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HITTING A LITTLE TOO CLOSE TO HOME: REFLEXIVITY, LIMINALITY,
AND IDENTIFICATION IN HORROR ACROSS FILM, THEATRE, AND
GAMES

By

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ABSTRACT

Reflexive art makes explicit the inherent connection between artistic process, intertextual context, and an audience to create an intentional dialogue with its audience by tapping into the duality inherent in spectatorship - awareness of both the creation process and the final product, and participation in one or both through viewership. In this study I analyze several pieces across three mediums—film (*Funny Games* (2007), *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* (2007)), theatre (*Ubu Roi* (1896)), and video games (*The Stanley Parable* (2013), *Bioshock* (2007))—and consider audience reviews to determine how audiences are affected by reflexivity in each. Through the lens of the horror genre I consider reflexivity—and the liminal, intertextual, and interactive methods employed to achieve it—as a form of cultural reflection in which an art work calls upon its audience to reflect on how it has been created and on their place in that process as viewers. Explicitly and inescapably reflexive works of the horror/adjacent genre, such as those discussed herein, allow spectators to renew their awareness of the implications of art as both a cultural community and as individuals. While impeding some aspects of entertainment or enjoyment for audiences in the moment, as suggested by audience reviews, reflexivity seems to make these popular media works all the more culturally enduring.

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INTRODUCTION

The spectator is crucial to the completion of the artistic process, and art must be placed in the context of being somehow shared in order for a project to be complete. Especially in the performing arts, works are inherently in conversation with other works and their shared audiences, described by the term intertextuality, which encompasses this placement in the context of the history of a given medium or genre. Reflexive work, which this paper aims to discuss at length, makes explicit this connection and creates an intentional dialogue with its audience by tapping into the duality inherent in spectatorship - awareness of the creation process and the final product, and participation in one or both through viewership. In this study I will investigate several pieces across three mediums, theatre, film, and video games, which I argue are reflexive, and consider audience reviews to determine how audiences are affected by reflexivity in the various mediums.

The pieces covered in this paper are Michael Haneke's film *Funny Games* (2007); The Dowdle Brothers' film *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* (2007); Alfred Jarry's play *Ubu Roi* (1896); Davey Wreden and William Pugh's game *The Stanley Parable* (2013); and 2K's game *Bioshock* (2007). Each of the works analyzed are what I would consider horror or horror-adjacent. These terms in this paper mean they constitute artistic explorations of fear, the grotesque, and revulsion and aim to provoke audience responses via identification with these concepts. In each of the works analyzed, some

expression of this generic definition is present. Horror is well placed for a study of reflexivity in media. Horror, by virtue of being especially liminal - occupying, or inciting the feeling of occupying, a space outside of specific time and place, ungrounded, or transitional and between the boundaries of existing times and places - opens audiences to experience a feeling of multiple-placeness. This is required by reflexivity uniquely in its quest to place audiences in the situation of an artwork's creation and its consumption simultaneously. Horror also creates an obvious path for audiences to consider their placement in the process and what that means for society by virtue of being a particularly political genre.

Because each medium engages with both the genre and its own audience in different ways, I think it is useful to consider these related but different forms of art together rather than just one alone. It is especially interesting how the inherent interactivity of games affects the reflexive techniques - audiences of video games are expecting some level of reflexivity due to their understanding of the fabrication and the mediation in their own hands of the controls - something that I discuss as both a removal/distancing property and a potential immersion-strengthening device. The final section of this paper is a study of audience reviews and takeaways for each piece discussed which, when placed with my analysis of reflexive moments and tactics in each, will illuminate how works *can be* reflexive in various mediums, and how they are *differently* reflexive. It will also test if reflexivity is effective through particular tactics across mediums.

A Primer on Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a psychology term adapted to the humanities to describe a property of something being self-referential, or provoking reflection onto itself. The *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology* offers some potential uses of the term that I used as a jumping off point, the most relevant describing the concept as “a form of human reflection, as an active turning back on oneself or enacting some form of self-regard; such reflection is taken to be essential to engaging in and making sense of one’s place in the material and social world” (Morawski, 2014). Using this definition, I came to consider reflexivity as a social tool as it is employed in media – reflexive media would engage its audience into activity by both reflecting something about their world and illuminating their hand in the artistic process of creating this reflection.

I first encountered the term in film studies as one of Bill Nichols’ “Documentary Modes of Representation”, the second chapter of his book *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts of Documentary* (1991). Discussing an approach to documentary filmmaking, Nichols indicates that the reflexive mode differs from interactivity (though does not exclude it as a tactic) in that it “also engage[s] in metacommentary, speaking to us less about the historical world itself...than about the process of representation itself” (Nichols 56). He states that reflexive works might “draw attention to the process...when it poses problems for the viewer” or participants, and might employ manipulative realist techniques “only to interrupt and expose them” (Nichols 57).

The concept of representation as it interacts with truth and agency and the understanding of reflexivity as an engagement with audiences about the creation process is a theme we see as others discuss reflexivity in the literature review and through my investigation of the pieces and audiences' reviews of them. Reflexivity is about engaging with the fabricated nature of a work while interacting with that work, and my inquiry is about what effect that might have on an audience. Theatre artist and theorist Bertolt Brecht believed that understanding a story's fabrication while taking it in would allow for awareness from the audience and act as a wake-up call to action, to blend a couple turns of phrase. Reflexivity takes the form of this cultural reflection, whereby an effort is made to create a work that comments on the process of art-making after which an audience receives this message and reflects back on it, furthering conversation around the art form itself and potentially altering it in some way moving forward. Reflexivity can be present in a lot of works of art in the chosen mediums, but I am interested in when it is more intentional, actively inciting audiences into complicating their view of their relationship to art and their own world. Actively reflexive works allow spectators to renew their awareness of the creation process of art and their place in that process as a cultural community and as individuals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The most foundational piece in this research process has been Robert Stam's *Reflexivity in Film and Literature*. Stam provides in this work a multidisciplinary text on reflexivity and what it might look like in a variety of mediums, which is work I hope to extend by investigating audience responses to reflexivity in various mediums. He outlines a working definition of reflexivity as "the metaphorical capacity of cultural productions to 'look at' themselves, as if they were capable of self regard" (Stam xiii). I aim to expand this definition, because I think while useful this leaves out half of the cultural equation by neglecting the audience. While he does address audience relations throughout the piece, I want to place them within the context of creation by examining audience reviews. The self regard, in my argument, is not between art and itself, but between filmmaker-as-cultural-producer and filmgoer-as-cultural-producer. I argue that both parts of this dichotomy are necessary for reflexivity to happen, and necessary for a piece of art to be complete at all.

Using Stam's ideas as a foundation, I am looking at work that interacts with its audience and asks for interaction in return, work that calls audience attention to the medium through which the audience and creator communicate and asks them to play in multiple spaces at once - their own reality, the artists', and the conditions of the world of the piece. Stam positions reflexivity as a "nuanced spectrum or continuum" (Stam xvi), offering several potential categories to aid in the identification of reflexive moments as trends and patterns rather than an exhaustive list of all possible forms. There is

necessarily a lot of categorical bleed and overlap, and I have used these alongside others' definitions of reflexivity throughout this research to identify popular manifestations and tactics used by creators. Some of Stam's categories are as follows:

- Intertextuality - calls attention to, alludes to, references, or parallels/mimics/takes inspiration from previous art, and reinforces that “no text is read independently of the readers' experience of other texts” (Stam 21).
- Relation to Audience/Allegory - anti-illusionist art reminds one that they're watching something fabricated, and offers reality checks of the space between camera, screen, and spectator, and “reminds us of our necessary complicity in artistic illusion” (Stam 35) as we willingly suspend disbelief.
- Meta - for instance, films about films, work that shows a representation of the process, and forced awareness through Brechtian Alienation [Verfremdungseffekt].
- Self-conscious - like Brecht's aim to “forge an art at once broadly comic and intensely political” (Stam 85), disrupting the dichotomy between comedy and drama, message and entertainment, and artists' knowledge of their effect on the world through art is allowed to affect the art itself, and art is made *for someone*, not independent of audience, consumers have autonomy over the story.
- Anti-illusionist/carnavalesque modernism - absurdity and “aggressive anti-illusionism” is used to create a world beyond ours, free of rules and

tradition, the disconnect between signified and signifier is used to provoke awareness by jarring audiences into focus via the absurdist route.

Stam's categories and the way they bleed into one another remind us that all relationships between artist-art-audience are bound in the entire history of media, regardless of which medium, that "representations cannot be transparent; they are inevitably caught up in discourse, power, intertextuality, dissemination, and difference [relation between text and meaning]" (Stam xv). The act of engagement itself necessitates alteration, and as such a work can only be considered reflexive (and indeed complete at all) where there are creators and audiences both to do the reflection.

Because reflexivity can manifest in a large variety of ways in different media types, and because horror operates differently in the various media due to proximity to and methods of the operating emotion (fear, revulsion, or grotesque), multiple approaches are required to appropriately analyze and discuss. I draw from other theorists in this paper, including Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others*. This work, in tandem with Michael Haneke's scholarship and filmmaking particularly, helps me consider the larger implications of horror represented in media. By outlining the various effects and goals of violent imagery, especially war imagery, in media, Sontag gives us a framework to grapple with larger questions in this study - why does horror affect us and how? Why are the politics of horror a good ground for a reflexive approach?

Sontag touches on how media mediates, telling us that the camera provides the privileged a means of understanding (though never experiencing, just approximating experience) in a biased (by camera and operator) way the lives and situations of others from our privileged position. Supported by Carol J Clover's *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, audience identification in horror serves a similar function – we can experience fear and pain many times removed, which makes us enjoy both the removal and the experience. Sontag tells us that “there is a satisfaction of being able to look at the image without flinching. There is the pleasure of flinching” (Sontag 41).

She also, however, finds appropriate nuance in the hunger for violent imagery and what that may give us as audiences. She says that violent imagery can “answer to several different needs. To steel oneself against weakness. To make oneself numb. To acknowledge the existence of the incorrigible” (Stam 98). She also maintains that “sentimentality...is entirely compatible with a taste for brutality and worse...it is passivity that dulls feeling” (Sontag 102). These reasons for seeking out violent imagery as well as for being appalled by it mean that participation in horrific imagery can engage empathy, and that by making audiences aware of their position in the creation of these images and the proliferation of violent acts through reflexive methods, an artist can awake audiences into active engagement with the text and with their own world.

Sontag also reinforces Stam's claim of intertextuality as an essential consideration in the study of reflexivity, indicating that “the photograph is like a quotation, or a maxim or proverb. Each of us mentally stocks hundreds of photographs,

subject to instant recall” (Sontag 22), allowing us deeper understanding of meta-commentary via proximity to or recollection of other media works. She also discusses the ethics of subject choice and representations of violence. First she determines that exoticizing images allows us to have more graphic representations of violence and still remain a comfortable step removed from that violence. She goes on to say that shocking images may hold more power over audiences, and be more effective in getting audiences to think about their position in a piece’s creation, that “uglifying, showing something at its worst...invites an active response. For photographs to accuse, and possibly to alter conduct, they must shock” (Sontag 81).

This is something that Haneke also discusses at length in his essay “Violence and the Media” as found in *A Companion to Michael Haneke*. Haneke says that there are qualifiers for audiences to enjoy representations of on-screen violence, that there are “three dramaturgical premises, of which at least one must be satisfied” to keep a large audience engaged in violent imagery (Haneke 576). The first is a disengagement from the representation of violence, something that Sontag brings up as well. Violence perpetrated on the Other, people perceived as far from one’s own situation, provokes a very different response than violence shown on those perceived as in close proximity to one’s situation. The second is the intensification, a ramping up of violence against the protagonist until the only option for justice is more violence. Haneke says this is where the act of violence on the part of the protagonist is justified, like when a Final Girl starts to fight back and maybe even kills her movie’s villain. This lets the audience feel good about the violence, as if it is “liberating and positive because it was the only acceptable

solution”. And finally, the third, the “embedding [of violence] ...in a climate of wit and satire...”, to situate violence in a place of perceived harmlessness and allow for non-intuitive responses to violence by providing another lighter emotion in tandem. This is your slapstick, violent action comedy, spaghetti westerns, and horror comedies - subgenres that feed audiences violence cut with laughter, jokes, excitement, silliness, and the like to lessen the impact of the violent imagery.

Haneke, like Sontag, finds viewer positionality regarding representations of violence to be the most important question, not just how it affects audiences to see violence, but beyond this what could happen if audiences were also made aware of their position in the creation of that violence. As Haneke says, “the question...is not ‘how do I show violence?’ but rather: ‘How do I show the *viewer* his *own position* vis-a-vis violence and its portrayal” (Haneke 579). He also supports my conception of reflexivity as related to liminality, or even provoked by liminality – liminality is a term denoting the occupation of or feeling of occupation of a ‘space between’, something not quite in a single or distinct time or place but existing between the boundaries of known, identifiable time and space. A limen is a threshold, and ritual performance studies consider liminality as an occupying or crossing of the threshold between here and there, then and now, etc. This use of the term is discussed further down on this page.

Haneke says that for audiences “the boundary between *real existence* and image was difficult to establish...the oscillation between the disconcerting feeling of being present at a *real event* and the emotional security of seeing only the *image* of an artificially created or found reality...” (Haneke 578). An example of where I experience

this in his work is in the use of facial closeups in *Funny Games*, where you feel you are occupying space with the character, not just watching the character, because of the closeness of the shot in context of the larger happening at the time. I also feel this in normalized moments in the film, for instance when one of our villains makes a sandwich as the son is killed by the other villain. The normalcy of the moment and how it is shot destroys the boundary between being here (in my seat watching the film) and being there (experiencing the fear and sandwich construction from an adjacent room). The liminality of being forced to occupy multiple places and no place at once reminds one that they are participating in filmgoing as a necessary consequence, which is a reflexive moment.

Victor Turner gives us a foundation for liminality in performance spaces in “Frame, Flow, and Reflection: Ritual Drama as Public Liminality”. He considers the performing arts as forms of “plural reflexivity, the ways in which a group or community seeks to portray, understand, and then act on itself” (Turner 465). He then considers liminality as a method and consequence of this reflexive work, describing the process of liminal experience as a participant in a work of art in “three stages...separation (from ordinary social life)...margin or limen...when the subjects of ritual fall into a limbo between their past and present modes of daily existence...[and] re-aggregation, when they are ritually returned to secular or mundane life” (Turner 466-67). Liminality to Turner is a key aspect of art-going, and especially of reflexive art experiences.

When one observes reflexive art, they are taken to a state of multiple-placeness, a term I use to describe the sensation of mentally occupying multiple places at a time,

both real and fabricated. The viewer experiences liminality through this multiple-placeness and the sensation of 'being in' the different spaces – in their viewing position and time, in the time and context of the artwork itself, and through reflexive techniques, in the time and context of the making of the artwork. The resulting timeless and placelessness is the feeling of liminality - a between state, a transitional space not quite in any single grounded place but in many and none at once. This feeling can give the experience of a removal, a distancing. It is an essential part of the reflexive experience, and what helps a society "look at itself" by "cut[ting] out a piece of itself for inspection" (Turner 468).

One complication with this study is the slightly different language employed between the three fields I'm working in, theatre, film, and game studies/digital media. In digital media I found specific support for reflexive reading of games (and explicit relation to theatrical reflexivity) in Gonzalo Frasca, especially in his consideration of nontraditional video game design in "Rethinking agency and immersion: video games as a means of consciousness-raising". Frasca suggests that games could be used reflexively for greater social purpose, that one could "drop the traditional Aristotelian design conventions and use Augusto Boal's drama theory, creating video games that enhance players' critical thinking and understanding of their society" (Frasca 167). He posits that games can use more intense behavioral rules and mirroring to represent human relationships and society both as narrative content and in the mechanics of the game itself in order to breed awareness of the world the player lives in through the playing of the game. See also this concept continued in Ian Bogost's "The Rhetoric of

Video Games”, where he details his theory of procedural rhetoric to describe the way in which games attain “effective persuasion and expression using processes” and discusses how the procedures, or rule systems, of games constitute their most expressive power because “assembling particular rules that suggest a particular function of a particular system” (Bogost, 125) illuminates a particular worldview and can influence players’ conceptualization of the system on which the game’s rules comment.

For Frasca’s example, he criticizes the lack of real-world behavioral rules regarding nuanced topics like social race issues in the Sims game world. He also stresses how the game developers’ views on society will naturally constitute the behavioral rules in the game, and if we follow reflexive documentary concepts, this should be made known in the game - any commentary on society is that of the creators, not an objective ‘truth’. *The Stanley Parable* is an example of balancing creator ideas of society and many perspectives in its free choice format of multiple endings, offering many different and sometimes conflicting commentaries on society in the various endings available.

Frasca also gives us some of the most succinct descriptions of Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal’s ideas on alienation and participation, two theatre theorists that this work draws on significantly. I include them here for clarity:

- “Brecht created several techniques...in order to ‘alienate’ the play, reminding the spectators that they were experiencing a representation and forcing them to think about what they were watching” (Frasca 170).
- “Boal’s main goal is to foster critical thinking and break the actor/spectator dichotomy...giving them active participation in the play...not to produce

beautiful or enjoyable performances, but rather to promote critical discussions among the participants” (Frasca 170).

I also draw from Brendon Keogh’s “A Play of Bodies”, a theory about video games’ effect on our physical person. Keogh indicates that through videogame play we experience a “flicker between bodies and between worlds...both here and there” (Keogh 11), that we occupy both spaces physically and mentally through haptic devices, engagements of a variety of senses, and the perception of a virtual physically “real” space. He also, however, says that we can’t be fully ‘immersed’, that “the player must be decentered from the full technologically augmented experience because no video game player truly chooses how to act separate from the tangible affordances and constraints of the system across which they find themselves distributed” (Keogh 16-17).

With Turner’s work on liminality and my assertion that liminality and reflexivity are related, videogames as an exercise in liminality make them inherently positioned to provide reflexive experiences. Of course, the level of reflexivity and the intention varies. Keogh’s work on immersion and awareness of reality and mediation from the game system as entangled in the player’s body further strengthens my argument for games-as-liminal and provoking that multiple-placeness, stating that “an understanding of the pleasures and meanings of videogame play as not easily separating player and character, actual and virtual, real and fictional, story and game, embodied and textual but as existing in the hybrid all-at-once splice where the player is present across the perforation of worlds and bodies torn apart and folded over each other” (Keogh 33).

I identify the texts discussed above as among the most influential on the course of the research at large. While there are several other texts I have read and will reference in this research, there are some less foundational pieces that are still worth a mention in this literature review as having some central ideas. One such is Trinh Minh-ha's "The Totalizing Quest of Meaning", particularly her discussion of documentary as a style more than a form in practice which "no longer constitutes a mode of production or an attitude toward life, but proves to be only an element of aesthetics (or anti-aesthetics)" (Minh-ha 99). Minh-ha argues that documentary has become a recognizable style with conventions instead of the straightforward truth- or life-representative document that it is often considered to be. While audiences still approach most documentary as a representation of the "real", it is actually just a style of narrative filmmaking, and can have aspects that are biased and objective, fictional and nonfictional. This becomes relevant in multiple pieces I will analyze, primarily *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* and *The Stanley Parable*, which both adopt documentary styles in fiction narratives as a reflexive technique to play on audience familiarity with and proximity to the form in daily life. Minh-ha also very aptly describes how reflexivity can mean implementing "processes to prevent meaning from ending with what is said and what is shown..." (Minh-ha 104), how it is more than a technique in the name of disclosure of perspective, but a comment on reality itself and its relationship to filmmaker, film, and audience.

I also draw from theatre theorist and bad (sad?) boy Antonin Artaud, and particularly on Gregory Flaxman's identification of his work in film in "This is Your Brain

on Cinema: Antonin Artaud". Artaud's cruelty theories about shocking audiences to make them more susceptible to messaging have a lot in common with reflexive aims, trying to jar audiences into further awareness of their condition. While the technique differs, the result is similar. He also had thoughts that relate to Keogh's *A Play of Bodies* about film's effect on the body and why it could enact societal change. Flaxman says Artaud thought film could be "purely visual situations whose drama would come from a shock designed for the eyes, a shock drawn, so to speak, from the very substance of our vision" (Flaxman 68) and "likenes the cinema to possession, delusion, vision, hypnotism, trance, hallucination, and narcosis because, in all of these experiences, we are inhabited by an 'other' logic, our brains and bodies given over to a force that lies outside of us" (Flaxman 71). And finally, a line from Darlene Elizabeth Liefson's book "The Edge that Separates Chaos from Order" about liminality, reflexivity, and performance has stuck with me throughout research as a summing-up of the foundational considerations in this paper: "liminality, paradox, and 'neither/nor-ness' allow for the doubleness - that is, for the simultaneous merging of action and awareness of action - that is necessary for self-reflexivity" (Liefson 186).

ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTS

Film

Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (2007) is a shot-for-shot English-language remake of his own film from 1997, the only difference being the use of American actors and setting over the prior version's Austrian ones. This transposition into American was, to the filmmaker's point, meant to help the film reach its intended audience, the American filmgoers he feels he is making a commentary on and trying to reach through the reflexive properties therein. The film is inspired clearly by the home invasion horror subgenre. The plot involves a family on vacation at their lakeside home overtaken by two young men who appear at first to be polite relatives of their friendly neighbors. The situation rapidly devolves as the facade of politeness is broken by both groups and the family is terrorized and [spoiler!] ultimately killed one by one by the two young men in their [cough] funny games.

This film makes use of several reflexive techniques to provoke discomfort in audiences, with the intention of making audiences aware of the part they play in on-screen violence and its continued use as entertainment. As Michael Fiddler says in "Cutting through the fourth wall", "there are two invasions in *Funny Games*; the first within the diegetic world and the second within the situated viewing experience of the audience" (Fiddler 1). Through reflexive techniques the film both victimizes us by

invading our home and our agency as viewers *and* implicates us in the victimization of others. It does so by taking away the feeling of control generally found in illusionistic narratives over things such as shot angle, narrative immersion, pacing, and viewing subject while also aligning us with the antagonists through fourth wall breakage that asks us to weigh in on the events of the film and shots that force us to make decisions prioritizing our own sight. I'd like to highlight a few examples of these techniques in action throughout the film.

The choice of camera view is varied and somewhat unconventional for narrative film here, breaking tradition and creating extensive distance (one could say Brechtian distance) between the viewer and the viewing process. There are many shots in which the camera stays still, leaving us in open landscapes with little or no action. These techniques work to give us little moments of uncharacteristically displeasurable agency over our sight - where normally the director would show us only what he wants to be seen (or hidden), in these wide still shots we are dared to find something, anything to look at to maintain some sense of pacing. An example of this comes about halfway through the movie and shepherds us into the second, more serious act - the aftermath of the death of Georgie, the couple's young son.

After his sudden, implicitly violent death (we hear the gun go off off-screen as we are cruelly forced to watch Paul make a sandwich) we are shown a broad shot of the parents grieving in the living room, and we remain in that moment with them for an extended period of time. Fiddler marks the significance in how "it is not the framing of the shot, nor the editing of the action that determine what we see, don't see, or unsee. It

is us” (Fiddler 7). We are given a single viewpoint that encompasses the whole living room, and like in previous shots with similar composition, Haneke is mocking us with choice, implicating us in the decision of what to look at. We as an audience member must choose how to view this scene - the blood spatter over and behind the tv, Anna struggling very slowly towards her obscured husband, the horse race playing loudly and jarringly on the tv, seeking out the unshown body of Georgie or the grief-stricken George just off screen, etc. We choose our ‘gaze’ so to speak, not the director and certainly not the indifferent camera. In a film that thrives on removing our agency outside of the impossible decision to turn it off, we are given this limited and painful morsel of it, as if Haneke is saying “you wanted a full picture well fine. Here is your full view, look at anything you want to see - you can’t escape the grief and pain your looking caused”. He condemns our urge to feel control in order to fulfill the need for pleasure or entertainment that we ostensibly seek from this film.

The feeling of control is a central issue in reflexive filmmaking. Reflexive works are interested in disclosing perspectives and biases, the lens through which a story is told. Sharon Sherman says in *Documenting Ourselves: Film, Video, and Culture* that all film is manipulated, and “who is in *control* of the film often becomes an issue...the filmmaker is inevitably in control” (Sherman 210) through editing practices and the personal statement they set out to make with their film. The authorial statement and interference are clear here. Even when Haneke wants us to experience the responsibility and consequence of control we are limited in scope of that power. There are several scenes in which we are displaced too close or too far from the action, where

the camera hyper-focuses on the nuances of pain painted on faces or cannot see the characters but instead parts of the house or landscape. We don't always get to see what we want to and this is disappointing (intentionally) to (American) audiences used to the illusionistic tendency to show exactly what audiences want to see - or at least give the impression that what is shown is what they *should* want to see.

In "Game over? The (re)play of horror in Michael Haneke's *Funny Games U.S.*", Vartan Messier says that "although it rides on feeding our sadistic impulse to witness violence exerted on others, we are also denied the sadistic pleasure of voyeurism. Instead, through a series of carefully sequenced close-ups and long takes, the Farbers' suffering becomes our own" (Messier 68). Perhaps the most notable controlling device is the seemingly central tenet of the film that we are always present for violence, watching the buildup and the fall out, but are almost never shown moments of violence explicitly. We are instantly made aware that we were waiting for the blows, expecting them, trained by the history of the genre. This is an intertextual reference by way of pointed non-referencing. Through the use of genre tropes and the removal of their expected payoff, Haneke subverts what we have been taught to expect and desire in similar film setups. We are disappointed when we aren't shown and *can't even look for* the actual violence. It subverts expectation, powerfully removes the illusion of control over our own gaze, and negates the potential for pleasure/release/catharsis that we have come to expect from the home invasion/vengeance subgenres.

Haneke also makes extensive use of editing to create inconsistencies and pace-changing to break immersion in the narrative of the film and remind viewers that this is a

film experience. These include small moments such as the double set of credits at the top, repeated after the narrative has already begun, and the quick change from Handel's classical sounds to a jarring noise-punk for the title card. It also includes the non-diegetic sound at the beginning as we follow the family on the drive to their lake house. Seeing the outside of the car but sonically feeling as if we are in the car with the family makes us understand the level of removal we will continue to have from this film, breaking immersion immediately and setting us up to receive the reflexive moments to come.

The inconsistency is especially notable in Paul's asides to the audience, wherein he crosses the fourth wall to inquire about how we are enjoying his story. Fiddler says that "it is perhaps not so much that the fourth wall is broken so much that it comes to envelop us in the walls of our *own* homes. We are provoked into our own unbearable intimacy with the action" (Fiddler 7). We are spoken to and we speak at. We are watching through the antagonists' eyes, the protagonists' eyes, and the apparently neutral camera's 'eye', and this multiple position and flexy fourth wall makes us feel vulnerable and uncomfortable by implicating us in the choice to seek violence and removing our sense of immersion with the story. Simply put by Messier, "Paul's Brechtian interventions remind us that we are watching a movie" (Messier 69).

The notable exception to the no explicit violence rule is deceptive. In a moment that genre tradition tells us is the satisfying moment of revenge we seek out of empathy for the tortured family, one of the tormentors (Peter) is shot by Anna in retribution for all the harm done. This moment of satisfaction, the pleasure of indulging in the violence we

sought in this film, is instantly taken back from us as Paul picks up the diegetic remote control and rewinds the movie. Our screen, which especially as home viewers we are supposed to have sole control of, betrays us by following his direction. We are officially stripped of all agency, other than that taunting choice to turn it off entirely. The unsettling power removal through dialogue via inconsistencies, fourth wall bending, and uncomfortable angles and views is fully realized in this moment of the film. After this moment, we are treated to the opposite of what we want - Anna's unceremonious death and a bleak reminder of the cyclical nature of violence, how it continues and propagates - according to Haneke and this film - by our own hand as a gore seeking audience.

We are stared at accusingly by Paul through another set of credits, and his knowing and seeing eye contact implicates us in sitting through and validating the creation of this movie - that fictional family only suffered because we demanded to see it, and the movie is unwilling to make us feel better about that desire by enacting the requisite revenge on the antagonists. Ultimately, Paul says, it's all our fault for wanting it. Messier describes the disappointment and guilt of this ending, saying that "our voyeuristic impulses, our pleasures in seeing, are codependent on narrative resolution or closure and our capacity to immerse ourselves" and that *Funny Games* "brutally denies us any type of catharsis...[and] perturbs the sanctity of our position as spectators by reminding us that we are the instruments of our own demise" (Messier 65). Watching or not was the control we had, says this film, and the choice to participate in the completion of the project by viewing it led to us victimizing ourselves and the family onscreen alike.

With *The Poughkeepsie Tapes*, John Erick Dowdle and brother Drew Dowdle began a fresh sequence of found-footage horror films that helped to establish and expand the genre over the past decade and a half. In addition to pushing forward the popular subgenre of low budget horror, *Poughkeepsie* also proves how mockumentary, the parody and mimicry of documentary styles, can be reflexive by creating an aesthetic reminiscent of 'true' crime stories to create proximity to audiences via awareness of form.

The film is a collection of clips, interviews, and home tapes, centering around the premise that the house of a prolific serial killer was raided and a massive collection of tapes documenting his terrible crimes were collected and parsed in a vain attempt to catch the killer. The tapes, several of which we are shown, depict a decade of crimes which the film doses out to illustrate the brutality and severity of these crimes, acting as a documentary on the subject with interviews of investigators, friends and family of victims, experts, and other familiar documentary subjects. Ultimately both the reasons for the crimes and the person behind them are left in question, and we as an audience are led to believe that the killer is likely in screenings of this film, perhaps even created this film, to relive the thrill.

The most notable reflexive tactic this film employs is the use of familiar filming styles, what Sherman might categorize as folk styles due to their accessibility to audiences as "not only receivers of the image but its manipulators as well" (Sherman 1) because of their reproducibility with access to cameras and understanding of their purpose. This familiarity is used to create closeness with the audience for narrative

purposes (this film wants you to be scared!) while simultaneously reminding an audience of the mediation of the camera in the film experience. The film is a combination of extremely attainable forms for spectators - home video style clips from a portable camcorder; local news footage; interview footage; documentary reenactments.

The use of these accessible formats as the primary message delivery system lends us acute awareness of the precarity of our situation and fragility of our safety as humans out and about. The news clips look identical to those of local cable stations, and the familiarity of the documentary form, especially in light of the true crime docuseries boom of late, fosters a tone we are perhaps unfortunately intimate with as audiences. Intertextuality works by drawing on our mental catalog of 'things we've seen before' to get close and reflexive and scare us on a stylistic level beyond the creepy narrative. The familiar media formats also work to remind us of our own experience with video-making in our lives. We all have cameras, and we have almost all had an experience making some kind of video at some point. The fact that anyone in the world could have made the videos featured in this film - a friend, family member, neighbor, even ourself - both terrifies us and helps reflexively call attention to the process of filmmaking present in the film. We know how these tapes were created because we too have created similar tapes.

In a review for *Fangoria* magazine in 2007, Michael Gingold says that "in adopting the characteristics of a genre devoted to revealing truths, the lack of such revelations in *Poughkeepsie Tapes* ultimately becomes frustration" (Gingold). While he criticizes this aspect of the film, I argue that it's part of the point of the film as an

effective reflexive tactic. By not giving us reason behind the killer's brutality, the film subverts both the psychological horror subgenre's tropes and the documentary style's tropes it has intentionally co-opted. Documentaries and psychological horror, tradition dictates, intend to reveal truths about their subjects, both killer and victim.

Contrary to this perception of documentaries however, documentary scholarship insists that truth is subjective and film is exponentially so by definition - as Sherman says, "all films are personal documents that reflect the self" (Sherman 68). Sherman goes on later to say that due to the constructed nature of films, "film 'truth'...is a misnomer because film is never objective" (Sherman 207). Even with a subject of real stories/people, experience is subjective so film must be too, and any claim of objective singular truth is further manipulation, especially in documentaries whose nature is the illusion of truth. By not providing us with a fabricated truth, *Poughkeepsie Tapes* forces us to confront the conceit that documentaries are in fact made to provide such an objective final truth, and to recognize that we watch even the most grisly stories, presented as fact or fiction, ultimately for entertainment value alone. I know / don't watch true crime docs to learn something.

In this way *The Poughkeepsie Tapes*, like *Funny Games*, makes us aware of the creation process of filmmaking and our placement in and proximity to that process, implicating us in the creation of further violent media and the exploitative telling of violent 'true' stories. But where *Funny Games* introduces us to a fictional family in a fictional situation which we know to be untrue even if it feels close to home, *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* never tries to tell us it is fiction - everything about the style it

adopts, the way it tells its story, and its aesthetic home-filmed quality leads us to feel it is presenting us with a truth.

Another tactic the film uses is forced relation with the killer via point of view shots from his gaze. Like in *Funny Games* where we are put in the perspective of protagonists, antagonists, and the suspiciously neutral camera eye, we are made complicit in the victimization of the killer's victims as we observe the harm, torture, and murder through his eyes and the camera's in alternation. The switching of perspective asks us to consider our position in the process of making violent films, of buying into the premise willingly that this could be a true story and real snuff tapes and still deciding to watch it as entertainment.

It uses another similar filming technique to *Funny Games* for reflexive ends by fostering awareness of the desire inherent in film participation. There are several shots that are too close, too far, too dark, too bright, too focused on the wrong place in the room instead of on the action. These work to prove that we are not in control. We can't look at what we want to, which breaks the feeling of ownership and agency over sight that illusionistic films usually provide to give an audience satisfaction through expectation and reward. *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* breaks this on purpose because it wants us on edge, aware of our limitations as a spectator. It takes us close to the violence but doesn't always show us the actual blows, focusing more on the horror, dread, and fear surrounding moments of extreme violence and not allowing catharsis in the exorcism of violent ideas that the film leads us to consider. The film takes this stripping of agency even further, making us experience the perspective of perpetrator

and onlooker and/or victim. As an audience we are powerless to help the victim, powerless to make 'ourselves', as the pov would have us feel, stop the violence we are inflicting, and above all and most frustratingly, powerless to see and properly witness.

Finally, the most obvious cheeky bit of reflexivity in the film arrives near the end in a discussion about the killer watching the film we as an audience just watched. It is suggested that the killer is likely in attendance at as many screenings as possible. This tactic works on multiple levels; it creates fear that if one goes to a theatre they might be observing alongside a killer; and it finalizes the allegory of killer and audience. Since we have shared his perspective so far in the snuff film clips, why shouldn't we conclude that we could be implicated as the killer in this scenario proposed by the investigators.

Overall, *Poughkeepsie* invokes familiar styles to imply that it is presenting a true story, and in doing so enacts reflexive techniques on the audience to breed discomfort with the initial choice to watch the film and with the position of the viewer as spectator, observer, perpetrator, and victim. Unlike *Funny Games*, *Poughkeepsie's* reflexivity relies largely on the documentary style and the assumption by its audience that it is or could be true, making it a closer kind of reflexivity by adding a layer of proximity to the story but still employing similar methods of intertextuality and liminality.

Theatre

I have a theory about absurdist theatre's unique ability to enact reflexivity by provoking liminal experiences in audiences that remind them of their position in theatre. Absurdist

works tend to immerse in a loose narrative while making extensive use of commentary on politics, the state of theatre, and reality AND breaking the fourth wall (among other nontraditional highly theatrical tactics). While Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* is not a work of the Theatre of the Absurd movement but rather a precursor to and influence on it, it is nonetheless a stellar example of using absurd tactics and parodic structure with exaggerated carnivalesque anti-illusionist techniques to establish reflexive moments in audiences. This style makes them aware of their conflicted positions as both cultural tastemakers and beholden to illusionist storytelling.

Ubu Roi, sort of a Macbeth/Hamlet parody, tells the story of a disgusting, crass lord who will do anything to become king at the behest of his nagging wife, including murder and repeated repulsive behavior. First performed in Paris, France in 1896, it is still a biting commentary on the stupidity of the rich and the dangers of an unchecked upper class, and a disgusting-funny grotesque horror puppet show. *Ubu* uses a number of reflexive techniques to remind audiences that they are participating in a piece of art. These include conflict between silly, empty facades and deeper symbolic meanings, intertextual allusion which provides context for messages in the parody, use of carnivalesque and grotesque language and imagery, and the distancing effect of the puppetization of familiar character types.

Stam briefly discusses *Ubu* in *Reflexivity in Film and Literature* in his chapter on the carnivalesque, lending us some useful language as a starting point in this analysis. The term carnivalesque comes to us from Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian literary theorist and philosopher, in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Bakhtin discusses the concept of

a “specific carnival sense of the world” which “possesses a mighty life-creating and transforming power” (Bakhtin, 107) as seen in rituals and in the serio-comic tradition across cultures. He says that carnival collapses social and class division and provides a space where “everyone is an active participant” and “live[s] by [carnival] laws as long as those laws are in effect” (Bakhtin, 122). Carnival blends all people and removes “the hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it” which “brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid” (Bakhtin, 123). Because carnival represents inevitable change, death and renewal, and the equitable baseness of all humans, carnival has the capacity to both turn life upside down and uphold the social structures as the regular order opposite carnival’s ritual chaos.

Stam’s chapter on carnivalesque reflexive media looks at the “aggressive anti-illusionism...in modernist texts which adopt strategies of carnivalesque fantasy and absurdity” and the subversion that the carnivalesque implies in how it “abolishes hierarchies, levels social classes and genres, and creates an alternative second life free from conventional rules and restrictions” (Stam 167). He says that *Ubu* is an example of this type of media in a number of ways, not the least of which is its use of language devoid of etiquette or decorum, its “devour[ing of] the high literary tradition and regurgitat[ion of] it for its own ends...” (Stam 169). *Ubu* makes use of language to make fun of the use of language, collapsing boundaries between traditional upper-class behavior and traditional ‘lower’ class crudeness.

There are several examples of the contrast of absolute silliness/emptiness in the absurd language and symbolic meanings and wisdoms that can be gleaned through deeper reading. As a play, *Ubu* feels frivolous until you consider the parodic nature of the work, how it makes fun of royalty and upper classes by exaggerating all of its parts. It then becomes a rather serious commentary on the social norms of decorum, tradition, class, and society, albeit one that veritably spills over with crude poop jokes. For instance, when King Wenceslas is told to be wary of Pere Ubu, he says, stupidly, “to prove how little I fear my Lord Ubu, I intend to go to the parade just as I am, with no arms and no sword”. This is silly. But, past the surface, it is a clear exaggeration of the classic passive entitled trust that rulers have of their power as the King doubts the potential danger of any given subject due to his elevated status. This is a narrative that we have seen before, and the subversion of it through this sort of silly blatant claim is a theme in the show.

While we are given a familiar plot, it only exists to call awareness to the shallowness of such plots - why do the Ubus need to conspire in the first place, why aren't they content with their station? Because they want to conspire, answers *Ubu Roi* mockingly. Because something must create drama for drama to be performed. These flippant answers constitute a meta-commentary on the creation process, reminding viewers/readers that they are at a play and are suspending disbelief and logic.

The distinct lack of stakes for the rich characters in this play – and their real-life proxies – is emphasized by the way they discuss their predicaments throughout. The pointlessness of the scenarios created for the character, which I stress we are reminded

is total fabrication for entertainment, is punctuated by the way they speak, in flippant tone and absurdist reversals like this: “My haggis”, he says. “Hey, that’s enough, I should think. Is there any more?”. And yet we are given little wisdoms beyond parodic implication. “Isn’t wrong as good as right?” “This madman’s pursuing me! What have I done, great God!” is ultimately a mockery of kings who go back on their word to save face after massive wrongdoing. While it mocks the characters in the play and the real life figures they are meant to remind us of, the same tactic is used to reflexively mock the nature of fabrication and the artistic process. In doing so, *Ubu* employs language, parody, and reversal as a multi-layered reflexive technique.

Ubu uses allusion as a method of intertextual reflexivity, pulling from the many several other pieces of media that audiences might have experienced and referencing them directly to make audiences aware that they are observing a play situated in the history of play making. As Stam says, “no text is read independently of the reader’s experience of other texts” (Stam 21). Art is always in conversation with itself, and art is always present in the minds of artists and audiences alike. This more obvious and intentional allusion is a reflexive tactic. *Ubu* uses pretty blatant allusion most obviously to *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* to provoke laughter and remind audiences of how the play (and the audience) positions itself in the history of theatre-making and art at large. The ghosts’ haunting (“how sad to be alone in the world, only fourteen years old, and with a terrible wrong to avenge!”) is a clear allusion to *Hamlet*. The whole plot arc is a subverted, carnivalesque parody of *Macbeth*.

More subtle allusions exist, such as repeated reference to chivalric code, another method of mocking the hypocrisy of upper classes. Lines of dialogue such as “we should give him a terrific blow with a sword and split him open from head to middle” “yes, that’s noble and gallant” and “we must swear to fight gallantly” “...we haven’t got a priest” provide a contrast between discussing brutal murderous conspiracy and considering themselves akin to the holy noble Knights. These create an intertextual reference which recalls the brutality of old stories’ protagonists masquerading as ‘chivalry’, followed immediately by a hard-hitting joke laid to mock those old heroes about religion being used to purify or justify the most egregious and intentional of sins here. These allusions drive home Jarry’s point that, historically, anything can and will be justified by the powerful, because they only have to justify it to themselves. Reflexive intertextuality lends important additions to the parodic social commentary in this play by providing familiar examples of the overreaches of power and overextension of grace to rich and powerful people to complement the exaggerated depiction of known character types.

The violence of these intertextual references is not isolated. The play’s use of violent, rude, and visceral language breeds a play that is carnivalesque, grotesque, and devoid of etiquette in a manner that collapses the high-class subjects with the ‘lower’ working classes with which this sort of crudeness - and the carnival at the root of the term - would traditionally be associated. The language of the play flips tradition and decorum, showing the rich/authority as they are according to Jarry’s perspective. Noting

that this play is originally written in French and these are the choices made in the translation I favor, examples of this in the text include but are not limited to:

- “Merdre!”
- “You look really ugly today”
- “I’ll tear your eyes out”
- “I’m going to sharpen my teeth on your calves” (a very jarring thing to say that absolutely provoked the audience)
- Stinky imagery throughout
- A personal shoutout to “fartichokes”

This language intentionally breaks the class divide by removing the space between classes artificially in place via upper class traditional affectations. By making the rich and powerful gross silly rude people, we are shown that upper classes are not only at least on our level but are in fact morally below us as working classes and do not generally deserve the respect extended to them. This is something the working classes usually sort of know but don’t always have the language for, and by subverting this dynamic *Ubu* makes it plain. It also provokes distancing from audience expectation to extend the parody and the reflexive response - rudeness is endearment, violence is love, and disgust is delicious.

Finally, the puppetization of the performers dehumanizes characters and provides immersive distance within the audience. This applies to both the caricaturization of the characters and their exaggerated nature as well as actual

performance of the play using puppets. The distance created between audiences' capability to identify with and immerse in the narrative and their awareness that it is indeed a narrative influenced by other stories forces reflexive ideas during viewing about the artist who made it, the systems that provoked it, and the audience's individual and collective place in all of that. *Ubu Roi* uses reflexive techniques unique to the theatre, such as distancing by removing the immediate immersion fostered by sharing space with physically present human performers, to expand our understanding of reflexivity. It also uses familiar reflexive tactics already discussed such as proximity to the carnivalesque/grotesque to shock our sensibilities and intertextuality to more easily situate it in the context of other media and remind spectators that it is a fabrication. That it also makes them laugh (in theory more than practice perhaps) and become grossed out is a stylistic bonus.

Games

To show how a variety of genres and styles can use reflexive techniques effectively (and differently) in video games, I'm going to discuss two games that employ different mechanical styles to illustrate game-specific reflexivity and how it might be accomplished in this medium. *The Stanley Parable* and *Bioshock* use reflexivity in different ways to carry through a message and make audiences aware of a particular issue and their place in that issue, and they each use both story content and mechanics to do so. *The Stanley Parable* is an effective commentary on capitalism and workers'

issues as well as a mechanical exploration of a mind in a liminal state, separated from the routines and external logic that keeps us grounded, using reflexive techniques to separate us from our bodies and consider the quality of our own life and our agency over our choices in the real world. *Bioshock* teaches us to be critical of suggestion and appeals to power and mechanically it allows us to experience moral grayness in action, using reflexivity to help us interrogate our habits around authority and, again, our agency over our choices in the real world.

The Stanley Parable, created by Davey Wreden, is a first-person point-of-view choose your own adventure indie game centered on an office employee (Stanley, and you) who wakes up in a deserted office – everything looking very much the same and beige, equipped to handle hundreds of employees with a warehouse beneath – with no instructions on his computer screen (as opposed to the player’s monitor) and must wander and determine what is going on. A narrator suggests a path to Stanley/the player at each junction with choices, and the player can choose to either follow the narration or stray from the prescribed path to different effect. The result is a seriously liminal game in which a player can’t always distinguish their own choice from that of the narrator, is mocked and disparaged by the narrator for making choices, is drawn on many journeys with various messages in their story, and endures a frankly shocking amount of fourth wall breakage to eerie effect. Even early in the game, if a stray choice is made the narrator will begin to comment on Stanley’s action, saying that he isn’t sure why Stanley is going that way since there’s nothing there. There is a memorable section in a broom closet in which nothing happens and the narrator consistently questions the

player directly for the duration of their stay in the non-event closet, and another where the narrator fabricates a terrible tedious mini game involving a baby, fire, and a button that must be pressed every few seconds to stay in the game. These are directly addressed to the player as well as Stanley, making it more unclear who is the player and who is the character.

The liminal nature of the game makes it extremely scary to me. The loss of grounding and loosening of the human-imposed measurements of experiences of existence is jarring, and it is hard to settle with constant reminders that I'm both feeling what Stanley experiences through the pov and in control of the experience with my actions as a player. I am constantly aware of the playing and immersed in the story, and thus this is the game in which I feel Keogh's theory of the body's involvement in gameplay the most – Keogh discusses the way that the physical experience of controlling character movement in a game makes us both aware of the motions we go through (the buttons we push to play) and also more immersed in the game because we *feel* the physical experience of the character as 'they' do by proxy in our fingers. The game both asks you to be emotionally involved in what are essentially short stories about Stanley's paths and make decisions about where he should go next, thereby affecting the story. However, in a game in which the illusion of choice is highlighted, we as a player are still "decentered" from the experience because "no videogame player truly chooses how to act separate from the tangible affordances and constraints of the system across which they find themselves distributed" (Keogh 16).

The video game medium in which this story is told provides, to me, the best extension of Haneke's intention to remove agency from the audience by complicating the illusion of control that art gives us. Where *Funny Games* just gives the compulsion to turn it off in order to regain agency, for several years now I repeatedly *have* turned *The Stanley Parable* off on most playthroughs because I cannot handle the visceral dissonance around control and agency in the game. I am so bothered by the awareness that I am playing combined with the immersion of Stanley's stories that I literally have to remove myself from the liminality so powerful it feels akin to dissociation. This power in turn carries over to real life, and starts the thoughts - are we really in control of our lives? Much like in Brecht and Weiss's opera *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, the reflexive techniques paired with the story make me even more acutely aware of capitalism's hand in puppeteering our daily lives, how society removes our illusion of choice by forcing our action in a certain direction.

Haneke's films are very effective at this complication of agency, but it seems to me that his ideas might apply even better to gaming theories. While the imagery is not as close to "an almost complete impression of reality" (Haneke 577) as Haneke indicates the camera and recorder have always been (his assumption of the cause of that liminal state in filmgoing), the placement of player as character - not just identifying with character but actually as character and viewer simultaneously - allows games to take this concept to another level, actually feeling in control of a whole other life than your own in real time.

The Stanley Parable seems to understand the conflict in their players very well. Each time you complete an ending you restart at the beginning, but you as Stanley and the game both remember the previous round. The dialogue changes, sometimes a lot and sometimes more subtly, based on what routes you've already completed, reminding you of your past play activity and reaffirming that this is a game. There are other moments that point specifically to the game-ness and development of the game, such as broken rooms and exposed textures, fake "mini games" if you veer off in certain directions, extensive wall breaking wherein the narrator comments on the player's choices, etc. Between the puppeting of the narrator, the mocking, and the way that each ending is never really an ending, the game drives home the capitalist hellscape evoked by the deserted office setting and the choiceless choices offered to Stanley/the player throughout the game - there really isn't an escape, except death and dreams (which is what the "perfect" ending after following all the directions precisely feels like). It is an exercise in reflexivity and liminality to unsettle the player and provoke awareness about their station - and Stanley's - as cogs in the machine.

In a more explicitly horrific direction, *Bioshock* is set in an underwater world called Rapture that was designed to be utopia and has devolved - here's that pesky capitalism and individualism critique again - into a dystopian hostile world of biomechanically altered grotesque inhabitants all seeking the same drug (a physical manifestation of more power in the form of superpower-giving ADAM) at the expense of the wellbeing of anyone else. This is a first person pov action shooter game. The player controls the actions of Jack, who is transported from the outside world into Rapture and

is led via headset by Atlas, a purported hero of the people who is in revolt against the city's leader Andrew Ryan. Atlas begs Jack's help in an effort to stop Ryan from killing his family in retaliation for the uprising and subsequent war. As Jack gets further into the story, details of his past with Rapture and Ryan are revealed, and the benevolent Atlas is not what he seems. Ultimately, this is a story of blindly following direction from those who claim their benevolence, and of the dangers of rampant individualism and hunger for power over all.

Maybe the most jarring reflexive moment in the game is a moment during the climax leading to the big boss fight at the end in which Jack learns of his history - a child of Ryan who was raised in the lab of Atlas/Fontaine to be the ultimate weapon against him, brainwashed into following orders when a certain phrase is spoken: would you kindly? This phrase comes up throughout the game in the form of directions given by Atlas to Jack along the journey, and is a good justification for why the player character would be following these arbitrary instructions other than "because that's the story we gave you to play out". However, when the illusion is revealed by Andrew Ryan during what should be a boss fight, we as a player (as Jack) are mocked by Ryan for falling victim to this mind control, for following orders no matter the consequences, killing ADAM addicted splicers and other characters just to fulfill this given quest. It questions our spine as players - are we really willing to do anything just because we are told to by the game? Do we even feel remorse for the bad things the game asks us to do to its inhabitants and environment? It forces us to reflect on whether we even have the choice in the first place, and this, like in *Stanley*, translates to our behavior in our own lives.

Bogost's procedural rhetoric is put into process in the mechanics of this game - by following the procedures that the game asks of us, by accepting the rules and internal logic of the game, we are persuaded to do bad things in the name of playing correctly, and when we learn the consequences of doing so we are reflexively aware of these mechanics and forced to consider our acceptance of similar rules in our own life. What choices do we make on our own, and which are we led to by those in power or by the promise of status/power?

There is really only one meaningful choice in the game, whether to spare or harvest little girls being used to create ADAM supply, and this only affects the peace a player gets in alternate endings - do they become an adoptive father of the little girls and live out of a happy life, or are they chastised for their terrible actions that led to the girls' death? Although I am of the opinion that there is a right choice, this doesn't meaningfully affect any gameplay other than the final cutscene, and future installments negate this choice anyways in favor of raising the former happy ending to canon status. Some notably disagree with my take on this though, and find it adds meaning to the game through game mechanics beyond plot.

Clint Hocking states in "Ludonarrative Dissonance in Bioshock" that the mechanic helps illustrate a big theme of the game - that "the notion that rational self-interest is moral or good is a trap, and that the 'power' we derive from complete and unchecked freedom necessarily corrupts and ultimately destroys us" (Hocking 256). By forcing a moral decision about whether to harvest or spare (a choice in which Hocking went with the former because it was the "best choice mechanically [and] also the right

choice”), the game lets the player “literally experience what it means to gain by doing what’s best for me (I get more Adam) without consideration for others (by harvesting Little Sisters)” (Hocking 256). For Hocking, this choice would be reflexive, both reminding him of the mechanic that he is working under as a player and driving home the moral point and theme of the game and complicating both the actions of the power-hungry inhabitants of Rapture and the real-world motivations of the power hungry in our society. It allows Hocking to play out the moral dilemma realistically, and receive both guilt and reward, or disappointment and clear conscience, and understand the pros and cons of each choice.

AUDIENCE EFFECTS

While it was illuminating to watch/read/play through all of this material (and more) and analyze its reflexive techniques and effects, I am really interested in what general audiences gain from these reflexive properties in their media. What does it do to an audience to be aware that they are participating in the artistic process while they are doing so? How does it change their perception of the piece if they are being provoked into awareness, yanked into liminality, and in many of these pieces partially or fully implicated in the actions of the characters?

I created a plan for evaluating audience responses and guiding questions for myself to assist in the audience analysis portion of this paper. My methodology is simple - I retrieved somewhere between 50-75 publicly posted audience reviews for each piece available online, or in the case of *Ubu Roi* I did research on audience reception from those who were present since the production in question occurred in the late 1800s. I sought mention—positive or negative—of the reflexive moments and tactics I identified in the analysis section above while reading reviews and pulled publicly posted reviews that highlighted these aspects of the pieces. Finally, I look here at the ways in which people identify, receive, and feel about the work differently based on their perception of the reflexive moments, aspects, and techniques in these films.

I noticed some interesting trends in general while reading reviews of all of these pieces. One of the biggest surprises for me was that a lot of reviews that highlight what I've identified as reflexive moments or effects are negative reviews of the piece. People

tended, especially in select pieces like *Bioshock* and *Funny Games*, to pick up on the reflexive aspects as an obstacle to smooth gameplay/viewing, something that inhibited their quest for mindless media to enjoy. While I don't disagree that media can just be enjoyed without motive, and while that's a personal philosophy of mine (to enjoy media even with motive just because it's enjoyable), I think it's interesting that breaking narrative immersion to become aware of one's placement in the process of creation is reviewed popularly as a negative effect. While they don't use the term, reflexivity is doing precisely the job it is intended to do if these reviewers are uncomfortable with the awareness they had throughout the experience. That's the purpose of reflexivity, to make one aware of their part in the creation of a thing and often to implicate them in the bad effects therein. It is the opposite of complacency - reflexivity requires activity in viewership. By giving a negative review highlighting reflexive moments and techniques, these audience members actually strengthen the argument for the effectiveness of the piece in question.

Film

I will go in the same order as the previous analysis section by medium, beginning with film. *Funny Games* is a pretty notorious feel-bad movie among horror fans and film buffs, so it is unsurprising that a lot of reviewers picked up on some of the reflexive tactics they were being manipulated by while watching. Google reviewers had

conflicting opinions. Some considered the implication of the audience to be a positive aspect of the film by carrying over a clear message. Many identified the urge to take back control that Haneke dares us to follow. They also point out various reflexive techniques as mentioned in my analysis, such as intertextuality, camera angle and perspectives, subversion of genre expectations, etc.

- “Filmmaking with a purpose...[a] commentary on/attack of the audience choosing to watch the senseless violence and desire for classic genre formula”
- “I felt unsure about whether I should quit” and “the movie felt like an emotional assault, like you’re watching something you shouldn’t be”.
- One user points out the camera techniques and how they change your perspective of the events of the film and your awareness level around the film, “you’re either watching as a family member, helpless to what’s happening or as a third point of view character from the teens perspective with their occasional camera deliberate glances to make sure you’re still with them on this horrendous episode. Sometimes what you don’t see is the most disturbing”.

A stunning 1-star review manages to somehow articulate the point while totally missing it themselves:

- “Absolutely terrible. At the end, when they FINALLY had a plot point I liked, he looks for a remote and rewinds time so it didn’t happen like what?? Forget how completely frustrating it is, you shouldn’t watch this film based on how absolutely mind numbingly boring and slow it is. There are a ton of scenes that are quadruple the length they should be. If you can watch this without skipping ahead, I really commend you because you have a whole lot of patience”.

Beautiful. The level of absolute discomfort with the pace, editing, imagery, and content, the urge to turn it off or skip ahead through uneasy scenes, the frustration at the ending and the lack of agency at large, all of this beautifully illustrates the purpose and intention of the movie, and the reflexive techniques it uses to create those effects.

The critics are also divided. The Critic Consensus section on Rotten Tomatoes notes that “though made with great skill, *Funny Games* is nevertheless a sadistic exercise in chastising the audience”. Rotten Tomatoes audiences highlight many of the same reflexive moments as google reviewers, with more talk of the fourth wall breakage.

- “Some typical tricks with thrillers that you expect aren’t used...you almost end up begging for those tricks that usually end up making the story typical”, which I discussed in my analysis as a pointed non-referencing of genre traditions
- The fourth wall breakage is effective because “the viewer is part of the story, which makes the impact of the unfolding events surprisingly greater”
- Speaking around the liminality provoked by the camera choices, “a sense of misplaced-ness that pervades”.

Finally I looked at letterboxd reviews, several of which, while making different commentary on reflexivity in the film, also were fun to read.

- “I am now feeling very confronted by my own taste for violence in cinema! Good job mike” which made me laugh because me too, that’s exactly what Haneke wanted and he did do a good job, thank you for the concise review.

- A good point here: “that one white dude was acting as if he didn’t have gloves on !!!!! he licked his gloved fingers after eating!!! He washed his gloved hands after he touched blood!!!!!! What the fuck was that!!!!!! White boys are terrifying”
- A user sums up one of the greatest and most subtle reflexive techniques in the film, stating that “although the pacing changed dramatically after the most significant death in the film, it made sense because the director doesn’t want you to feel interested when the killers aren’t on screen”.

In *Funny Games* reviews, audiences have identified nearly all of the reflexive techniques highlighted in my analysis as well as illustrated their intended effects. These reviews prove that reflexivity in this medium in these ways works as intended to provoke abnormal audience response to and engagement with the film. Between the analysis, the stated intentions of the director, and the audience reviews that accurately identify the purpose and moments that work towards that purpose, this film is effective in provoking active engagement and further thought via reflexivity.

Theatre

Ubu Roi, as previously mentioned, required different collection methods than the more modern and technologically mediated works in this list. Alfred Jarry’s play both opened and closed on December 10, 1896, and was so controversial that we have a notable record of it. In his seminal book *Theatre of the Absurd*, Martin Esslin discusses this production, Jarry’s intentions, and the reception of it at length as an early massive

inspiration on the Absurdist movement in theatre. His introduction of the play poses it as dangerous to the time, having “provoked a scandal as violent as the famous battle at the first night of Victor Hugo’s *Hernani*” (Esslin 356) and written with the intention to “confront a bourgeois audience with the horror of its own complacency and ugliness” (Esslin 358). A quote from Jarry himself on the same page as the latter supports this intention, and indicates his agreement that the audience’s reaction, while outsized, was not *unintended*

“...it is by no means astonishing that the public was stupefied at the sight of its ignoble double, which had never before been presented to it in its entirety, made up, as M. Catulle Mendes [a french poet present at the show] has excellently put it, ‘of the eternal imbecility of man, his eternal lubricity, his eternal gluttony, the baseness of instinct raised to the status of tyranny; of the coyness, the virtue, the patriotism, and the ideals of the people who have dined well’”

While a theatre critic and scholar such as Esslin’s opinion is not precisely the one we’re looking for in this analysis as he would be more informed than general audiences, Esslin does a good job describing aspects of the production and prioritizing accounts of those present. Esslin describes a “monstrous puppet play, which was acted by a cast clad in highly stylized, wooden-looking costumes, in a decor of childish naivete” (Esslin 358) and includes a description of the set from Arthur Symons, another poet, as follows:

“The scenery was painted to represent, by a child’s convention, indoors and out of doors, and even the torrid, temperate, and arctic zones at once. Opposite you, at the back of the stage, you saw apple trees in bloom, under a

blue sky, and against the sky a small closed window and a fireplace...through the very midst of which...trooped in and out the clamorous and sanguinary persons of the drama. On the left was painted a bed, and at the foot of the bed a bare tree and snow falling. On the right there were palm trees...a door opened against the sky, and beside the door a skeleton dangled. A venerable gentleman in evening dress...trotted across the stage on the points of his toes between every scene and hung the new placard [with the description of the place where the action was laid] on its nail" (Esslin 359).

These descriptions of chaos and confusion in the design and production along with my analysis and its crudeness help us understand why this violent play was received so violently by the patrons of its time. WB Yeats was present in the audience and journalist Dan Piepenbring quotes him in his article on Yeats and *Ubu*, "An Inglorious Slop-pail of a Play", as sensing the play's massive implications for the art form, saying "feeling bound to support the most spirited party, we have shouted for the play, but that night...I am very sad, for comedy, objectivity, has displayed its growing power once more" (Piepenbring). Piepenbring says that the play "offended almost everyone who saw it" and "in this, it prefigured modernism, surrealism, Dadaism, and the theater of the absurd", a host of Avant Garde movements that continued the tradition of being inappropriate and making people uncomfortable for a philosophical purpose.

Piepenbring supports Esslin's assertion that a riot occurred during and after the play. Even those who liked or appreciated it were unhappy with the experience. Catulle Mendes, quoted by Jarry himself above, predicts the changing form of theatre as well, warning that "Pere Ubu exists...you will not be able to get rid of him; he will haunt

you...” (Piepenbring). Arthur Symons, whose detailed description helps us understand the circumstances, said “most remarkable about it is the insolence with which a young writer mocks at civilization itself, sweeping all art, along with all humanity, into the same inglorious slop-pail” (Piepenbring).

It was a contentious and reviled production, even when understood as a sign of innovation in the medium. And once again, like we saw in reviews of *Funny Games*, the negative reviews seem to more acutely understand the point of the piece and identify the reflexive aspects - or in this case, the effects of reflexivity - than the positive ones. While some reviews at the time praise Jarry’s vision as a game changer, an act of “pure theatre” (as Henri Gheon called it), the overwhelming majority are conflicted by the conventions used by Jarry to present the satire. The disgusting language, puppet-like acting and stylization, carnivalesque presentation of the upper and ruling classes, and over-the-top crudeness and grossness are all mentioned as obstacles to enjoyment by reviewers, often in the same review.

People were offended, outraged, and upset by seeing a mirror of their society and themselves in *Ubu Roi* presented in such grotesque dressings, and this is, as we have established by now, a massive purpose of reflexive works: as Stam says, to remind us all, reflexivity is how work “look[s] at” itself “as if it were capable of self regard” (Stam xiii), and as Turner says, how we “cut out a piece of [our]self for inspection” (Turner 468), and as Sherman says, how we “interpre[t] ourselves and culture” (Sherman 1), and so on through all of the theorists here. Audience reactions to

media, especially the negative reactions, prove the efficacy of reflexive properties and works, here as in *Funny Games*.

Games

Through audience reviews of the games in this study, I found once again that while absolutely a related form of art to the earlier film and earliest theatre, video games as a medium offer a different perspective and require different language than the older forms. This is not to say that video games will phase out earlier forms of art, just to highlight a key difference in observation and identification vs observation and participation. While there is still not direct participation in a story, video games allow for activation of touch, more sensory input to change the reception of a story.

At large, I found that the reviews for both *The Stanley Parable* and *Bioshock* were more positive than those for *Ubu Roi* or *Funny Games*. That being said, some trends seen in prior analysis remained consistent in reviews of these games, strengthening both arguments for reflexivity as effective in a variety of mediums and for drawing relation between these 3 mediums as performing art adjacent - *Bioshock's* negative reviews were still more likely to pick up on or highlight reflexive moments and techniques in the game as obstacles to enjoyment of the story, and reviewers still picked up how weird and innovative both pieces felt as they were experienced.

IGN, Google, and Metacritic reviewers generally praise *Bioshock* for innovation, considering it a masterwork of the genre and on the cutting edge of gaming at the time of its release. They elevate it beyond 'just another game'.

- “To call this game simply a first [person] shooter, a game that successfully fuses gameplay and narrative, is really doing it a disservice”, indicating the deep level of immersion that players feel while playing.
- Skirting around the meta issues involved in the game’s main twist, calls it “a wake up call to the industry at large...you’ll see why you should demand something more from publishers and developers”
- Noting how the game uses intertextual reflexivity and subverts conventions of the genre “by thrusting you through experiences that toy with and vastly strengthen that fragile, intangible bond between in-game protagonist and yourself...forc[ing] upon you moments of reflection...where you contemplate the nature of blindly accepted game conventions”.

Some reviewers also speak to the moral dilemmas as reflexivity discussed in my analysis of the game.

- “Even thorough Ryan spits out what seems totalitarian propaganda, you can’t help but sympathize with him”
- “It’s almost as if BioShock’s enemies [the splicers] want you to kill them, to put them out of their misery”

Yet more also consider it a shame that the moral system is just another illusion of choice and agency.

- “Your choices really are of no consequence..that is the biggest letdown of the game”.

Immersion, becoming emotionally involved in a story and mentally absorbed by it prompting the sensation of being ‘transported elsewhere’ while playing, is also a big part of favorable reviews of the game. Emily Brown and Paul Cairns consider the varying personal definitions of immersion in “A Grounded Investigation of Game Immersion”, highlighting the variety of experiences loaded into the term by surveying gamers about their concept of it. They found it was used to describe “the degree of involvement with a game” via “removing [of] barriers” such as player concentration and game construction, and consider immersion to describe the most complete degree of involvement (with the terms engagement and engrossment preceding it) (Brown and Cairns, 1298). The emphasis in reviews on the positive emotional effects of immersion in gameplay makes reflexive moments where immersion is broken, such as in dying, in “clunky” mechanics as noted by multiple reviewers, and in the big twist’s chastising of the player, even more notable and more jarring to players.

Several reviewers also do my job for me and compare the experience of playing this game to other artistic mediums.

- “Like reading a novel [the purpose of a single-player game] is to form your own impressions”
- “[This is] the closest thing to actually being in a movie released so far”.

These reviews and others like them speak to the philosophical immersion provoked by reflexivity in video games, how the illusion of active participation (which I argue is also available through strong identification with film and theatre works) allows you to work through real world problems and concepts to theorize about potential

solutions and physicalize your responses to them. Games help with physicalization, because you are tangibly physically involved, but Artaud suggested upon the invention of cinema that its power lay in the very same property - the engagement of the eye (and by extension the body) with the camera. In "This is Your Brain on Cinema", Gregory Flaxman asserts that Artaud envisioned film as "purely visual situations whose drama would come from a shock designed for the eyes, a shock drawn...from the very substance of our vision" (Flaxman 68) and thought it could "take hold of the sensory-nervous system and...introduce an automation into thought itself" (Flaxman 71). Just how Keogh considers games as a medium that engages both body and brain, Artaud once considered cinema and theatre to have the same properties through his Cruelty theories - not just intellectual, not just mental, but actually physical, properties which all allowed for the shocking and provoking of audiences into actual action through art observation.

The Stanley Parable reviews focus more on the intellectual properties of playing the game. While some felt very strongly, the way I did, about the horrifying liminality and the intense physical sensations that the game provokes by cultivating that atmosphere - "felt like a horror [game]" and "plenty of the endings and events are quite comedic, but I think the game as a whole is very unnerving" - reviews largely revolve around the philosophy of the game as carried through both the stories and the gameplay.

There is considerable focus on how jarring it is to be both scolded for breaking the rules and encouraged through new material to break the rules given to us as players, and the unexpected nature of the paths these breaks set a player on.

- “Teaches players about the limits of linear game narratives by blowing up those limits”

The game is an intertextual metacommentary on linear gameplay by showing just how few choices players are actually given in linear narratives in gaming. The game itself becomes frustrated with players for breaking the linear format, even though we logically know that anything we could possibly do must be built into the game, and that our agency is limited and illusory because all choices were anticipated and dialogue and action were built around each potential choice. There is no choice that a player can make in this game that is not proscribed by the developers, just like any other game. And yet, because the game is centered around making choices and breaking rules, we are made aware of the fabrication of narrative gaming while participating *in that same style of gaming*. It is a brilliant commentary informed by the traditions of a genre and the simultaneous upholding of and subversion of those conventions.

Once again, reviewers touch on all of the reflexive techniques highlighted in the analysis, proving the efficacy of intentional reflexivity - the fourth wall breaking by the narrator, the emotional reaction of the narrator to choices, the illusion of choice, the intertextually informed commentary, etc. This too is an effectively reflexive work, because, as noted by reviewers, they both noticed the reflexive tactics they were meant to notice and these moments of awareness provoked them into thought and in-game action, changing their experience of the game as compared to other works in the same format.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this study I have applied concepts of reflexivity, including the concept that liminality helps create the conditions of awareness for reflexivity, to several works across three mediums - film, theatre, and video games. Reflexivity is, very shortly, the use of techniques that bring awareness to the fabrication and creation process of art in order to remind audiences of their position in that process so they might consider the implications of that position on art and society. Liminality is the feeling or occupancy of a between state, timelessness and place-lessness, here applied to the occupancy of multiple spaces simultaneously inherent in art - in the space of observing, such as your seat in the theatre, in the space of the story, such as identification with a character's story, and in the space of the creation process, such as intertextual awareness of the history of the genre - and amplified by the medium of video gaming in particular based on the inclusion of physical sensation.

I argue that these works are effectively reflexive, and that this terminology can be used across mediums, across genres, to discuss socially active work that engages with audiences on a further level than entertainment in an attempt to create active engagement with the work and its implications that carries over to how they interact with the real world. Each piece discussed throughout this paper handles some sensitive societal topic - violence in the media, proliferation of violence, capitalism and individualism as harmful to humanity and community, class issues, herd mentality and blind obedience, moral grayness, etc. - in a genre format that is horror-adjacent or

carnavalesque, and frames its approach using reflexive tactics to better reach audiences. Much like how Brecht believed that distanciation would help audiences better understand their plight by removing them from the story so they could see it more objectively, reflexive techniques pointedly remind audiences of their position in the creation process so they may better understand their hand in the issue being discussed. And much like Augusto Boal determined that audiences could benefit from the careful destruction of audience/creator boundaries in order to exercise solutions to large problems, reflexive techniques can be used to work through problems in artistic mediums and larger social problems in a more approachable way beyond just narrative storytelling or instruction alone.

It is clear from analysis of each piece and of audience review patterns that reflexive techniques noted throughout this paper in the works discussed were executed effectively and were effectively reflexive, employing techniques that engage audiences on a more personal level and make them reflect on their place in the creation process and the implications the represented scenarios have on their life. I come to this conclusion for a few distinct reasons related to the definitions and purpose of reflexivity outlined early on and reinforced throughout:

- Each piece engages with reflexivity in an attempt to make commentary on the medium/genre/society and share that commentary with their audiences in a nontraditional way to provoke action or thought.
- Noted reflexive techniques in each piece are consistent with definitions and discussions of reflexivity in various reviewed literature from the three mediums.

- Audiences picked up on most to all reflexive techniques associated with each piece of media.
- Even when perceived negatively, the techniques made audiences think about the larger history of the medium that the piece is situated in as well as the implications on the society or life of the audience member.

I want to consider why the horror genre and horror adjacent genres in particular are well suited for a study on reflexivity. The logic behind selecting pieces in this genre is manifold. First, I chose this genre quite simply because it is the genre that I am interested in. Horror is where I personally spend the most time in all mediums of art, and when I was conceptualizing the arguments in this paper initially I kept thinking of examples of horror media that fulfilled reflexive concepts and aims in some way - I thought of the mockumentary style, found footage, *What We Do In The Shadows*, or *Cabin in the Woods*, a new classic of meta horror. Of course I thought about the work done in the *Scream* films, especially the moment when Randy watches *Halloween* as he is Halloweened, or the opening of *Scream 4*. There are *so many examples* and they all flooded my mind when I approached the topic originally, and I like to write about what I know and care about. This is obviously a big reason, and in a paper all about exposing the process and authorial intent, I am stating a personal motivation.

However, there are more academic reasons beyond the examples that revealed and strengthened themselves as I continued to research. For one, horror is in my opinion uniquely situated as a genre to handle political and moral topics because it has the capacity for simultaneous fun and serious vibes, like sugar with medicine as Mary

Poppins would say. Horror is exceedingly, often explicitly, political, and we find art movements and theories across history that tell us awareness and active audiences can really strengthen the punch of a political message (thanks, Brecht). These pieces specifically are political in a multitude of ways, and each uses reflexivity - and the awareness and active audience it creates - to empower its message/meaning. In addition to this, I think horror is a particularly liminal genre. In much horror media audiences are asked to identify with multiple perspectives. As liminality is an occupation of multiple places and perspectives that provokes a feeling of timelessness/placelessness/ungrounding, this makes horror liminal. And as in my findings liminality can provoke reflexivity by taking the spectator outside of the 'text' while simultaneously allowing for continued immersion, then horror, by virtue of being especially liminal, is especially open for reflexive moments.

And finally, in the question of why horror, I would say that horror is fictional but real. It provides a sense of agency but also is fabricated to feed a message. By engaging in horror media, one is engaging in a paradox, something Darlene Liefson calls a "doublesness" required for reflexivity. Horror media is playful (interesting effects, silly framing, low budget) and horrific; it provokes fear and revulsion, but also joy and laughter, because that's what adrenaline does to a body. Horror can be considered a test - you take agency over your choice to watch or turn off, and you might watch just to prove you can. And with an engaged and active audience, horror provides an excellent ground for a study into audience identification and perspectives on reflexive media.

I also believe it was important to discuss all three of these mediums in tandem, which are always related but generally kept separate professionally and academically, because they not only have a lot in common on the surface but they are using similar vocabularies - visual, linguistic, and sensory - to do work. While reflexivity is not a term used in all of these mediums regularly, it is applicable to all 3 in similar ways. The reflexive techniques remain fairly consistent across the mediums - intertextual referencing and awareness, meta techniques to expose the creation process, dissonance to jar audiences into awareness of fabrication, you've seen them outlined throughout - and this proves that they should be investigated together.

I also think that studying reflexivity in these 3 mediums simultaneously has exposed further problems in the idea that any art form is a replacement for any other. It is easy to feel like theatre led to film led to games, and in some ways this is true. Technology consistently breeds innovation, and art evolves to adapt to and better utilize this technology to create new and different art forms. However, technological mediation clearly does not significantly alter adoption of techniques such as reflexivity and the ways in which those techniques are utilized, since each of these uses reflexivity in such similar ways. Theatre, film, and video games are each distinct mediums that use similar formats in different technologically mediated ways to tell similar stories. Even audiences agree with this, exemplified in the reviewer that highlighted how *Bioshock* felt like being in a movie. These mediums are just different ways to reach out to audiences, tell human stories, and find ways - such as reflexivity - to provoke the audience into thought and action in their own lives.

And finally, a question I've been mulling over throughout this research process is this - is reflexivity always a form of implication? Can you make a reflexive media project that doesn't upset audiences, that doesn't impede entertainment or enjoyment? Is the sort of narrative immersion that breeds media enjoyment antithetical to the purpose of reflexivity? I think I have found some kind of answer between my experience and that of the reviewers mentioned above. On the one hand, of course reflexivity acts as an implication. If the purpose of reflexive work is to make the audience aware of the creation process and their place in it, and to make them aware of their own life and their place in it as reflected in media, then it is necessarily an act of implication, of placing the audience in the blame zone for their complacency in both media consumption and real-life situations like those represented.

But on the other hand, I don't think thoughtful, reflexive media cannot be enjoyed. I know this from my own experience - while I can't say I loved watching *Funny Games*, I appreciated a lot about that movie and enjoyed the experience it gave me. I couldn't put *Bioshock* down, so much so that I completed all 20-ish hours it took me in 2 days. I passed *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* to my friends to make them uncomfortable, I shared my fear of *The Stanley Parable* with my partner so we could play together, and I think and laugh about *Ubu Roi* so much that it has been shaping my scholarship for several years now. Personally, I loved each of these pieces, even though they were challenging, probably *because* they were challenging.

And beyond personal feelings, though audience reviews included in this paper indicate that the reflexive properties impede enjoyment and entertainment, these pieces

are all still *widely* popular and beloved. People get tattoos from *Bioshock*, and both games discussed here are respected and celebrated and played and replayed. *Ubu* is still regularly performed in vastly different ways and helped birth a whole movement of Avant Garde theatre as a precursor and inspiration to Theatre of the Absurd artists. Both films, especially *Funny Games*, get passed around the horror community as a sort of challenge, a barometer for sensitivity, because of how difficult they are to watch, because of the reflexively fabricated proximity of viewers to film. These pieces are all well-loved and well documented, proving that people clearly find the capacity to enjoy them, often multiple times.

The reviews indicate that the reflexive moments pull people out of their immersion into the narrative and impede enjoyment, but I think ultimately people *do* enjoy reflexivity in their media because it makes them think and reflect on their life and position, and this strengthens the bond between people and art, between spectator and piece. In the future, I would continue this work to consider why these pieces of media are so popular, and where in popular media we might find evidence of reflexive moments that are responsible for their overwhelming popularity. The beloved nature of the pieces discussed in this paper promisingly indicates that reflexivity is not too high minded for the masses - audiences want to be critical about their life and the art they consume, and reflexivity is clearly widely available in popular art, just waiting to be explored from such a lens. While people are sometimes critical of the reflexive aspects, I think it is in fact what makes these pieces so popular and enduring – reflexivity draws

connections directly between audience, art, and artist, and fosters a personal closeness to that media.

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