly worrisome.

MRI revealed arrhythmic REM/NREM cycle. Laughter in NREM state.

INTERVIEW NOTES:

Billy asked about the status of his mother's lawsuit against Murkoff and the asylum. This represents a catastrophic breach in security, despite Billy's claims that he discovered the truth 'in the blood dreams of Doctor Trager.' (Note: the only Trager on company records, one Richard Trager, is an executive from M.R.D.) All orderlies and security personnel must be questioned and video security improved to include analytical biometrics.

MURKOFF PSYCHIATRIC SYSTEMS PROJECT WALRIDER
Mount Massive CO"

1.1.11 Title: "Project Paperclip Excerpt"

Transcript:

"PROJECT PAPERCLIP, Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency (JIOA) document number 8 of 186, location 230/86/46/5
<excerpt>

REF: Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act.

a. The First, PAPERCLIP, provides a means of obtaining services of foreign specialists for specific assignments within the technical services of the Departments of Army, Navy, and Air Force.

b. PROJECT 63 is primarily a denial program with utilization as a desirable feature. The aim of this program is to secure employment in the United States of certain preeminent GERMAN and AUSTRIAN SPECIALISTS, thus denying their services to potential enemies."

1.1.12 Title: "Dr. Wernicke Death Certificate"

Transcript:

"Please find attached a copy of the DEATH CERTIFICATE for RUDOLF G. WERNICKE, Murkoff Psychiatric Systems subcontractor no. 148616.
No surviving family.

STATE OF COLORADO
hold to light to view watermark
File No. 8732
Place: Colorado
Town or City: Mount Massive Preserve
Full Name: Rudolf Gustav Wernicke
Length of residence in city or town where death occurred:
0 Years, 7 months
How long in U.S., if of foreign birth: 55 years
Sex: Male
Color or Race: White

Single, Married, Widowed, or Divorced (write the word):
Single.
Date of Birth: October 20, 1918
Birthplace: Germany
Date of Death: February 28, 2009

I hereby certify:
that I attended deceased from June 4, 2003 to February 28,
2009
that I saw him alive on February 27, 2009, that death
occurred on the date stated above at 4:11 AM.

The principal cause of death and related causes of
importance were as follows:
"Heart failure due to advanced age."
THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THIS IS A TRUE AND CORRECT COPY OF
THE OFFICIAL RECORD"

1.1.13 Title: "Request for Reassignment"

Transcript:

"From: David Annapurna
To: hresources.us@murkoffcorp.lu
Subject: Request for Reassignment

To Whom it May Concern,

This is my third time asking for reassignment after two
months without an answer. I don't want to work at Mount
Massive any more. I have been an orderly my entire adult
life, but have never experienced such a consistent level
of secrecy and disrespect. I even have suspicions that some
of the patients may be being abused. I know personally two
of them who have been moved to the basement ward and never
returned. If I don't get an answer to this email, I will
be forced to resign, and may very well consider contacting
the press. Thanks for your time.

David Annapurna."

1.1.14 Title: "Persecutorial Delusions"

Transcript:

"From: r.trager@murkoffcorp.lu
To: p.walsh@murkoffcorp.us.com
Subject: Annapurna, employee no. 531920

Mr. Walsh,
Please accept the immediate resignation of Orderly 531920,
David Annapurna, and process him as a patient of Mount
Massive to treat his persecutorial delusions. Treatment
should continue until the time of his death. Thanks,
buddy.

Rick Trager
Murkoff R&D."

1.1.15 Title: "Variant Postmortem"

Transcript:

"PROJECT WALRIDER
POSTMORTEM PREPARATORY REPORT MM1300921
(form note: all material herein to be transcribed and revised to fit legally binding requirements of Murkoff Corp. records. See form 4083)
AUTHOR: Jennifer Roland
NOTES: My fourteenth autopsy of a Walrider patient, showing no more signs of accepting the therapy than any of the others. There have been slight gains in cell migration and morphogenesis (including effects similar to Human Growth Hormone), but nothing to suggest the stable creation of a sentient, independent swarm. So tired. Doubting my judgement. Will submit another request for leave. The psychological cost of using such far gone and further provoked patients is more than I feel I can handle.

May suggest hanging less hope on the far-flung theories of a senile Nazi and move towards using a simpler mechanical engine based on major sperm protein.

Will definitely suggest harsher chemical restraints. Murkoff Security killed patient 921 after he overcame enough tranquilizers to put down a hockey team. I'm afraid the Hormone Therapy is interacting with our chemical restraints in a counterproductive manner."

1.1.16 Title: "Rose Garden"

Transcript:

"(Excerpt from the diary of Shirley Pierce, Mount Massive Mental Hospital Patient, 1952-1964)

How can I not remember where the cuts are coming from? They hurt so deeply, even days later. Doctor Newhouse tells me that it's my fault, I'm subconsciously resisting the hypnotherapy. But I want so much to get better, I don't know how I could be doing this to myself. Dr. Newhouse says it's another condition of my bedroom-inspired hysteria. Poor Bruce, I make him suffer so.

I've tried, subtly, to ask Mrs. Jackson if she's had similar "issues" with her husband, but she is loathe to talk about it. Her husband, too, has found comfort in a younger woman.

I know the doctors only mean well, and with the help of the government men who've joined the staff, I am in the very

best hands possible. I should just take my pills and sleep, hope for more pleasant dreams tonight."

1.1.17 Title: "Warrant For Seizure"

Transcript:

"THE MURKOFF CORP. United States Office
WARRANT FOR SEIZURE CASE NUMBER: 294758104

In the Matter of the Seizure of:
MOUNT MASSIVE PSYCHIATRIC CENTER
MURKOFF PSYCHIATRIC SYSTEMS
Mount Massive Wilderness Area
Country Road 112

Affidavit(s) having been made before the BOARD OF DIRECTORS by MURKOFF HARDLINE SECURITY (M.H.S.) who has reason to believe:

CATASTROPHIC SECURITY FAILURE OF PSYCHIATRIC CENTER WITH IMMINENT DANGER OF ENVIRONMENT CONTAMINATION

We are satisfied that the affidavit(s) and testimony establish sufficient evidence to require urgent action on the part of M.H.S. and grounds for the issuance of this warrant.

You are hereby required to grant M.H.S. full access to all facilities and surrender complete authority to its agents. By acceptance of this document you (and any surviving relative) surrender all claims of litigation against the Murkoff Corp. or its subsidiaries for the actions of M.H.S or the circumstances which required their actions, regardless of responsibility."

1.2 Outlast: Whistleblower

1.2.1 Title: "Lesser Known Ecological Aspects of Humanity"

Transcript:

"EXCERPT FROM 1957 AND COMMENT ON IG REPORT "OPERATIONS OF TSD"

7. Influencing Human Behavior

e. The potential use of psychochemicals in political actions operations is well recognized, although it has not been explored as thoroughly as might be expected. Chemical Division includes it as an objective of its program to be prepared to support or make such operations possible. Non-chemical methods are also included in the program.

Note: (J. Lawler/April 15, 1958) Present the above MKULTRA excerpt to Technical Services Division for budgeting and

authorization of continued research into research of Dr. Rudolf Wernicke (asset 14866) and project WALRIDER. Autopsy of recovered test subjects shows chemical content of bodies (metallic tumors, evidence of sub-dermal combustion) that indicated heavy psychochemical dosage. (See note: 92387-HS.BERLIN.6.Sept.1938) "

1.2.2 Title: "The Groom"

Transcript:

"Above the knees, below the navel,
Sliced and sewn on Gluskin's table.
To make a place to push inside,
The Groom will make himself a bride.
Above the knees, below the navel,
Sliced and sewn on Gluskin's table.
To make a place to push inside,
The Groom will make himself a bride.
Above the knees, below the navel,
Sliced and sewn on Gluskin's table.
To make a place to push inside,
The Groom will make himself a bride.
Above the knees, below the navel,
Sliced and sewn on Gluskin's table.
To make a place to push inside,
The Groom will make himself a bride.
Above the knees, below the navel,
Sliced and sewn on Gluskin's table.
To make a place to push inside,
The Groom will make himself a bride.
Above the knees, below the navel,
Sliced and sewn on Gluskin's table.
To make a place to push inside,
The Groom will make himself a bride."

1.2.3 Title: "Project Walrider Patient Status Report for Frank Manera"

Transcript:

"MURKOFF PSYCHIATRIC SYSTEMS
PROJECT WALRIDER
Mount Massive CO
Case Number: 209
Patient: FRANK ANTONIO MANERA
Consultation Dated: 2012.08.29
Initial Date of Patient Consult: 2010.11.01
Patient Age: 36
Gender: Male
Observing Physician: Dr. Carl Houston (DBNR)

THERAPY STATUS:

Minimal Morphogenic Engine activity, and only at extreme (stages 5 and 6) levels of hormone therapy. Dream states

return repeatedly to images of isolation and betrayal. Zero lucid state.

DIAGNOSTICS:

Heavy bronchial accumulation consistent with patient with histories of tobacco and marijuana. Exceptionally low REM activity.

INTERVIEW NOTES:

At the time of this interview, Frank was down to 155 pounds, (from his admission weight of 228.) He was lethargic and largely non-responsive, exhibiting interest only in the hypnotherapy script pattern 9 (Wernicke), concerning drinking blood from the chest of sleeping men. He continues to refuse bathes or the attention of a barber outside of general anesthesia, stating, "if I cannot partake, I cannot share."

Recommend forced nutrition for Mr. Manera if we cannot find something he likes to eat.

MURKOFF PSYCHIATRIC SYSTEMS PROJECT WALRIDER
Mount Massive CO

1.2.4 Title: "Patient Dennis"

Transcript:

"From: n.wolfram@murkoffcorp.us.com
To: f.ford@murkoffcorp.us.com
Subject: Dissociative Dennis

Dr. Ford,

I conducted another interview with your patient, Dennis, this afternoon and have to agree with your suspicions. In the course of a forty minute interview, I had a wide exposure to all four of Dennis' expressed personalities, (as near as I could tell two brothers, their father, and their grandfather.) They seem primarily concerned with some life-threatening flood, though there was little consistency between the event having already happened or threatening imminent arrival.

The clarity of his delusion, and performative nature of the personalities' expression certainly suggests malingering. I admittedly fall in the Furstenburg camp of categorical skepticism of the Dissociative Personality Disorder. But Dennis's case seems clearly invented by an attention-seeking patient, more likely symptoms of gross narcissism and obsessive compulsive disorder. Continue with shock therapy.

Sincerely,
Dr. Wolfram"

1.2.5 Title: "Resignation of Waylon Park"

Transcript:

"From: j.blair@murkoffcorp.us.com
To: h.grant@murkoffcorp.us.com
Subject: Resignation for Mental Health, CC 8208

Ms. Grant,

You may receive requests for information from a Mrs. Lisa Park, of Leadville, CO, in the coming weeks concerning the resignation and hospitalization of her husband, Waylon. If so, please forward them to my personal attention.

Waylon Park (Former consulting contract 8208) resigned due to previously undiagnosed mental illness. I personally visited Mrs. Lisa Park and her sons and broke the news to them, with the "silver lining" that Murkoff Psychiatric would be graciously providing treatment. Mrs. Park had some less than charitable things to say about myself and the Murkoff corporation. I assured her that with her power of attorney she could try to fight the doctors' diagnoses of her husband's illness.

However, if it were discovered that he resigned under false pretenses, his insurance would be cancelled and the family would be saddled with not insignificant healthcare debts. Hopefully she understood.

But if she insists on making a nuisance of herself, or tries to get around me, please let me know. This is one I want to take care of personally.

Yours.
Jeremy Blaire"

1.2.6 Title: "God and Family"

Transcript:

"(Excerpt from the recordings of Doctor Bruce Newhouse, MD. Employed by Mount Massive Hospital 1958-1965)

Father Clarke--

Far be it from me to lie to a man of God, so let me at least say that I will do my personal best to improve the safety of your working conditions. I and the rest of the staff truly appreciate everything you do for our patients, and if you feel threatened by anybody in particular, simply let us know and we can either increase chemical restraints, or administer a lobotomy or similar calming procedure.

Don't underestimate the contribution your sermons offer our patients. Especially considering the depth and necessarily chaotic nature of hypnotherapy, our patients need the bedrocks of God and family. Not all of our poor unfortunates have the families to call upon, and so the burden, (and calling,) is yours. We are all of us relying on your faith and hard work.

DBNR
Dr. Newhouse, MD
May 20, 1961"

1.2.7 Title: "Miscarried Profits"

Transcript:

"From: j.blair@murkoffcorp.us.com
To: r.trager@murkoffcorp.us.com
Subject: false pregnancies / real profits

Rick,

Fun hitting the greens last week, we should make the drive more often.

Was reviewing some old test records from the early days of Project Walrider and something sparked my interest. Were you following the project back in 2010? Apparently we had issues with female employees experiencing psychosomatic pregnancies, something to do with how the Morphogenic Engine interacts with the immune system? (All Greek to me. Am I right?) It was more often fatal than not, and these were employees not patients, so a little harder to sweep under the rug. But...

The Morphogenic Engine activity in these ladies' marrow was off the charts. And these are women who were never even exposed to additional hormone therapy. Now I don't know PPM from a kick in the teeth, but I can read a spreadsheet, and if the projected profits from PROJECT WALRIDER are half of what they say they are, I've just got one question:

Why aren't we performing experiments on women? God knows mental illness is an equal opportunity affliction. Seems unethical to pass up on such a potential windfall.

Sincerely,
Jer"

1.2.8 Title "Three Blind Dreamers"

Transcript:

"TRANSFER AUTHORIZATION FOR PATIENTS:

14306-8
14279-1
14868-1

FROM:
MURKOFF PSYCHIATRIC SYSTEMS
Mount Massive

TO:
MURKOFF ARD
Zeichner Facility

CAUTION: Level TRIPLE BLACK security protocols, including chemical restrain, physical restraint, and separate adaptive hyperbaric chambers are to be used at all time in transit. Chemical stimulation is highly recommended for all personnel within 500 meters of the patients. Attempts at communication should be assumed to be hallucinations and disregarded. Facial disfigurement should not be taken as a sign of lost acuity; they are physically blind but not unseeing.

NOTE: Security clearances for PROJECT WALRIDER will not apply to information regarding Patients 14306-8, 14279-1, and 14868-1. New security clearances will be issued and appropriate protocol assigned."

1.2.9 Title: "Project Walrider Patient Status Report of Eddie Gluskin"

Transcript:

"Case Number: 196
Patient: EDDIE GLUSKIN
Consultation Dated: 2013.06.09
Initial Date of Patient Consult: 2013.02.14
Patient Age: 46
Gender: Male
Observing Physician: Dr. Garrett Snow

THERAPY STATUS:

Lucid dreaming figures remain as murky as ever; Gluskin claims near constant control of his dream state, yet correspondence between his narrative and REM cycles. Highly arrhythmic REM/NREM. Morphogenic Engine activity plateaus at 90 PPM.

DIAGNOSTICS:

Heavy bronchial accumulation. The rashes associated with hormone therapy have receded and vanished since we stopped using latex tubing.

INTERVIEW NOTES:

Gluskin remains a frustrating interview subject; he's still trying to tell us what he thinks we want to hear, while studiously avoiding certain elements of the truth. His childhood remains an obvious fiction, he's claiming to have grown up in "Leave it to Beaver," despite a traumatically violent ongoing sexual experience that is a matter of public and medical record. When I confronted him with the photographs his father and uncle took, he responded with a mixture of laughter and anger, and restraints were issued.

He similarly refuses to discuss his victims, both categorically and specifically. When I showed him pictures of the women, he would not admit that they were dead or mutilated.

He is still claiming advancement in the Morphogenic Engine program that he has not yet achieved, said that he could clearly hear the voice of the Walrider just by closing his eyes. Clearly he's still trying to curry the favor of his doctors. I won't speculate what he expects to gain by it."

1.2.10 Title: "Beyond Hope"

Transcript:

"From: Helen Granat
To: group8416@murkoffcorp.lu
Subject: Rudolf Wernicke Phase-Out

Dear Sirs,

The ground work has been laid to ensure an uneventful egress for Rudolf Wernicke from structural and financial systems at Mount Massive. His advanced age should alleviate any suspicions among contractors and employees, (among whom he has been cheerfully nicknamed "The Crypt Keeper,") and legally speaking he died years ago.

I understand patients 14306-8, 14279-1, and 14868-1 have already been scheduled for transit. We're all terribly excited at the obvious profit potential of the new project. My researchers have combed through Wernicke's files and found no mention of the three "lucid dreamers." I think we can safely assume Wernicke was sufficiently distracted by the partial success of the patient Billy Hope (along with his own infirmity), to be ignorant of the real discovery at hand.

Even minimal exploitation of these resources is hard to overestimate. I only hope the new facility is sufficiently

shielded to allow female staff, so I can see what comes with my own eyes.

Respectfully,
Helen Granat
Murkoff Legal Mitigation Dept."

Annex 2: In-Game Notes

This section comprises all the written records of Miles' and Waylon's thoughts and feelings while recording particular incidents in *Outlast (2013)* and *Whistleblower (2014)*.

2.1 Outlast

2.1.1 Title: "Death of Trager"

Transcript:

"How To Make Trager Juice
Step 1: squeeze."

2.1.2 Title: "Mount Massive Asylum"

Transcript:

"I start feeling sick just looking at this place. Mount Massive Asylum, shut down amid scandal and government secrecy in 1971, reopened by Murkoff Psychiatric Systems in 2009 under the guise of a charitable organization. Cell phone reception cut off abruptly a mile out, more like a jammer than lost signal. The Murkoff Corporation has a long track record of disguising profit as charity. But never on American soil. Whatever they thought they could get out of this place has to be big. Might finally be the story that breaks the bastards."

2.1.3 Title: "Total Security"

Transcript:

"I can't shake Chris Walker, the big ugly fucker who likes ripping off peoples' heads. I hear him muttering about security protocols, containment. What if he's not the problem? What if he's trying to fix it?"

2.1.4 Title: "Death of the Soldier"

Transcript:

"This is the way you die. Ripped to pieces from the inside, watching your marrow scatter on a concrete wall. You've escaped one Hell, Chris Walker. God help me but I somehow hope you didn't find another."

2.1.5 Title: "I'm Inside"

Transcript:

"I'm inside. Bodies everywhere. Blood. Burn marks. Heads lined up like bottles behind a bar, Dead Murkoff scientists hung from the ceiling; their badges say "Murkoff Advanced Research Systems." Murkoff's longtime M.O. Has been to profit off the exploitation of supposed charity. Fuck the third world and bankroll another billion.

How did Murkoff think they would make money off a building full of crazy people?

There's some kind of tactical cop pinned like a pig on a spit. Tells me to get the fuck out and then dies. Would have been a good thing to hear when I could still leave the way I came."

2.1.6 Title: "Organised Torture"

Transcript:

"The harder I try to escape, the further I get into this god awful place. Like fighting a tar pit. They've been torturing people in the basement, and by method. Written on the wall- "FINGERS FIRST. THEN BALLS. THEN TONGUE." Somebody's managing the torture, instructing them."

2.1.7 Title: "The Passion of Father Martin"

Transcript:

"I can't believe Father Martin one-upped Jesus Christ himself in shitty ways to die. And I don't believe I'm going to miss him. A way out. If he's telling the truth, now I've got a way out. And a story to tell. He wants me to spread his gospel. I'll tell the whole fucking world."

2.1.8 Title: "Under the Mountain"

Transcript:

"Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

Whoever finds my corpse- trust no one and tell everyone. I am not crazy. I know, I know, only crazy people say that. But I am as sane as this world allows, with a camera full of evidence. Don't call it a gospel. Call it a mockery of reason, let the world know it is Murkoff's fault. Bury these bastards with my mutilated dead body."

2.1.9 Title: "Let It Burn"

Transcript:

"I'm not the only victim here, not by a long shot. I watch a man wait to burn to death, the most painful death imaginable, rather than stay in this place."

2.1.10 Title: "Billy Hope"

Transcript:

"From Billy's patient reports, he ought to be twenty-three years old. He looks like at least fifty years of rough road, pain scratched deep into what I can see.

Killing you would be an act of kindness."

2.2 Outlast: Whistleblower

2.2.1 Title: "A Radio in the Prison"

Transcript:

"There's a radio. In the prison. Short wave. If it's electronic I can make it talk, make it work for me. There's hope, Lisa. I'm coming home to you. My mistake was subtlety, like you always said. I thought leaking information to a few journalists was the safer way. I didn't want the spotlight, the attention. Murkoff is dangerous, I know that. I thought I had to be subtle for your sake, Lisa, and for the boys.

But I should have exposed what Murkoff is doing to the world, I should have shouted to anyone and everyone. I can't die. Not before I reach the radio. They can't cover this up now. It's too broken, too dangerous."

2.2.2 Title: "Satisfaction"

Transcript:

"A scream. Is it him, the cannibal? Could be pleasure or pain, I won't guess. I'm not sure he'd even know. His voice sounds like... something I wanted while watching the Engine. Its only message is hunger, to crush and consume. I'm going to try to forget it, Lisa. If I get out of here, I'm going to come back to you."

2.2.3 Title: "An Easy Way Out"

Transcript:

"It would be so easy. I don't believe in it any more. Getting the truth out. There is no truth, only lies we've accepted too long to double back on.

It's our children, Lisa. I would take the easy way out if it wasn't for the boys. Damn this place to hell, I'll suffer anything to get out of it."

2.2.4 Title: "Varying Effects"

Transcript:

"Lisa, or whoever finds this, know that Murkoff is making monsters. I'd never seen the patients after they'd gone through that German's so-called therapy. The Engine. So much worse than I could have imagined. They may still be human, but something's been ripped out of them. And too many... other things pushed back in. They were not all murderers. They were sick, but they weren't killers. Murkoff made them monsters.

Dr. Roset said that the engine had "varying effects," the variant outcomes too erratic for any sort of prediction. I

took it as idle cafeteria small talk, Raul's endless chatter. I should have listened."

2.2.5 Title: "Jeremy Blaire"

Transcript:

"Jeremy Blaire. My supervisor's supervisor, a man who'd see me skinned, salted, and raped for a promotion and a few martinis. Injured. Dying if he's not already dead. I'm trying to feel sorry for him. Really, I am.

But there's no way in hell he's stopping me from getting out of this godforsaken place. I'm coming home, Lisa."

2.2.6 Title: "Blue Beard's Wives"

Transcript:

"Bodies hanging like wet laundry, like skinned rabbits. Men mutilated, hunted, and murdered. The shortest distance between any two points separates violence and ruined lust. Whatever story he's telling himself, he's not making women to bear his children, he's making women to kill them.

Lisa, I want you to burn this place and any evidence it ever existed to the ground. Destroy the Murkoff Corporation. Bury it in shame, take away its money, wipe it from history.

This man thinks he's in love. He thinks the therapy made him better. Everything reeks of death and fear. Piss and coppery blood, meat decomposing to game."

2.2.7 Title: "Down, Down, Down"

Transcript:

"Somebody who looks as much like a priest as this place looks like as an asylum, writing instructions on the wall. Talking about God. Tells me not to be afraid.

How was I ever a part of this inhumane bullshit greed-driven moral genocide? The monsters Murkoff ripped from tortured minds, the lengths their jack-booted business school worms will go to protect it. Their own men slaughtered. I've never prayed in my life, Lisa, but if some small-minded interventionist god is listening, kill Jeremy Blaire before I die. Sanity and avarice. There's no pain he doesn't deserve.

There is no radio. No hope of reaching the outside world. Only escape."

2.2.8 Title: "What Fresh Hell"

Transcript:

"A man's body, mutilated and bent to mimic or... mock the moment of birth. The kind of thing that a man cannot see without changing in some irreparable way.

Lisa, I was with you when both our boys were born. It was, until recently, the most miraculous thing I had seen. Completely outside of reasonable belief and yet somehow central to everything I've come to believe since. You always said I was too literal-minded, tried to turn everything into an if-then statement.

Lately, I've widened my horizons. How can the things I've seen here be? But I know the answer. Money. Profit. Things we made just because we could."

Annex 3: In-Game Dialogues

All the different dialogues said by the various characters during *Outlast (2013)* and *Outlast: Whistleblower (2014)*.

Content Warning: The following section includes transcriptions of in-game dialogues that contain graphic descriptions of violence, torture, psychological abuse, and other potentially traumatic content. These texts are presented exclusively for scholarly analysis and critical discussion.

Reader discretion is advised.

3.1 *Outlast*

3.1.1 Wernicke Exit Interview

Transcript:

- **Interviewer:** ...exit interview recorded December 27th, 1985 in Los Alamos, New Mexico. Clearance Sierra Alpha. Subject: Dr. Rudolf Wernicke. 14866.
- **Wernicke:** The films are real.
- **Interviewer:** There was no alteration to the footage at all? No trickery?
- **Wernicke:** None.
- **Interviewer:** In June of 1943 you recorded three instances of spontaneous bleeding. A half dozen test subjects began to develop brain tumors.
- **Wernicke:** Yes. The autopsies revealed that the tumors were pure lead.
- **Interviewer:** It killed them? Can you explain why the results could not be reproduced in the United States?
- **Wernicke:** I have my theories. My homeland, in those years. It's impossible to understand the things we felt. What we believed. The overwhelming fear. Ecstatic rage and... English words are insufficient. More than hope. A human mind in that environment is capable of extraordinary things.
- **Interviewer:** You're saying the experiment needed...
- **Wernicke:** A proximity to death. To overwhelming madness. Only a test subject who had witnessed enough horror was capable of activating the engine.
- **Interviewer:** Do you believe your test subjects achieved something supernatural?
- **Wernicke:** No.
- **Interviewer:** Do you think they contacted something supernatural?
- **Wernicke:** Nothing is supernatural.
- **Interviewer:** Then what was it? You said Project Walrider was a gateway. A gateway to what?

3.1.2 Trager's Monologue

This dialogue occurs during the cutscene where Trager amputates Miles Upshur's fingers.

Transcript:

“You know, I'm a bit worried how much time you've been spending with Father Martin. I know... I hope you haven't been letting him confuse you with his... holier-than-thou bible thumping. No offense to the man, but I sometimes worry he might just be a little bit... crazy. It's understandable, people get scared, they're as like to turn to God as anything else. God died with the gold standard. We're on to more concrete faith now. You have to rob Paul to pay Peter, there is no other way. Murder in its simplest form, but what happens when all the money is gone? Well, money becomes a matter of faith. And that's what I'm here for. To make you believe. You paying attention? Don't pass

out on me, there's still a lot for you to absorb. There. Better now, right? Do you understand what we achieved here? We made the consumer into the means of production. This thing is going to sell itself!"

3.1.3 Wernicke's Monologue

This dialogue occurs during the cutscene where Miles finds Wernicke in a sealed office in the Underground Laboratory.

Transcript:

"Is somebody there?"

Has somebody survived? Come closer.

Please, talk to me, before he kills you, too.

Over here! Please, I must try to explain.

I promise you, I'm trying to help.

I know, I-I, I know, I am supposed to be dead. No, no such luck. I am older than sin, but, somehow, the only one left. Because of Billy. He takes care of me. He may think I'm his father. He certainly loves me, the poor idiot. Do you know what this symbol represents? It warns of a nanohazard. Microscopic machines, technology we have had for decades, but never mastered. Murkoff discovered, in my research, a work-a-round. Turning the cells of human bodies into nanofactories. It's the natural function of cells to produce molecules, but through psychosomatic direction, we engineered the precise molecules necessary. Mind over body. It was... foolish and wrong to think we could control it. To use mad men to control something so strong. You have to stop him, to... murder Billy. Turn off his life support, his anesthesia. You have to undo what I've done. No one can get out of this place while he lives. You must kill him.

We achieved something like this in 1944. Those fascists thought it was spirits, and I let them believe it. Let them kill themselves thinking there was some kind of afterlife now empirically promised to them. Fools. Poor Alan. He would weep to see what I've built from his dreams.

Billy doesn't mean harm. He's a child with a damaged mind, granted the powers of a God. It would make any of us into a monster. You must end this. We all must die here.

Murkoff knew the dangers, and they didn't care. In the corporations' mind, we are all just dollar amounts in a ledger. And the profits Project Walrider promised overshadowed whatever pitiful balance a few doctors and patients amounted to.

He will spread if you don't stop him. The Morphogenic Engine is self-perpetuating. I pray to God you have the strength to end it here with your death. More than anything I want to rest. Billy will not let me die. He could never imagine how cruel this is. I only want to die."

3.1.4 Prologue Text

This is the text displayed before the game begins.

Transcript:

"You are Miles Upshur, an investigative reporter whose ambition is about to earn him an intimate tour of hell on earth. Always willing to risk digging into the stories no other journalist would dare investigate, you will seek out the dark secret at the heart of Mount Massive Asylum. Stay alive as long as you can. Record everything. You are not a

fighter; To navigate the horrors of Mount Massive and expose the truth, your only choices are to run, hide, or die.”

3.1.5 Variant Dialogues (Prison Block)

These are the various dialogues said to Miles by the different variants in the prison cell block.

Transcript:

“The Doctor is dead. All the doctors are dead but The Doctor. So how did I see him? How did he see me? What does he want...what is he building?”

“So many dead and suffering here over so many years. So much horror. Have you read the files? It’s all there- superstition, delusional Cold War CIA garbage Nazi mysticism. Have you heard of MK ULTRA? They thought they could co-opt Nazi magic. No reason at all. Except money...it’s always money. It comes back and this place is filled with suffering for money. Goes capital..profit margins of torture.”

“The Doctor told me once if you showed a caveman our technology he would think it was magic. And if you showed a modern man magic, he would think it was technology. We have faith in all the wrong things. And it will destroy us.”

“Don't trust them. They'll tell you it's science but it's not. They were waiting for us. In this place. Billy understood. They've always been here.”

“What's the experiment the dead would perform on the living? I'll give you a hint. It's still happening! The experiment is still happening!”

“You just made us look in at our reflections, made us wish. You pushed our heads under and made us drink.”

“Said I could sell you the dream. The dreams. (sobs) Let me sell you the dream.”

“You are the product!”

3.1.6 Variant Dialogue

This is said by a random Variant on spotting Miles Upshur, right before proceeding to chase him.

Transcript:

“Who... You're one of those Murkoff sons of bitches, aren't you? I want to show you something!”

3.1.7 The Twins Dialogue (1)

This is an exchange between the twins after Miles jumps out an open window to hide from them.

Transcript:

Twin One: My god, he vanished.

Twin Two: Vanished without a trace.

Twin One: I detect sarcasm.

Twin Two: It was my intention.

Twin One: He thinks we're assholes.

Twin Two: Or stupid.

Twin One: Let's pull him in and slit his belly open.

Twin Two: Wait. Just a moment.

3.1.8 The Twins Dialogue (2)

This is an exchange between the twins after encountering Miles for the first time.

Transcript:

Twin One: Who's this?

Twin Two: Maybe Father Martin's man.

Twin One: Maybe.

Twin Two: He looks nervous.

Twin One: I would like to kill him.

Twin Two: As would I.

Twin One: The preacher asked us not to.

Twin Two: It would be impolite.

3.1.9 Pyromaniac Dialogue

This dialogue occurs when Miles runs into the Pyromaniac in the burning cafeteria while trying to figure a way out.

Transcript:

“I had to burn it. All of it. Murkoff took so much from us. Used us. Turned us into these things because nobody cares about a few forgotten lunatics. So let it burn. Burn the whole god damned thing down. Get out. If you want to live, you can get out through the kitchen.”

3.1.10 Variant Dialogue

This dialogue is said by a seemingly coherent Variant who Miles encounters in the sewers.

Transcript:

“You don't have to be scared of me. I can tell we're the same. You still know what's real. The... doctor's dead, you know that, right? Doctor Wernicke. Died before he even started working here. What kind of experiments does a dead doctor perform on living patients? That's the question.”

3.2 Outlast: Whistleblower

3.2.1 Eddie Gluskin Dialogues (1)

These are all the dialogues said by Eddie Gluskin, either to himself, Waylon or other Variants, about wanting a family.

Transcript:

“I know you're lonely like I am... Don't you want love? A family? Someone to take care of you?”

“I want you to have my baby.”

“I want a family, a legacy. To be the father I never had. I'll never let anything happen to our children. Not like...”

“There's no place like home”

“Love makes house a home”

3.2.2 Frank Manera Dialogues

These dialogues are said by Frank Manera while chasing Waylon Park with a chainsaw throughout the Hospital Block.

Transcript:

“I can smell you!”

“Your meat is mine.”

“You can’t hide. Meat. Lonely flesh.”

3.2.3 Dennis Dialogues

These are the dialogues spoken by Dennis in a dissociative episode while he attempts to trap Waylon as a sacrifice to Eddie Gluskin for self-preservation.

Transcript:

“We need a goat.”

“There's reason here.”

“To bear our guilt, our gender. A small piece of flesh between us and the blade.”

“You wanna give him to Gluskin?”

“That's the idea. We feed him a goat and leave him alone.”

“Me and my boys did good, didn't we?”

“Sorry, boy. We gotta make you an offering.”

“Oh, Gluskin's gonna have fun with you, boy.”

“A gift for the Groom.”

“Here comes the bride. Here comes your bride, Mr. Gluskin.”

“We give him other flesh and he s-s-spare ours.”

“Fuckin' idiot. He delivered his own self to Gluskin's hell.”

3.2.4 Jeremy Blaire Dialogue (1)

This dialogue occurs at the beginning of the game when Blaire catches the email that Waylon sent Miles.

Transcript:

“Mr. Waylon Park, consulting contract 8208. Software engineer with a level 3 security clearance. Graduated cum laude from Berkley, but still somehow not smart enough to realize that the last thing a fly ought to do in a spider's web is wiggle. Somehow dumb enough to think that a borrowed laptop, onion router, and firewall patch would be enough to fool the world's leading supplier of biometric security.”

3.2.5 Jeremy Blaire Dialogue (2)

This dialogue is said by Blaire to Waylon when he catches him trying to use the short-wave radio to call 911 for help.

Transcript:

“Waylon Park. You couldn't just... You couldn't just keep your mouth shut. You couldn't just play along. But you're done talking now... Do me a favor and die here, Park.”

3.2.6 Eddie Gluskin Dialogues (2)

These dialogues are said by Eddie Gluskin when the men he mutilates die inevitably from blood loss or when they (including Waylon) attempt to escape from him.

Transcript:

“Darling, I need you to try to bleed less. I know the fairer sex often endure the same wounds with more suffering, but you really need to make an effort.”

“No. I'm so sorry, darling. Love isn't for everybody.”
 “You've given up. You're ugly and you've given up on love. You're not even worth stringing up. Bleed here... and die.”
 “Get back here! You're not done dying, you slut!”
 “You all want to leave me? Is that it? You want to leave me? Fine! Go! You and the rest of these ungrateful sluts!”
 “Nobody loves you. Nobody! You die alone, you shit!”
 “Filthy sluts. You're like all the others. You don't deserve my children. You don't even deserve to live. You belong with the others.”
 “One more. I try and I try. And you all betray me. And you can hang like the rest of them.”
 “Oh god. Oh god, are you okay? Tell me you're okay. I hate to think of you suffering without me. Why would you do something like that to yourself? You'd rather... Rather die than be with me? Then die. I would have loved you forever.”
 “You'll run out of places to go. I know you're not like the others. Or are you just another whore?”
 “Love... is hard sometimes. To think I wanted you to have my children... Just another whore after all. Women!”
 “Forgive me, darling! Why are you making me do this? Don't leave me! I can't be alone!”
 “All of you whores. Your judgment. Your little swinish eyes.”
 “You're nobody's mother.”

3.2.7 Eddie Gluskin Monologue

These are the dialogues said by Gluskin while Waylon is tied up in his surgical chamber for mutilation.

Transcript:

“You make yourself a gift for me. A delicacy to be unwrapped and-- unwrapped again. And savored. I've been a little... vulgar. I know. And I want to say, I'm sorry. I just... you know how a man gets when he wants to know a woman. But after the ceremony, when I've made an honest woman of you... I promise I'll be a different man. You'll have to wait here. I know you must be just as eager as I am to consummate our love. But try to enjoy the anticipation.

Hold still now, darling. All these unsightly hairs. Oh! Silky smooth. Like a little girl again. Now the more delicate bits. You have amazing bone structure. Such soft skin. You're going to be beautiful. A woman... has to suffer some things. It's not pleasant, I know. But just try to... endure. For my sake. For the sake of our children. It won't take long. A few snips of the flesh here, and here. Cut away everything.... vulgar. A soft place to welcome my seed. To grow our family. The incision will hurt. And the conception. And birthing is never easy. I'll make the cut fast. Just close your eyes and think of our children.”

Annex 4: In-Game Figures

This section comprises screenshots from different moments during *Outlast (2013)* and *Outlast: Whistleblower (2014)*.

Content Warning: The following figures contain graphic and potentially distressing visual material, including but not limited to depictions of violence, torture, bodily harm, and other traumatic content as portrayed in the *Outlast* series. These images are included solely for academic and analytical purposes.

Viewer discretion is strongly advised.

Figure 1. Mount Massive Asylum, Colorado.



Figure 2. William “Billy Hope” in the Morphogenic Engine.



Figure 3. Corridors in Mount Massive Asylum.



Figure 4. First-Person View of Trager in *Outlast*.



Figure 5. Night Vision View of Camcorder in the Sewers.



Figure 6. Prison Block Cells, Mount Massive Asylum.

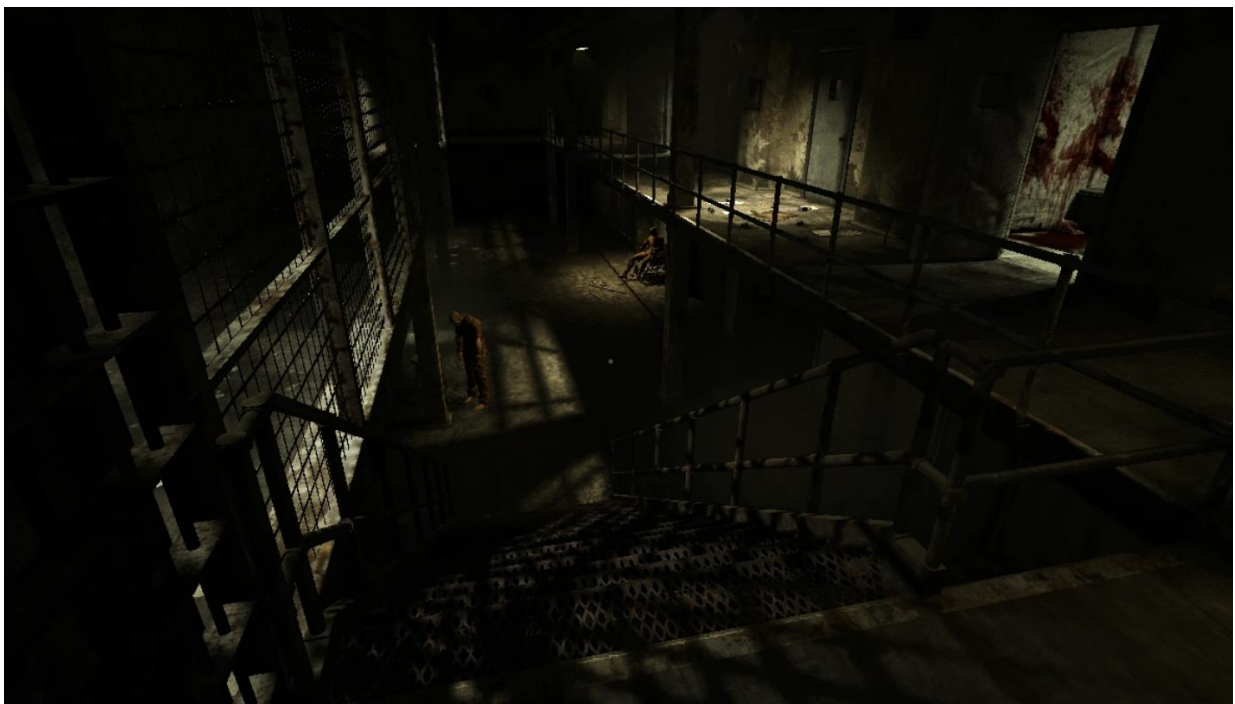


Figure 7(a). Male Ward, Mount Massive Asylum.



Figure 7(b). Female Ward, Mount Massive Asylum.



Figure 8. Underground Laboratory, Mount Massive Asylum.



Figure 9. Father Martin's Messages in Blood, Mount Massive Asylum.



Figure 10(a). Gluskin's Surgical Chamber, Mount Massive Asylum.



Figure 10(b). Gluskin's "Birthing" Re-Construction, Mount Massive Asylum.



Figure 10(c). Hanging Bodies of Men Mutilated by Gluskin, Mount Massive Asylum.



Figure 10(d). Gluskin's "Wedding Scene" Re-creation, Mount Massive Asylum.



Figure 11. Miles Upshur Being Shot to Death by Murkoff Hardline Security.



Figure 12. Father Martin's Death on the Cross.

