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OBLIVIOUS TO THE STORY: THE CASE OF THE SHOOTER GAME *RIO*

ALHEIO À HISTÓRIA: O CASO DO JOGO DE TIRO *RIO*

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ABSTRACT

The article proposes a reading of the modes in which a Brazilian videogame pre-released in 2020, titled *RIO — Raised in Oblivion*, portrays the favelas as spaces of violence and appropriation of older — yet present— imaginaries about those environments. Retrieving *Elite Squad* (*Tropa de Elite*, directed by José Padilha in 2007) as a turning point in how shooting in Rio de Janeiro's slums got fictionalized in the big screen — for its use of characters, documental narrative and transmedia techniques, the paper emphasizes postmodern qualities about *RIO*'s playability and storytelling, drawing from Lipovetsky (1989) and Lyotard (1989). New media theorists such as Bolter and Grusin (2000) and Turkle (1997) help us to recognize the singularities of the gaming experiences when it comes to comparing it to other media, and Soraya Murray (2018) bases our overall approach into the cultural fabric of a shooter game, inasmuch as we bring to the forefront the manner in which *RIO* borrows imaginations and dream-like scenarios of violence to serve a very impactful proposal of the favelas: they are spectacularized environs where otherness finds little to no human story substrate. In doing so, the present text intends to observe videogames produced in countries as inequal as Brazil as highly relevant artefacts to understanding how a certain perpetuation of violence representations of the favelas takes shape in society with new technology.

KEYWORDS

Violence and Videogames, Shooter Games, Brazilian Cinema in the 2000's, Postmodernity, Favela Representations

RESUMO

O artigo propõe uma leitura sobre os modos em que o videojogo brasileiro *RIO — Raised in Oblivion* (cujo pré-lançamento se deu em 2020) retrata as favelas como espaços de violência e apropriação de imaginários anteriores —mas ainda presentes— sobre esses ambientes. Ao recuperar *Tropa de Elite* (realizado por José Padilha, em 2007) como criador de outros vocabulários ficcionais no cinema, a envolver o "subir o morro atirando" (pelo seu uso particular de personagens, narrativas documentais e técnicas transmedia), o artigo enfatiza qualidades pós-modernas na jogabilidade e *storytelling* de *RIO*, através de conceitos de Lipovetsky (1989) e Lyotard (1989). Teóricos dos novos media como Bolter e Grusin (2000) e Turkle (1997) auxiliam-nos no reconhecimento de singularidades do videojogo no que tange à comparação a outros media, e Soraya Murray (2018) serve-nos de base à nossa aproximação teórica aos videojogos de tiro, uma vez que detectamos nos imaginários e fantasias de violência construídos em *RIO* e emprestados de outros discursos, um potencial impacto sobre como as favelas são percebidas: quer seja, sítios espetacularizados onde a alteridade encontra pouco ou nenhum refúgio narrativo. Ao tomar tal curso, esta comunicação procura interpretar os videojogos produzidos em localidades tão desiguais quanto o Brasil como artefatos altamente relevantes para se entender as bases em que as representações de violência nas favelas tomam forma através de novas tecnologias.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Violência e videojogos, Jogos de tiro, Cinema brasileiro nos anos 2000, Pós-modernidade, Representações da favela

1 Introduction

Through the critique of a contemporary videogame and its cultural substrate, which references Brazilian pop culture and a film tradition in particular, this paper aims to establish how the entwining of violence and narrative in a specific shooter videogame playability can be understood as a deeper postmodern development, for which storylines become more forgetful of multilayered and humanizing settings. Although potentialities are spotted in how an insider look of the favelas and its whereabouts can be explored on technological and entertaining levels, our analysis will trace how identity formation in regard to the favelas audiovisual representation have a true impact that goes beyond the fun and spectacle effect, resulting in the actual accrual of poorly imaginings of peripherical environments.

Featuring wings in flames over a dark background, the banner of the First Phoenix Gaming Studio, on their social media, reads: The Brazilian Dreams Factory. An apt metaphor to tell of a small company's hurdles in developing and selling a cultural product, it also serves here to touch on the importance of interpreting mass media artifacts such as their latest creation, the shooter game *RIO — Raised in Oblivion* (pre-released in 2020). The projection of stories and visuals through a playable form ultimately reveals cultural constructions that bring many issues into the public sphere: this paper is particularly interested in their aesthetic or artistic lineages and how they might be revealing of broader trends in contemporary times. Taken as expressions that ascertain viewpoints or claim realities, video games extrapolate the entertainment functions they are generally understood to perform. Soraya Murray (2018) rightfully posits "narratives and image-making practices of games as a kind of 'dream life' of a culture" (pp. 29-30), which takes us back to the importance of understanding what kind of dream — or, more specifically, what Rio is that envisioned in *Raised in Oblivion*. What possibilities the realization of this dream, in visual terms, opens up for the players' imaginary about Rio de Janeiro? Are technological processes in any way linked to these perceptions? In order to go deeper in analytical terms, we need to let go of the idea that this product is apolitical because it is made for fun — especially when "fun" involves indulging in violence.

Out of the many elements with the potential to reveal how the structures of ideology and technology operate within the confinements of an action artifact, we see in the national identity representation one of considerable stature. Firstly, the Brazilian city titles the game — at the same time, it works as an acronym that we shall discuss later. Secondly, the depiction of the favelas has a long history in visual terms, which reminds us why the film *Elite Squad* (Padilha & Prado, 2007), directed by José Padilha, needs to be talked about as a landmark in the artistic imagination of those areas in Rio de Janeiro. The discussion about the genealogy of such favela imaginations lends from a Cultural Studies approach, in the sense that, by understanding *RIO* as an item of "playable visual culture" (Murray, 2018, p. 24) with power-related implications, it is possible to draw a constellation of references (some made explicit by the game developers) without losing sight of the game's particularities. An axis devoted to the audiovisual legacy believed to play a part in *RIO* is helpful to understand the intertextuality and the machineries involved in its creation, as they profoundly influence how the action comes to life — or is desired by the user. Another line of observation should include the mode of story engagement proposed by the game, as it shows yet another striking facet of some contemporary consumption styles of culture: exploitative of a revamped surface and keen on detached effects.

2 Shooting in the postmodern favelas

The articulation between the identity represented in *RIO*, which inspires a digital existence that dwells on deteriorated, and realistic spaces, and certain visual representations of the favelas inspires us to think of radically postmodern experiences. Sherry Turkle (1997), witnessing new modes of information and entertainment consumption after the Internet, went on to suggest that postmodern theories had finally found their perfect case studies thanks to the countless possibilities of experiencing computer screens. Such navigations inside dreamlike realities actually pose a very concrete object of analysis, one constituted of materiality. The act of exploring the world of "mutable surfaces" (Turkle, 1997, p. 51) turns then into a critical, and doable research attitude due to the similar, inner features of a video game; it is with that spirit that we consider vital to discover the favela's physicality in *RIO* acknowledging its peculiar mode of action: one that recognizes references (from the news, social media, cinema and television and other games) and interferes in the space, wandering, exploring, performing over time.

To further understand how those audiovisual predecessors impacted *RIO*'s conception and making of a digital world, we suggest that remediation plays a key role here, with its intertextual emphasis and postmodern goal for efficiency. Bolter and Grusin (2000) theorized that both transparency and immediacy could be located in many of the digital experiences, the virtual reality and videogames being many of their examples. Indeed, the idea that the game's aim for realism borrows from other visual sources, at the same time that it proposes an experience of exceptional status, comes in handy to understand why filmic sceneries and motifs can be spotted when playing *RIO*. Then, what would *Raised in Oblivion* be remediating, and for what reason? Our hypothesis is that *RIO*'s double strategy (going for realism on one hand, and providing a cathartic fantasy on the other) has to do exactly with a paradoxical feat of the postmodern and digital intervention: in presenting a platform where performing better means gaining more points (and that means killing more enemies), efficiency becomes a goal per se (Lyotard, 1989), and the supposed realist connection to the world loses meaning — the literal death of meaning and referential absorbs the player into a protected, self-contained experience that relinquishes reflexive spaces or temporalities. Content, here, mirrors *RIO*'s form and mechanism. Setting out intertextual payoffs, the game's own medium offers to surpass the technical challenges that other products have presented — in this case, among others, television, the press, and particularly film. By quoting *Elite Squad*'s in their trailer, borrowing some of its visual patterns and symbols (i.e. the military police's uniforms), and, most importantly, adapting one of the film's controversial interpretations (to which the favelas are the main stage to perform violent action), *RIO* remediates a representation of Rio de Janeiro with new promises. Those are related to the radicalization of the user's experience in getting in contact with the favelas' exciting alleys and spots. The elements of fantasy (a zombie storyline that justifies a post-apocalyptic world, where the infected people are as shootable as the criminals), tries to render the game an original incursion into *Elite Squad*'s seductive slums.

The game's own visual playability is the technological facet that allows for an incorporation of film tropes and successful imaginary constructions (such as the police character) to, at the same time, make it obsolete, unnecessary to the whole experience. The ultimate goal, in *RIO*'s survival mode, is to kill the user's enemies. The multiplayer function provides the opportunity to make alliances and feel the unpredictable liveness that a film does not thrive for. It is this characteristic that we call oblivious to the story, for remediating *Elite Squad*'s visuals and premises only constitutes an asset if it can be, then, performed with efficiency. In this case, productivity is intimately connected to the thrill and its affective structure when killing or surviving. If it is naïve to consider the violent practices performed online as necessarily violent, we shall refer to the problem of representations of violence so that we can, again, place *RIO*'s specificities where they belong. The way literature and painting imagined pain and violence has changed considerably and have their own histories; what we want to stress is how the development and "diversification of new media" might complicate the ethical/aesthetical problem (Ribeiro, 2013, pp. 26-27): considering the way modernity injected some ideals in the construction of violent imaginaries, the contemporary radicalization in producing destructive scenes is clearly embodied in *RIO*. The act of immersing in a highly naturalistic take of Rio's slums to shoot enemies barely hides its ethical problems, insofar as the product's aesthetical dimension is hardly aware of its potentialities to discuss those actions. A fertile ground to invest in subversions of the causes and executors of the favelas' problems is used as

a commonsensical display of a chaotic, perpetual state of conflict. The fictitious goals are supposed to reflect upon an excessive reality (or a loud, overproduced effect from audiovisual forms) and also an ever more competitive normality. Curiously, what the players need to perform within the limits of *RIO* is so transparent in its intentions that the narrative rudiments supporting it gain even more importance.

In the game, the flimsy storyline can only function anchored in its referential proposal and pointing to the elimination of obstacles — the free zone to kill, in that regard, is perceived as a benefit, as opposed to the constrains of a complex film plot. The discursive aspect that technological engagement inaugurates in this case coincides with the remediation noticed by Bolter and Grusin: surpassing the limits of older media is simultaneously a referential and identity-chasing quality. In times when "discourses privilege technical testimonies" (Lyotard, 1989, p. 87), it is perceptible how the visual mechanization promoted by the game's fantasy will not deny its affiliation to a realistic tone about the favela's complexion, whilst its "fun" purpose stems from commercial intentions and a passive stance on what institutes a violent digital amusement. Again, the violence of *RIO*'s representation is thematically coherent, but does not qualify as such for simply representing violence. Rather, the depiction of truthful whereabouts with hardly any critical story to contextualize them as a no man's land is what we perceive as a perverse perpetuation of antisocial, aggressive and divisive ideals about Rio de Janeiro. Other games that were founded upon the logic of first-person shooting also discovered in film the inspiration necessary to sublimate the ethical discussions expected from a widely consumed product. Eugene Provenzo stressed the way the action game *Platoon* (Ocean Software, 1987) exacerbated the "futility of war" (Provenzo, 1991, p. 122-123) by a utilitarian take on analogous missions appointed to the soldiers in the film directed by Oliver Stone (Kopelson, 1986). When killing the peasants is incorporated into the player's objective (even with a negative consequence), the lack of critical awareness while emulating war might be exactly what Stone was pointing his fingers at. Such voracious use of mediatized conflicts indeed produces an aura of banality which is hard to even approach on critical terms. Would it be better to simply not represent certain things? That dilemma gains new life when these conflicts (Vietnam War, violence in the favelas) get reduced to the spectacle produced by life/death pairings only acceptable in games, but that in reality are shockingly multifaceted. Also, and here lie the real consequences, these battles bear historic importance inasmuch as they configure identities, so the way art and culture problematize characters and spaces, makes for a dynamic network we hope to interpret onwards.

3 Permission to kill: from games to a film, from films to a game

A closer look into the artistic identity sought by *Raised in Oblivion* has to, first, recognize the association between Brazilian identity formation and modernity. We refer to Amós Nascimento (2001), who highlighted the modernist approach of thinkers such as Mário de Andrade as an example of how the critical discourse on Brazil's plurality and complexity in the first half of the 20th century differs from postmodern, contingent visions of what it means to be Brazilian — *Macunaíma* (written by Mário de Andrade in 1928) was such a cornerstone in Brazilian culture that, not by coincidence, it was adapted by Joaquim Pedro de Andrade to the big screen (Andrade, 1969). That leads us to reflect upon the case of representing the collective self after modern projects for the country were long recognized: what visual heritage is inspiring contemporary objects when it comes to depicting Brazil — and Rio de Janeiro, specifically? As far as motion pictures are concerned, a shift manifests too in Brazilian culture: as film scholar Esther Hamburger (2007) points out, the representation of Rio's favelas is deeply connected to the emergence of modern film in Brazil. From Nelson Pereira dos Santos' *Rio, 100 Degrees F.* (Barros, Freire Cúri, Guitton, Jardim, Kosinski, Pereira dos Santos, 1955) to *City of God* (Barata Ribeiro, 2002), there was a marked transformation in the way favelas were brought up in film tradition. A first approximation with romantic undertones about the "others" living in the slums (considering no director had come from the favelas) established, at most, admiration for the roots of Brazilian culture — and with that, a clear notion of spatial otherness. What Hamburger sharply notices about the Brazilian film culture of the turn of the 20th century when it comes to the representation of favelas is a "dispute" (2007, p. 120) over those same othered voices hardly ever represented. That comes in obvious dialogue with the television production, which, in the 1990s, aired thousands of hours dedicated to the exploitation of violent events — and consistently attributing these to the domains of the favelas. Not by chance, a globalized Rio de Janeiro that suffered to deal with many of its old social problems has been taken as the ideal dramatic stage, a space to explore Brazil's most acute contradictions. Formally, explicit discourses of alterity might have prevailed in some films, sometimes even attributing self-responsibility (i.e. *News From a Personal War*, Zangrandi, 1999), but the video experience has introduced new and sturdy components of reality. In other words, documentaries or fictional pieces had to compete with the graphic tales of the favelas that were getting ingrained in the popular imaginary via the gory news.

It is within that context that we discuss the pertinence of *Elite Squad*'s cultural legacy to film and other media. Presenting an incursion to the favelas that is notably indebted to *City of God*'s fictional imagination, *Elite Squad*'s identity project is hardly one of plurality. It features harsh criticism to many aspects of Brazilian politics, that is true, but its main agent of transformation is a killing machine (so non-dialogical in essence). In the box-office phenomenon, tormented officer Captain Nascimento exposes the many layers of corruption as a way of justifying his own revolt towards a dead end. Aesthetically, José Padilha explores this conundrum fragmenting the array of voices, so that responsibility is, at the same time, shared by him and all of Brazilian society, and diluted in the same fictional world that serves it. In doing so, the invasion of the favelas' spaces is legitimized with a strong tie to the crime plot, and visually, the naturalistic take on locations such as Morro da Babilônia converts fantasy action into a credible document about the favelas.

Two certain features about *Elite Squad* should help us in demonstrating a connection to *RIO* that is not casual. The first has to do with that documental side aforementioned, rooted in José Padilha's own filmography — his documentary feature *Bus 174* (Padilha & Prado, 2002) — pretty much lays the ground to *Elite Squad*'s world-making and the emerging audiovisual trends that addressed urban violence. The other is the film's ability to transit out of its own medium codes: the hectic opening scene, showing a heavy funk party in the slums, infuses music video language to the crime film genre. It also mixes points of view that resemble, in many ways, certain video games — the point shooting perspective is literally used five minutes into the movie. Amy Villarejo (2012) goes as far as arguing that the use of visual modalities similar to the shooter genres comprises the spectators' conversion into active elements that have to deal with a complicated morality as they explore the favelas' environs. Such intertextual, and arguably gaming techniques, are used to create empathy and engage the viewer in a type of activity coming up the hills that would be morally questionable — but in first person, and as authorities, the men depicted have permission to kill, the same way the audience has the right to look. The thrilling exploration of the area, when founded in the realistic whereabouts that could be seen in documentaries, strives to put the viewer in the BOPE (a tactical unit of Rio's police) officials' shoes at all costs. Visually, this shooter perspective (Fig-

ure 1) blurs the lines between desire and fear that the film's omnipresent voice over tries to set straight.

Fig. 1: the player's perspective in *RIO* (source: First Phoenix Studio)

A sort of transmedia aesthetic in *Elite Squad* was noted by other scholars, and its life as a cultural product seemed to confirm the importance of such elements in singularizing the film among others. What is fascinating about this public life that Padilha's piece of work touched upon is how attuned it was to a fast, new time of video consumption, which included pirate DVDs, YouTube and video games. In her dissertation, Milena Szafir (2010) demonstrates with solid proof how the *Elite Squad* phenomenon circulated in different media and matched the postmodern, consumerist aptitude to engage in networks. The way *Elite Squad* preyed on games like *Counter-Strike* (Valve, 2000) and *Grand Theft Auto* (Rockstar North, 1997) resonated back to those products' main audiences, who soon found ways to create versions of said games so to incorporate *Elite Squad*'s main themes, adapting to the reality of Rio de Janeiro. The immediate attempts, nevertheless, were imperfect — in 2020, a new game would claim these references back.

4 *RIO*: an insider or outsider look into the favelas?

Raised in Oblivion is the first project created by the Brazilian brothers Bannaker Braulio and Jhoniker Braulio, who, talking from experience, wanted to play the survival genre with a different kind of engagement. The setting, in that sense, had to resonate with their counterparts; although from São Paulo, the authors have relatives living in Rio de Janeiro. Knowing the neighborhood of Praça Seca, they say (Freitas, 2020), was crucial to understand the scenery and choose the city as the main location for the game. Also, the hilly environment was said to be helpful in designing *RIO*, as the details had a natural limitation imposed by its representation. The survival genre referred to by Braulio, a popular mode of play that involves actions of exploration and outlasting others, commonly adopts post-apocalyptic scenarios to situate the player. Titles such as *DayZ* (Bohemia Interactive, 2013) and *Z1 Battle Royale* (Daybreak Game Company, 2018) invest in zombie outbreaks to give access to the thrill — killing enemies, and essentially surviving. The fantasy component embedded in this proposal, yet, is not what *RIO* puts forward as its main selling point. That would be the realism of the Rio setting and the close collaborations with the game's audience on Facebook groups, discussing improvements and additions to the playability, or even to the story. The game's trailer, featuring a voice over that resembles Captain Nascimento's, had already shown *RIO*'s willingness to remediate pop culture. Titled *Kill or die*, the teaser promotes how those from the favelas are "ready" to face anything. The heavy soundtrack by trap group Lounge anticipates a higher POV that shows armed men slowly exploring the slum's streets (Figure 2), while a literal *Elite Squad* quote ("Vai, calma, olha antes. Fatiou, passou… Boa meu soldado, boa!") infuses the game with tension. In that scene, it is clear how the favela's surrounds are to be taken seriously, or else the player risks not advancing — in life. The Braulio brothers have also used a *City of God*-inspired loading screen and included real singers as characters in the game, such as funk artists MC Lan, MC Igu and MC Carol. More than a marketing ploy, this expresses how popular film and music set ideas that end up being so influential that are understood as necessary signs of reality. MC Carol's lyrics for *Jorginho me empresta a 12* (2016) go as: "Hey, Jorginho, lend me your .12 / […] So that I can shoot that pothead" — her tough persona validates *RIO*'s graphic incursion to the favelas (Figure 3). The same method was used in *Def Jam: Fight for NY* (AKI Corporation, 2004), whose cast is comprised of big hip hop names.

Fig. 2: screenshot from the teaser trailer, showing the Order going through a dark favela alley (source: First Phoenix Studio)

Fig. 3: a stylized promo picture made after musical artist MC Carol (source: First Phoenix Studio)

The premise of the Braulio's game tells of a deadly, pigeon-spread virus that has caused the isolation in the region of Praça Seca, in Rio. There, three groups are put together to propel the action: the Infected, the Assassins and the Order. While the first lot takes back to the zombie tradition in survival games (in style and lack of singularity), the other two clearly resort to well-known figurations in the Brazilian society: heavy-armed criminals from the slums and the BOPE. The play modes vary from survival, battle royale and player versus player — in different degrees, they invoke the same "shoot before it is too late" logic, the customization (items, maps) being the real change-maker in the experience. Guns paying tribute to football teams like Flamengo set the mood for a "true" Brazilian experience, while the player searches for scattered objects that will help improv-

ing their rankings. On survivor mode, it is essential to find the best tools and routes in order to escape from the aim of a better positioned or better armed opponent. The player lives a true sense of open-jungle hysteria, in which the minimalistic and enhanced step sounds are suddenly interrupted by very believable, loud shots.

The mix of characters that are granted permission to kill, either because they have lost their brain capacities, or are representatives of soldiers in the favelas urban war, erases many complexities about the situation the game seeks to represent, insofar as the means of engaging in the story encompass homogenizing the threat of violence in shades of glory. It is the fascination about handling a gun in the favelas' alleys that draws the attention to this game and not to another survival product. The zombies, for that matter, are as accessory as they can be. Naturalistic traces such as the UPPs (Pacifying Police Units) spotted in the decaying environment of *RIO* (Figure 4) are symptomatic of a wider perception about how one should represent a favela. The UPPs were a program initiated in the second half of the 2000s in several slums of Rio, with the aim of integrating police battalions in the favela's social life. After years attempting to contain activities that could tarnish the national image amidst the Olympics and the World Cup, the Units more often than not were responsible for managing poverty with penal, and not social faculties (Santana, Costa, & Castro, 2016), so their symbolism here relates to an experience of vigilance and failure. The way the game appropriates those popular images is as cynical as the representations it borrows from the media — a great example is the use of the photograph of a mustached officer who posed in front of a spray-painted wall that offered money for his killing (Figure 5). This type of incorporation of a violent reality through grotesque, meme-y artifacts communicates well with the game's target audience. *RIO* puts on the same level real phenomena, media representations and artistic works to then make a case of a truthful backdrop — but the 3D favelas and their walls covered with realistic graffiti do not hide an immense, computer-generated desolation in learning that they are as far from the human sensibility as they can get.

The good-humored, pastiche-filled strategy that the game takes, conciliates the aggressive signs lent from documental favelas with a general attitude towards the postmodern cities. Gilles Lipovetsky, already in the 1980s, detected a type of individualism emerging in contemporary times that could be associated with this normalization of violent spaces. When the excessive consumption impacts to a great degree one's desire to "select and transform" (Lipovetsky, 1989, p. 101) —something that gamers take seriously in the action of customizing their missions, characters, and teams—, what is conceived as "real" ends up losing its very notion of alterity or "wild depth" (Lipovetsky, 1989, p. 70). In other words, exploration is permitted to levels never conceived before. The moral barriers that would refrain from the bare representation of violence have been banalized by cultural discourses flocking around. The favelas in *RIO*, unlike the films mentioned in this paper suggest, are not complex environments. The game's proposition is highly narcissistic in the logic that real stories do not matter, only if to suggest threat and excitement. The combination of fictional pieces with true events and characters is more revealing, in fact, of the pulverized identity of the general player. If otherness has been vital to establish the modern notion of a Brazilian identity in the arts (cinema included), *Raised in Oblivion* opts for a chaotic, disform identity that mirrors both content and spectatorship. By embodying what could be seen as anti-values in a fair, safe society, the game attests its verisimilitude precisely because it has been produced in a horribly inequal country. As Meza-Maya and Lobo-Ojeda (2017) have observed, when it comes to the intelligibility of violent scenarios in *Grand Theft Auto V* (Rockstar North, 2013) by kids in Bogotá, the sense of immersion to the aggressive virtual environ negotiates with social values that are present in their lives. When normality has accepted that violence is both a problem and a cultural artifact to be made fun of or spectacularized —in music, film, the news— the issue of alterity becomes more of an impediment to produce critical experiences than an instrument to pursuit any singularity.

Fig. 4: an abandoned UPP, part of *RIO*'s virtual realm (source: First Phoenix Studio)

Fig. 5: stylized picture of a real photograph involving a police officer in Rio (source: First Phoenix Studio)

The discursive device that connects the game user to urban resemblances has been studied in other products, such as *GTA*. Marcos Antón (2016) noted how the city built in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (Rockstar Studios, 2004) forges naturalistic American codes with the ultimate goal of enhancing the player's experience. Similar to *RIO*, *GTA* establishes an open world which makes up for previous limited representations about the dangerous urban life. But how attainable is this new perception about the favelas? In a perverse manner, the exploration of the areas is so superficial that it renders the mentioned naturalistic codes empty, algorithmic-generated figurations. We argue that this is a direct result of the fragile contextualization of the story. It is very true that the practices experienced by a new generation of gamers are familiar to visual excess and the myriad of cultural references —as said, the loyal base who collaborated by suggesting the game's characters expects a good deal of agency in the playability— but that does not suddenly replace the role of the story in anchoring human actions. Furthermore, and paradoxically, the game's attempt to portray a naturalistic Rio ends up

removing the human factor of it. This is not the first time the Brazilian background is a mere pretext to justify violent shooting plots: talking about *Max Payne 3* (Rockstar Studios, 2012), Murray brings our attention to how the appropriation of a peripherical setting was used to the expense of humanizing narratives (2018). Interestingly enough, the invention of a violent Rio de Janeiro, even if construed by Brazilian residents, tends to replicate this outsider phenomenon, where the favelas are reduced to their threatening aspect. Beyond stereotyping heterogeneous spaces, the shooter games end up promoting an indifference to the element of alterity that is foundational to the discussion of Brazilian identity. In being oblivious to this issue, *RIO* engages in an amusement that is radically based on the thrill of hiding, shooting and winning by extermination — contingent par excellence. Amongst a panel of equally brain-dead citizens, the figure of the "other" becomes completely devoid of substance, "mere extras" (Lipovetsky, 1989, p. 186), or props such as the rusty UPPs.

In this vein, the city of Rio de Janeiro gets a revealing treatment by *RIO*: the subtext in the acronym (*Raised in Oblivion*) points to an explanatory vision of the war zone that the region of Praça Seca represents in that story. A play on words that resonates with an international audience, it claims to its universe the social insensibility commonly evoked when portraying poverty and violence in Brazil. Another possible reading, with closer implications to what we have presented so far, fixes this same forgetfulness in the game user, who engages in the stupor of killing in Rio — with the notion that this is what the city offers, anyway. The permission to perform violence, moreover, is quite tied to an "urban simulation" (Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2009, p. 156) with deeper associations to the macro, violent structures observed outside of *Raised in Oblivion*. Coupled with the pop references that compose the shiny, spectacularized lives in the favelas, what could have been a title with dramatic undertones and, by stretch, a social commentary, becomes at most cynicism. As seen in *GTA*, in which the satirical assembly barely scratches the surface of real systems of violence, here too the authorization to emulate aggressive behaviors (known to happen in the favelas) is facilitated by the fantastic number of predecessors that painted these imaginaries. Locating the game in Rio, consequently, is a very conscious strategy that remediates a cycle of mostly "empty amplifications" (Lipovetsky, 1989, p. 191) about the favelas. And that includes the urban performances themselves — as Erika Robb Larkins (2013) found in her fieldwork about police action in a poor community, a sort of "hyper-favela" (Larkins, 2013, p. 556) comes up when such spectacularized representations gain the same status of truth in the favelas day-to-day life. The emptiness generated by those constructs is, thus, cause and consequence of the violence, given how society has become forgiving of both police action and its entertaining counterparts.

4 Final considerations, or a critical take on the perpetuation of violence

As T.V. Reed (2014) suggested, it is more fruitful to discuss the game-violence conundrum out of realms of direct causality, and rather look at how "games and game cultures unintentionally and indirectly create positive or negative cultural echoes, climates and impacts" (p. 146), because, as seen, the social practices are already charged with the performative ideas of what the favela is like — no neutral reality or symbols, for that matter, would take us to causational paths. In that line, the circularity of representations and identity signs infers reality through simulation, but we are dealing with simulations that "equally alter reality" (Turkle, 1997, p. 107). The stable loop of violent representations serves well the scorched-earth scenario for those hyper-favelas, since on a social level, little is done to transform it, and on fictional and informative dimensions, what matters is the dramatic potential emanating from those spaces. Video games like *RIO* are not only capturing violent elements with a naturalistic excuse — they are also spreading a powerful and predatory vision about the favelas, for which ethical predicaments are nothing more than embarrassing obstacles. In that regard, the game goes full force in the Captain Nascimento (or his enemies) mode but more drastically, letting go of the innermost dramatic layers that *Elite Squad* wished to put for discussion. The sophistication of the cinematic experience is not, ironically, rooted in direct interaction. That belongs to the game universe, which, here, in turn, makes use of the exploration and supposed autonomy of the user to virtually dehumanize the story behind the violence portrayed. Maybe the action, shooter experience is so totalizing that it sells itself as the only mode of interaction with such a menacing, poor representation of the favelas. The extreme, contemporary individualization has found in the interconnected, multiplayer video game the perfect model to practice a socialization that gets quick, dazzling pleasure out of the body count satire.

The leap observed between the ethical discourse from *RIO*'s preferred references and its own proposition of a forgotten extermination zone is considerable. And it gets more visible the moment we distinguish how technology plays a part in the consumption of games, in opposition to film spectatorship. As mentioned before, *Elite Squad* should credit part of its popularity to the way it resonated in a time of digital frenzy — that being said, its ethical dimension is protected (or exposed?) exactly by its cinematographic format. Contained by the story, the length, it attests that pace, editing and discourse are intimately connected. *Raised in Oblivion*, on the other hand, overlaps what is visual to what is playable: the remediation of other visions about the favelas mimics how the players make use of time and space in the survival and shooter genres. A substantial number of hours in immersion, depending on the tasks and interaction, produces a rapacious routine that wants room for exploration but not much for reflection — for the missions wished-for are nothing more than a silly death simulation. A silver lining of this type of representation could be its inclusive approach, taking creative voices that speak in first person about the favelas — but even that is subdued when the game's overarching structures reproduce stigmas that harm the actual complexity of those communities. What we hope to have demonstrated is how *RIO*'s remediations hinder a critical project to represent violence in Rio because the very process of dealing with the truth about the favelas is hardly separable from its cultural manifestations, which have continuously avoided original, many-sided approaches to the matters of violence, otherness and identity. The shooter game, with its interactive prowess, but self-indulgent playability, fails to take that risk.

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