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A WORLD OF HURT: Representations of Suffering
in the Silent Hill Franchise

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[Abundance of gratitude goes here.]

As ever undeserving of your kindness,

Sher Li

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Acknowledgements | 3 |
| Table of Contents | 4 |
| Summary | 5 |
| 1) “Sweet! Huge Exit Wounds!” | 6 |
| 2) Fear/Blood/Flesh | 22 |
| 3) Mutilated Bodies in a Mutilated World | 39 |
| 4) Earning Your Happy Ending | 59 |
| 5) Self-Imposed Suffering | 76 |
| 6) Conclusion | 92 |
| Works Cited | 95 |

SUMMARY

The conversation surrounding violence in video games has always focused on the morality of violence in video games. Violence in video games has either been condemned by moral guardians as immoral, or used by video game players to signify how far video game technology has progressed. This thesis aims to move the conversation instead to the nature of the violent images in video games. Through an examination of *Silent Hill*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Silent Hill 3*, and *Silent Hill 4*, this paper discusses how these four video games present images of suffering affectively, focusing on how representations of suffering change the relationship between the video game, the player, and the player's others within the video game world.

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A World of Hurt: Representations of Suffering in the *Silent Hill* Franchise

1) “Sweet! Huge Exit Wounds!”: A Brief History of Violence in Video Games

In a 2013 article for *eurogamer.net*, Simon Parkin examines the connections between the arms manufacturing and video game industry. Video games have become a new avenue for advertising and encouraging the purchase of guns, especially among young Americans, Parkin writes. Part of the efficacy of using video games as a means to advertise guns is “the gun's persistence and centrality in the video game”, due to largely “practical considerations” (Parkin). A gun, Parkin explains, is one of the “few inventions” that in a video game “can affect objects both near and far with the squeeze of a trigger (or press of a button)”, providing an instant affective connection between the player and the video game world (Parkin).

The ubiquity of firearms in video games and the use of the medium as viable advertising space for arms manufacturers demonstrates the profound relationship between violence and video games—a concern, in fact, alluded to in Parkin’s article. Speaking to an anonymous developer of a “a blockbuster American war game series”, the developer in question observes that “there is a bigger problem [within video games]”, which is that “shooting enemies” often comprises the core gameplay of most video games (Parkin). Likewise, Martin Hollis, described in the article as having “turned his back on developing violent video games” remarks that “[game developers] are partially complicit with violence as soon as [the video game] has a violence narrative” (Parkin).

Parkin's article is interesting in that it helps to illustrate the three major issues surrounding violence and video games that this thesis aims to explore. The first issue that this article demonstrates is the inclusion of violence in video games, and the moral concerns surrounding the presence of violent elements in video games, as evidenced in the article through the censure from video game developers themselves and society at large and as posing less an issue for arms manufacturers and video game players. Secondly, Parkin's observation of the frequent reliance on the gun as a basic tool of a video game reflects the pervasiveness of certain video game design choices and how they enforce the performance and perpetuation of violence in video games. Thirdly, the apparent influence that video games have on their players, such that the medium may be used as a marketing tool demonstrates the affective potential of video games, and this thesis seeks to expand on the affective quality of video games beyond instilling purely violent and destructive impulses in the player.

This thesis does not aim to discount the concerns that exist about the potential effects that the inclusion of violence in video games has shaped video game creation and reception, but instead is an attempt to examine, through a less moralizing lens, the ways that video games may represent violent scenes and acts not merely as spectacles and suggest that the affective potential of video games may instead be used to foster an awareness of the player's own vulnerability and the vulnerability of the player in relation to others and of others.

The concerns raised by Parkin regarding the presence of violence in video games is not new, of course. In fact, Carly A. Kocurek places *Death Race*, an arcade game developed and published by Exidy in 1976, at the centre of "video gaming's first significant moral panic" (74). The video game itself was a "chase-and-crash game", and was named after 1975's *Death Race 2000*, "a strategy that guaranteed the game a certain level of name recognition and invited controversy" (73—74). The central gameplay of *Death Race* had

players take control of race cars, and the objective of gameplay was to strike down as many gremlins as possible, which would, in turn, transform into “cross-shaped tombstone[s]” that provided an extra obstacle for players of *Death Race* to manoeuvre around when playing the game (80). These player-controlled race cars were represented by white, rectangular blocks with circles attached to them, while the gremlins in the game were represented by white, humanoid shapes. The game supplemented the violence of running down these gremlins with a high-pitched, shrill sound, which could be argued was reminiscent of the dying shrieks of people, especially in light of *Death Race*'s connection to the infamously violent film it was named after. Despite the video game's reputation, the actual depictions of violence and suffering in *Death Race* are actually lacking in detail. When the player's race cars collide with the gremlins, the gremlins simply disappear, leaving only the tombstones to remind the player of a pre-existing, unharmed body, and the act of violence that once took place at that location. Although the violence in *Death Race* is thus more suggestive, by making use of the sounds of the game and the video game's association to the film, Kocurek writes that *Death Race* nonetheless “attract[ed] national scandal” in the United States (81). Kocurek speculates that compared to other video games at the time *Death Race* was as controversial as it was due to its depiction of violence against noticeably “human actors” (82) and the seemingly unjustified context for its “unregimented” and “violent chaos” (83).

Despite the controversy courted by *Death Race* in 1976, it was far from the last video game to depict such acts of bodily harm, especially against “human actors” (82). Video game technology has continued to change, allowing for injuries and injurious acts to be staged in video game worlds in increasingly spectacular ways. In fact, compared to the moral panic surrounding *Death Race*, those who play games themselves seem to celebrate the fact that wounds of all kinds can be rendered with as much detail as possible as any other aspect of the video game world. This kind of response to injuries in video games may be examined through

two different forum posts on *NeoGAF* and *GameFAQs*, which are both video game websites that provide forums for their users to discuss particular video games and/or other aspects of gaming culture. The title of this chapter is, in fact, derived from a response to a post on *NeoGAF*, entitled “visual bullet wounds in video games”. The original comment from the post, which was written by a user named “Meccanical” in response to the graphic headshots in *Red Dead Redemption*, reads: “Yeah those were sweet. Huge exit wounds.” The post in question revolves around the depiction of bullet wounds in video games, with users posting screenshots of bullet wounds from various video games and debating over which video game depicts bullet-riddled bodies with as much grotesque detail as possible. “Meccanical”’s assessment of a graphic injury as “sweet” and their appreciation of large wounds perfectly encapsulates this celebratory tone that players have towards the ability of video games to render horrifying wounds. “[V]isual bullet wounds in video games” is far from the only forum thread discussing and comparing the variously detailed wounds in video games. A similar forum thread on *GameFAQs*, titled “Body damage/bullet wounds?”, seeks confirmation from other users about whether such wounds are depicted in *Grand Theft Auto V*. In this post, “Bjorn_Keizers” laments the absence of “accurate bullet effects” and echoes “Meccanical”’s desire to see “some nice, big exit wounds”.

Even amidst these enthusiastic comments about the desire to see ever more gruesome and detailed wounds, there appears to some reservation about the subject. In the very same forum thread on *GameFAQs*, “Right_Chus_1” contemplates how greater anatomical detail in bodily injuries might be a “double edged sword”. “Right_Chus_1” suggests that while video game developers may have the technology to render injuries in more detail, they might be hesitant to do so as there exists a “GIANT difference between violence and snuff in games”. The way that “Right_Chus_1” expresses their concerns over when injuries in video games cross the line from “violence” to “snuff” recalls Kocurek’s description of *Death Race* as

occupying the space of “unregimented” and “violent chaos” (83). While far from attempting to excite a moral panic about the violence in video games, much like the controversy surrounding *Death Race* in 1976, the line drawn here between “violence and snuff” by “Right_Chus_1” reflects a tendency to moralise discussions of violence in video games and tends to be focused on the violence itself and not the wounded bodies that appear in abundance in video games.

The reaction so far toward violence in video games appears to be divided between complete condemnation by certain critics on moral grounds and enthusiasm on the part of players who enjoy the violent spectacle that video games have to offer. Despite this polarising reaction toward violence and suffering in video games, there have been attempts at shifting the conversation towards the sheer amount of violence perpetrated within video game worlds, especially towards non-playable characters (NPCs), which often are wholly at the mercy of the player’s destructive actions, by design.

One such attempt is in a 2014 interview that *Vox.com* conducted with Brian Tomasik, who the website describes as, “a consultant at the Foundational Research Institute, which explores possible avenues for reducing suffering in humans and other sentient beings, now and in the future” (Matthews). In the interview, Tomasik questions the unthinking harming of non-playable characters (NPCs) in video games, especially by player-controlled characters, suggesting that the morality of that act depends both on the NPCs’ “degree of sophistication” and if the NPCs’ destruction “would correspond to something harmful” (Matthews, “This guy thinks killing video game characters is immoral”). While Tomasik goes on to argue that “violence toward video-game characters is [not] currently among the world's most pressing ethical problems”, Tomasik stresses that the sheer scale of NPCs being killed on a daily basis “add[s] up to something nontrivial” (Matthews, “This guy thinks killing video game characters is immoral”).

Tomasik's argument against the violence towards NPCs in video games echoes some of the objections raised to the violence against "human actors" in *Death Race* (Kocurek 82). Of course, the presentation of Tomasik's arguments is more nuanced, especially in terms of redefining suffering and extending the issue of care to beings that most individuals would currently perceive as artificial and non-sentient. Nevertheless, the objections that Tomasik raises remain bound to a moral standpoint. According to Tomasik's argument, the kind of NPCs that a player would eventually care for would already be the kind of characters that would be able to evoke a "moral" response in the player, especially if the NPCs were sophisticated enough to react in complex ways to harmful actions taken against the NPCs.

While Tomasik's argument about NPCs is an attempt to move away from discussing video games in moralistic terms, Tomasik's interview with the website also reflects an on-going resistance from video game players to question the actual depictions of harm in video games. Tomasik's entire interview with Dylan Matthews on *Vox.com* is framed with the title: "This guy thinks killing video games is immoral". The title of the article is no doubt styled to be attention-grabbing, but the phrasing of "[t]his guy thinks" suggests a glibness of tone that is contrary to the serious interview contained within the actual article (Matthews). By referring to Tomasik as "this guy" the article positions Tomasik (or at least, his opinions) as someone strange or unusual, which already casts Tomasik's opinions in doubt. The seeming strangeness of Tomasik's opinions is reinforced by Matthews' opening questions that repeatedly focus on the moral issue of violence in video games. The combination of the framing of this interview and the questions posed to Tomasik thus also point to a fundamental resistance towards assessing violence, injury, and suffering in video games in a more analytical way.

The common thread surrounding these discussions of violence in the medium of video games have tended to pass a moral judgement on the mere presence of violence, suggesting

that violence video games are pure spectacles that need to be condemned for their violence or celebrated for the same reason. The other issue that is common to these three main discussions about the violence in video games is the tendency to criticise the violence itself on moral grounds and the subsequent attempt to quantify the concept of violence itself as good or bad. This is not to say that a moral perspective on violence in video games is unnecessary, but as the case study of *Death Race*, the question of “violence” versus “snuff”, and the suffering of NPCs demonstrate, the application of a moral value to the depiction of violence in video games tends to restrict the broader discussion that can be had about violence, wounds, and suffering in video games as a whole.

As such, this thesis makes a distinction between violence and suffering by drawing on the etymological roots of each word. According to *Online Etymology Dictionary*, “violence”, is an Anglo-French/Old French word meaning “physical force used to inflict injury or damage”, and has roots in the Latin word “violentus”, which means “vehement, forcible”. “Suffering”, on the other hand, is derived from the word “suffer”, which has its roots in the Anglo-French “suffrir” meaning to “allow to occur or continue, permit, tolerate, fail to prevent or suppress” and the Old French “sofrir”, i.e. to “bear, endure, resist; permit, tolerate, allow” (*Online Etymology Dictionary*). “Suffering” thus is given the meaning of the “patient enduring of pain, inconvenience, loss, etc” or “undergoing of punishment, affliction, etc”.

The discussion surrounding violence in video games has tended to focus on the moral nature of violence, and perhaps it is due to the linguistic implications of the word—violence is a destructive force that needs to be moralized and contained. The connotations of the word “suffering”, in contrast, help shift the discussion towards how video games represent states of suffering, where the player has to “allow to occur”, “bear”, or “endure” prolonged states of weakness and vulnerability within the video game world, and to what effect.

This thesis thus posits that through certain choices in video game design/narrative, video games are capable of representing suffering, as opposed to spectacularized violence. Representations of suffering in video games allow the player to question how violent actions and the player's culpability in them are framed and enforced in other video games. By playing through these scenes of suffering, the player is exposed to their own vulnerability, their vulnerability to others, and the vulnerability of others, and the overall affective potential of video games, once seen as a tool to desensitize, may in turn, allow for more affective and empathic responses towards the self and others.

By shifting the focus away from "violence" to "suffering", this thesis also adopts a different perspective on the affective potential of video games. The focus on violence as an elements of video games has limited the critical examination of the relationship between the video game and the player (which is often framed as passive and in overall negative terms) as exemplified in psychological studies that explore the effect of violent video games in the player. One such study, "Comfortably Numb", which was conducted by Brad J. Bushman and Craig A. Anderson in 2009, posited that "exposure to blood and gore in the media might make people numb to the pain and suffering of others" (273). Bushman and Anderson theorized that after playing a violence video game as opposed to a non-violent one, players would be less likely or would take longer to respond to a situation where their help was needed (273). The video games designated in the study as violent included *Duke Nukem* and *Mortal Kombat*, while non-violent video games included *Austin Powers* and *3D Pinball* (Bushman and Anderson 274). Bushman and Anderson observed in their study that participants who had played a violent video game "took significantly longer" to respond to a situation that required the player's help/assistance (276).

While Bushman and Anderson's experiment suggests that playing video games which contain elements of violence may have potentially negative effects on the player—this model

of examining video games is limiting. Firstly, the parameters of their study reveal a strict division between violent and non-violent video games, which, considering the content of the video games used, may be seen as arbitrary. For instance, *Duke Nukem* and *Mortal Kombat* are video games known for spectacularizing violent, gruesome acts, while *Austin Powers*, an adaptation of the film of the same name, is perceived as non-violent, but does contain similar violent elements as the *Duke Nukem* and *Mortal Kombat*, albeit rendered in a more stylized form, and with an overall humorous tone. As such, the categories of violent and non-violent are arguably arbitrary and the exploration of how gradations of suffering are represented in video games instead may prove more useful in exploring the affective relationship between the video game medium and the player. Bushman and Anderson's study also suggests a one-way relationship between the medium of video games and the player, which simplifies the relationship between video games and the player, which does not consider the deeper implications of a medium that requires the player's input in revealing the full contents of the medium.

As such, this thesis derives its ideas on the affective potential of video games from Nadav Lipkin, who describes video games as "directly participatory" as the player learns and interacts with the video game mentally and physically (36). Consequently, "affect is produced immediately through the diegetic connection between player and avatar" (37), which "opens the possibility that the player might feel completely new sensations" (38) through sight, sound, and touch. Lipkin's formulation of the relationship between the video game and the player as "directly participatory" (36) and opening the player up to the possibility of "completely new sensation" (38) is more neutral in tone, allowing for both negative/positive/ambiguous reactions from the player to the video game. This conceptualization of the medium furthers the move away from a purely moral argument with

regards to the contents of video games and provides the space to consider how representations of suffering in video games may ultimately be perceived.

This thesis will thus examine representations of suffering in the following video games: *Silent Hill*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Silent Hill 3*, and *Silent Hill 4*. These four video games are located within the survival horror genre—a subset of horror video games that often portray psychological and physical suffering within their narratives and may even exercise a similar affect on the player through their design. Most action heavy video games, even within the horror genre, tend to position the player as invulnerable within the video game world, by the almost mechanical repetition and accumulation of violent acts perpetrated by the player on enemies or vice versa. In contrast, the four *Silent Hill* video games tend to isolate the player and provide little recourse for the player to defend themselves within the video game world. These interactions between the player and the othered beings/video game world bring into question how the player otherwise interacts with the supposed enemy in other video games.

This thesis examines how these four video games represent an ongoing state of suffering within the video game world and the transmission of that affect into the player through certain aspects of video game design, in particular, the positioning and framing of the player and othered beings within the video game, the overall narrative structure of the four *Silent Hill* video games, especially their inclusion of multiple endings, and other mechanics which guide how the player encounters and works through the scenes of suffering present in the world of *Silent Hill*.

Lipkin's framework provides a means to examine how the *Silent Hill* video games positions the player in a state of weakness or openness in comparison to other video games, which allows the player to be more receptive in their response to the condition of suffering as represented on the bodies of the characters within the *Silent Hill* video games, and in the

interactions between the player, the player's characters, and other characters in the video game world. Lipkin's conceptualization of video games also creates the possibility for the player to be affected by narratives of suffering that do not neatly resolve the suffering contained within them by virtue of taking place over multiple endings and multiple video games.

These representations of suffering in *Silent Hill*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Silent Hill 3*, and *Silent Hill 4* are framed through Adriana Cavarero's "horrorism", in relation to the suffering inflicted on the bodies of the inhabitants of *Silent Hill*, and Cathy Caruth's discussions of trauma in *Unclaimed Experience*. Cavarero defines "horrorism" as "a particular form of violence that exceeds death itself" (32) in order to more precisely frame the "new [...] way in which the massacre is now perpetrated" – one that does not end with the destruction of a singular body but is perpetrated and perpetuated from one body onto others (29). While Cavarero's conception of "horrorism" is used to describe acts of mass violence and suffering in the real world, "horrorism" is also useful in examining the generation and re-generation of bodies (especially othered bodies) in video games such as the four *Silent Hill* video games. The framework of horrorism raises questions of how suffering becomes an ongoing condition in these video games as expressed in the bodies of the player's character, the player and the other/othered characters that the player interacts with in the *Silent Hill* video games. Injurious acts and seeming deaths in video games do appear to "exceed death itself" and continue to affect other bodies around the originally harmed body, through the very mechanics of the medium itself, which allows for bodies to be created and to experience and re-experience suffering.

On the level of narrative, these four *Silent Hill* video games when viewed through their multiple endings, and across video games, arguably represent the "experience of trauma", which Caruth describes as "repeat[ing] itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the

unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will” (2). Caruth’s conceptualization of trauma as possessing an unassimilated nature is useful to examine the numerous endings present within these four video games and the subtle plot threads that remain unresolved from one video game to the next. While not entirely open-ended, the presence of multiple endings especially in each *Silent Hill* video games could be seen as a method through which the medium of video games represents a traumatic narrative, by Caruth’s definition of trauma in *Unclaimed Experience*. The repetition/return of trauma that Caruth describes is useful in an analysis of the overall narrative structure and absence of resolution that can be possible in video games, which opens up the possibility for the player to be more greatly affected by the representation of suffering contained therein.

Since these four video games are located within the horror genre, the analytical framework and the focus on the representation of suffering in the *Silent Hill* franchise may be seen as focusing in a primarily negative affect on the player by creating a sense of weakness, powerlessness, and thus, horror, within a hostile world. However, this thesis frames the representation of suffering and the vulnerable state it produces in the player as a more ambiguous and possibly transformative element that it transmitted between the video game and the player, by adopting Judith Butler’s ideas on vulnerability from *Precarious Life* and “Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance”.

In *Precarious Life*, Butler argues that

[t]he body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. (26)

Butler's approach to the position of the body in relation to itself and other bodies is useful in this thesis in that the exposure of the body to "morality, vulnerability, agency" is not necessarily perceived as a negative, especially in light of the way that video games typically position the bodies of the player and the character that they play. In video games such as *Duke Nukem* and *Mortal Kombat*, the player's character in these video games are designed to be perceived as strong and invulnerable—or, if there are weaknesses, there are other mechanics built into the video game to compensate. For instance, the titular Duke Nukem is portrayed as a hyper-masculine figure, with an exaggerated musculature, and health items are available throughout the video game to compensate for a loss of health points, while in *Mortal Kombat*, the playable characters are all accomplished fighters, with "special moves" that can be used to gain a significant advantage over the player's opponent during gameplay. These choices in video game design place the player in a body that is weak enough to be entertainingly challenged, but as a whole, strong enough to ultimately triumph over the challenges posed during gameplay.

However, by framing the body as "not quite ever only our own" the interactions between the player/the player's characters/others within the video game world can be further reframed away from simple acts of violence from one party to another, rendering the position and relationship between the player/the player's character/the other in video games as more receptive of more complex and affective experiences.

In *The Ethics of Vulnerability*, Gilson criticizes Butler's notion of vulnerability for, among other things, neglecting to discuss its relationship to "invulnerability" (76). Gilson describes the "denial of vulnerability" as driven by the desire to maintain an "arrogantly self-sufficient, independent, invulnerable master subject" (76). "Invulnerability", according to Gilson, is a "central feature" of this manifestation of subjectivity since it "solidifies a sense of control", albeit an "illu[sory]" one (76). This definition of invulnerability, when juxtaposed

against Butler's conceptualization of vulnerability, provides a framework to view how similar video game mechanics and narratives are used in the *Silent Hill* video games to provoke the player to interrogate how they perform violence and assert their invulnerability in other video games, and through this process, the player may come to the awareness that the desire to be invulnerable is also the futile desire to not "be affected by what might unsettle us" (Gilson 76).

In order to further illustrate the affective potential of video games, especially in rendering the player aware of their vulnerability and the vulnerability of others, this paper also adopts the definition of vulnerability expressed in Butler's essay, "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance". In "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance", Butler argues that vulnerability "is a kind of relationship that belongs to that ambiguous region in which receptivity and responsiveness are not clearly separable from one another" (25). Butler's description of vulnerability as a "relationship" located in an "ambiguous region" between/within "receptivity and responsiveness" helps develop the analytical framework for the medium of video games, as expressed by Lipkin, and complicates the relationship between the player and the video game.

Furthermore, Butler's view of vulnerability is particularly pertinent to the affective quality of video games, due to its parallels to the concept of the "magic circle" used in video game studies. The "magic circle", as defined by Eric Zimmerman, is "the relatively simple idea that when a game is being played, new meanings are generated" and these meanings combine "elements intrinsic to the game and elements outside the game". In other words, the experience of playing a video game and the affect produced by that experience do not necessarily end when the player stops physically playing the video game. By bringing together this view of video games and Butler's notion of vulnerability, this thesis explores how and in what form the suffering portrayed in the *Silent Hill* video games leaves the player with a

lingering sense of their own vulnerability and the vulnerability of others, even after completing their playthroughs of the *Silent Hill* video games.

As a whole, this thesis acknowledges that even in a video game series that portrays suffering in a non-spectacularised way, there may be the concern of equivocating the traumas portrayed in a series of video games with those in real life, as being of equal weight and significance. This thesis does not claim that the suffering contained in video games and in reality hold equal weight. Instead, as Marianne Hirsch would argue, the video game, like other “aesthetic works [...] can serve as theoretical objects enabling us to reflect on the vulnerability they elicit within us” (82). Rather than viewing video games as a kind of empathy creating machine, this thesis posits that the medium of video games and the myriad ways meanings are created within video games and through the player’s interaction with video games, the medium offers the possibility for the player to gain a greater “ability to respond”, which “work[s] against an appropriative empathy” and which does not “homogeni[se] suffering” (Hirsch 84).

The following chapter begins the examination of the *Silent Hill* video games, by firstly shifting the discussion of violence in video games to how these four video games portray suffering. This chapter focuses on how the *Silent Hill* video games frame the world of Silent Hill and the player’s position within it, as guided by Lipkin’s conceptualization of the relationship between the player and the medium of video games.

Chapter Three deals firstly with the notion of the invulnerable, as per Gilson’s definition of the term, by using *The House of the Dead: Overkill* as a point of contrast to the vulnerable bodies and world portrayed in the *Silent Hill* video games. Chapter Three then goes onto explore the suffering portrayed on the bodies of the player/the player’s in-game self/others in the four video games and how this persistent condition of vulnerability render

the player more conscious of the vulnerability of their selves/others/selves in relation to others, as viewed through the lens of Cavarero and Butler.

Chapter Four builds on the discussion of vulnerability from the previous chapter and considers how the absence of a definitive resolution to suffering within the *Silent Hill* video games, through the use of multiple endings and the possibility of repeated playthroughs, echoes the experience of trauma as described by Caruth.

Chapter Five then examines the consequences of the accumulation of this affect and how certain video game elements further draw the player into the affective experience of playing a video game, as posited through the larger framework of Lipkin and Butler, by examining both video game mechanics and the language used in player descriptions of their experiences with the *Silent Hill* video games.

2) Fear/Blood/Flesh: Regarding Isolation and Suffering in the *Silent Hill* Video Games

In order to reframe the conversation surrounding violence in video games, it is necessary not only to shift the terms from violence to suffering, but also to re-examine the ways in which the medium of video games are framed and how they frame the fictional worlds they create. The analytical model offered by Bushman and Anderson is limiting in its definition and categorization of violent video games and the study simplifies the relationship between the player and the video game, where the player passively receives and is influenced by the negative elements in video games. In contrast, Lipkin portrays the medium of video games as “directly participatory” (36), where “affect is produced immediately through the diegetic connection between player and avatar” (37). Lipkin’s view of video games provides a more flexible framework to view how *Silent Hill*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Silent Hill 3*, and *Silent Hill 4* draw the player into the video game world and how the player receives/reacts to the world is built into both the video game design and the subtleties of the player’s response to the medium.

Lipkin’s framework is useful even in examining more spectacle based video games. In his essay “Die Hard/Try Harder”, Geoff King characterises the general “aesthetic of games” as being “in favour of the production of [...] sensation and spectacle” at the expense of “narrative dynamics” (King 50). King examines primarily action video games which are adapted from films like *Die Hard*, and suggests that while both mediums place an importance on spectacle, the experience of playing a spectacle-filled video game can be very different to watching a similarly action-packed film (52). For instance, as opposed to the experience of watching *Die Hard*, the experience of playing through a *Die Hard* game involves “a great deal of nervous anxiety amid the finger-twitching” (52). The bodily reaction of the player, as described by King demonstrates the affective relationship even between a violent video game and the player is more ambiguous and there is space to examine instead the representation of

suffering in video games and their affective relationship to the player. The example that King provides here is more of a reaction towards wanting to overcome the challenges that a video game adaptation of *Die Hard* would pose to the player. However, in the *Silent Hill* video games, these visceral reactions are developed throughout the video games to expand on the sense of suffering in a video game as more than mere challenges to overcome or spectacles to revel in.

Silent Hill, the first game in the franchise, was developed by Team Silent and published by Konami in 1999 for the Playstation. In Francesca Reyes' review of *Silent Hill* during its initial release, Reyes' commends the video game for being "an adventure masterfully crafted by the use of sound, sight and even touch", adding that the experience of playing *Silent Hill* is akin to "one strange trip into nightmares". Other reviewers echo Reyes' assessment of *Silent Hill*. From the website Absolute Playstation International, the reviewer Tom writes that *Silent Hill* "creates the perfect blend of fear and tension that will undoubtedly send chills up your spine and give you the 'willies'". Joe Fielder concurs with the likes of Reyes and Tom, remarking that "*Silent Hill* establishes a very unsettling atmosphere that at once puts you off and creeps you out". What is interesting about these reviews of *Silent Hill* is the strong focus in the visceral experience of horror within the video game and in the experience of playing *Silent Hill* itself. Reyes' emphasis on the way that *Silent Hill* incorporates different sensory details to create a nightmarish world, Tom's focus on "chills" and getting the "willies" while playing the game, and the unsettling sensation that Fielder points out, demonstrates an entirely different anxiety evoking experience in video games like *Silent Hill*, which present visual suffering as less of a spectacle, and more of a bodily, visceral, intrusive and isolating experience.

In comparison to the action-heavy, fast-paced environment of the *Die Hard* video game, the world of *Silent Hill* that these four video games take place in is one where the

player spends most of their time isolated and alone, and where actual violent encounters are interspersed between long periods of world exploration. The amount of time that the player spends isolated provides the space for the player to dwell on any instance of suffering that they encounter, and makes it clear that the player's position within the world is ambiguous, even if the video game camera is often fixed in a third person perspective, behind the player's in-game avatar. Consequently, the isolation of the player and the portrayal of violence and suffering in the *Silent Hill* video games could be seen as a refusal of the video games to let violence become common in order to preserve the visceral experience of suffering. For instance, *Silent Hill* begins setting up the world that it inhabits by presenting the player with an unattributed quotation, positioned in the middle of a black screen, immediately drawing the player's attention to it. The quotation reads: "The fear of blood tends to create fear for the flesh." This quotation serves as the player's first interaction with the world of *Silent Hill* and establishes a link between *Silent Hill* and element of intrusion and invasion, through its implied threat of bodily harm. Furthermore, the linguistic imbalance between "fear of blood" and "fear for the flesh" creates an unsettling atmosphere about the video game world and unsettles the player as well. This sense of disquiet pervades the rest of *Silent Hill's* video game world, and like the quotations that welcomes players into its world, the game design of *Silent Hill*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Silent Hill 3*, and *Silent Hill 4* construct a deeply isolating world where the horror and violence lurking in its depths is prevented from becoming simply a spectacle.

In fact, these four video games all begin by presenting the protagonist as isolated, both physically and psychologically, which, in turn, also isolate the player, as the protagonists of these games are the means through which the player explores the world of *Silent Hill*. The playable character/protagonist of *Silent Hill* is Harry Mason, who journeys into the largely abandoned town of Silent Hill in search of his daughter, Cheryl. In his quest

to find Cheryl, Harry discovers a cult attempting the resurrection of an ancient deity in the town, and Cheryl's inextricable connection to the cult. *Silent Hill* first introduces Harry through an opening montage of domestic scenes, which are intercut with scenes from later on in the video game. In an early section of the montage, Harry is seen with his wife picking up an abandoned infant, who is presumed to be Cheryl. This scene takes place in an external setting, is brightly lit and in soft focus, emphasising the warmth and joy of the moment.

However, the seemingly normal and domestic atmosphere around this scene quickly changes, when Harry and Cheryl, once again appear together, but Harry's wife is notably absent, suggesting the wife's death or estrangement. The loss of Harry's wife is suggested through the change in setting as well, as Harry is seen at the wheel of a car, with Cheryl in the passenger seat next to him. Harry wears a troubled expression as he drives the car down a long, lonely road at night, with the interior of the car itself dimly lit. The use of the opening montage in *Silent Hill* is thus used as to begin the process of embedding the player into the perspective of the character of Harry Mason. Thus, the compression of physical space around Harry increases the sense of both physical and psychological isolation surrounding Harry and the player, as the player is now positioned through this opening montage in Harry's perspective and their playthrough of *Silent Hill* will be coloured by this deeply isolated perspective.

The association and connection between Harry and the player is heightened when the player is given control after Harry crashes his car at the end of the montage, and subsequently wakes up alone in the car, with Cheryl nowhere in sight. The player and Harry is immediately drawn into this unsettling situation and the player, with as much information about the situation as Harry, at this point has to take control of their character and begin the exploration of Silent Hill.

A thick, persistent fog encircles Harry's crashed vehicle, further unsettling both Harry and the player. Harry's trek into the town of Silent Hill begins here, but is not shown. Instead, Harry's walk into the town is suggested by way of loading screen, which depicts Harry wandering into complete darkness. The compression of time and location via the in-game loading screen further emphasises the way that the world of *Silent Hill* may engulf both Harry and the player with a sense of oppressive isolation.

Silent Hill 2, which was published in 2001, follows James Sunderland as he visits Silent Hill, after receiving a letter from his wife inviting James to the town. However, Mary could not have possibly written the letter, having passed away three years prior to the start of the game. Despite the logical contradiction that this presents, James nonetheless is drawn further into the town and continues to explore it. In contrast to Harry, James willingness to explore Silent Hill already suggests an unsettled psychological state. *Silent Hill 2* broadly builds on the disquieting and isolating experience of *Silent Hill* not only in terms of its characters, but by appearing to address the player directly the moment *Silent Hill 2* begins. The opening montage of *Silent Hill 2* begins with Maria, who may or may not be a reincarnation of Mary, speaking directly to the camera/an unseen individual. She lists off a series of details about James and Mary's relationship, which Maria should not be aware of, prompting James (the person she is speaking to) to question: "Aren't you Maria?" The uncertainty of this exchange points towards the unstable foundations on which the world of *Silent Hill* is built.

Unlike the first video game, *Silent Hill 2* further compresses the space that its protagonist inhabits, in order to further isolate both James and the player. The opening montage in *Silent Hill 2* is presented as if it were a cut-scene, which would typically allow players to take control of James afterwards. However, after the brief exchange between Maria and James, the opening montage takes place instead. Furthermore, throughout the tense, one-

sided conversation between Maria and James, which the player views from James' perspective, a set of prison bars separates Maria and James. Due to the perspective of the scene and the dimensions of the room where this conversation takes place, it is unclear whether it is Maria or James (and the player) who is behind bars, suggesting not only physical and psychological entrapment, but the instability of James himself, and/or the world he currently occupies, as represented by the ambiguity of Maria's existence. After the montage that follows James and Maria's conversation, the player is presented with a dimly lit scene of James staring at his own reflection in the mirror of public restroom. What little light is present in the restroom casts James' reflection in the mirror almost entirely in shadow, and gives a ghostly pallor to his skin. As James continues to examine his reflection in the mirror, the perspective of the video game camera changes from this close up of James to a medium shot of James. The game camera presents James in full, except the camera appears heavily tilted and to be capturing this image of James from a very low angle, which not only distorts the physical space of the restroom, but further hints at the unusualness of James' actions and at his internal instability.

Silent Hill 3 and *Silent Hill 4* continue to emphasise the isolation of their protagonists both externally and internally, by introducing their protagonists, Cheryl and Henry, respectively, alone, without the suggestion of any kind of familial or romantic ties, unlike Harry and James. *Silent Hill 3*, which was released in 2003, is intended as a direct sequel to *Silent Hill*. The protagonist and playable character of *Silent Hill 3* is Heather Mason, who Harry adopts at the end of *Silent Hill*. The cult from the first video game is once again active, and murders Harry. After discovering Harry's body, Heather travels to the town of Silent Hill in order to take revenge on the cult responsible for her father's death.

Heather's complex relationship to Harry and the cult that operates from Silent Hill is gradually revealed throughout the video game. However, in Heather's first appearance, she is

seen seated in a diner by herself and looking morose. The diner itself appears deserted and dingy, and while Heather is seated next to the windows of the diner, the blinds are drawn, only allowing small slivers of light through. In contrast to this scene, an up-tempo song, titled “You’re Not Here”, begins to accompany the montage of video game scenes that follows. The quick pace of the song and the style of vocals chosen for the song not only serve to highlight Heather’s loneliness from the beginning of the game but also obscures the nature of the song’s lyrics, which laments the painful loss of someone close to the song’s narrator. The up-beat tempo of “You’re Not Here” gradually transitions into distorted carnival music at the end of this introduction to the video game. Unlike the first two video games, *Silent Hill 3* has a monster appear before Heather and the player actually venture into the video game world, acting as a reminder of what exactly the player is isolated with. After the player is given a glimpse of the monster and the environment that they will soon be exploring, Heather is shown walking into Lakeside Amusement Park. The amusement park that Heather finds herself in is in a state of disuse, with the bloodied heads of (potentially decapitated) amusement park mascots littering the ground around her. Heather and the player wander into this space unaware of how they have arrived there, unlike Harry and James. Heather also finds herself inexplicably equipped with a knife. By initially obscuring the context under which Heather and the player find themselves in a disused amusement park, and inexplicably armed, *Silent Hill 3* displaces the player even more fully than the two previous video games. The absence of context, the inexplicable situation that Heather finds herself in, and the hint of violence in the opening scenes of *Silent Hill 3* serve to both draw the player deeper into the video game world, but also continue the work of displacing and isolating the video game’s protagonist and player further.

In a similar way to *Silent Hill 2*, *Silent Hill 4* once again moves away from the story of the Masons and focuses on an unrelated protagonist named Henry Townshend. In fact,

Silent Hill 4 takes place in an apartment building, located in a town close to Silent Hill.

However, the supernatural influences of Silent Hill have spread beyond the confines of the town, and consequently, Henry finds himself trapped in his apartment. Other supernatural occurrences begin to take place in Henry's apartment, and Henry attempts to find the source of these happenings and escape his apartment.

In comparison to the first three video games of the *Silent Hill* franchise, *Silent Hill 4*, interestingly enough, does not immediately introduce its protagonist, Henry, to the player. Instead, the opening montage of the video game starts with a series of external shots of normal-looking apartment buildings with cars driving past them. The atmosphere of normalcy that these images create is immediately undermined by the internal shots of empty, dilapidated buildings, with occult symbols painted all over their walls, that follows after. Unlike the first three video games, which pair a generally more up-beat piece of music to the dark content of their opening montages, *Silent Hill 4* instead matches both the content and music of its opening. The song, "Room of Angel", is sombre in tone and its low, repeated beats are reminiscent of heart beats. "Room of Angel" suddenly cuts away during the montage, and is followed by a series of distorted vocalisations that sound half-human/animal, screams, and the squelch of flesh. The absence of contrast in the opening montage of *Silent Hill 4* suggests that the world of *Silent Hill* itself actively isolates, unsettles, and destabilises anyone who inhabits it, both physically and psychologically. This is emphasised by a quick shot of Henry, who is first shown standing behind the door of his apartment, which is covered in an absurd amount of locks and bolts. Henry's position behind this heavily locked door brings into question Henry and the player's psychological and emotional stability as the locks and bolts on the door suggest that Henry/the player may have been trapped in the apartment with good reason.

Silent Hill 4 also differentiates itself from the previous three video games by having the player begin the video game from a first person perspective. The player inhabits Henry's point of view, as Henry awakes to a version of his bedroom that looks infected by a dark red-brown mould, dirt, and decay. The player continues to control Henry from a first person point of view as Henry leaves his bedroom and explores the rest of his apartment which is covered with the same form of decay. White noise also fills the apartment, distorting the space even aurally. *Silent Hill 4* thus isolates Henry and the player not only physically, but by locking the player at the start in Henry's "mind"/perspective, the video game also imposes any possible psychological instability that Henry may have onto the player.

In his retrospective on video games in 1997, Mark J. P. Wolf writes that due to the interactivity of video games, the player often controls "which spaces appear on-screen or off" (12). As a result, unlike the off-screen space that exists in other mediums, Wolf argues that the "off-screen space [in a video game] can often be investigated or explored" even "constitu[ting] a large part of game play itself" (12). Wolf's conceptualisation of video game space is particularly interesting, especially in framing the extensive use of off-screen space in *Silent Hill*, which was published two years after Wolf's essay. After locating the player in the role of a deeply unsettled protagonist with an uncomfortable relation to the world around them, *Silent Hill*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Silent Hill 3*, and *Silent Hill 4* go on to construct a large, seemingly empty video game world, where monstrous creatures seem to lurk at its edges. The oppressive, isolating atmosphere of the *Silent Hill* video games, and the often implied, rather than explicit, scenes of suffering and violence create a space where suffering and violence can be interpreted in a more ambiguous way.

Wolf suggests that the player is, for the most part, in control of the video game world, allowing them the freedom to explore both on- and off-screen space. However, the four *Silent Hill* video games arguably subvert Wolf's expectation of the way a video game typically

functions. During gameplay, these four video games usually situate the player in a third person perspective, located at a short distance from the character that they are currently in control of. The player also has some ability to adjust the angle of the video game camera. Instead of providing greater clarity to the player about the kind of world the player is inhabiting, the four *Silent Hill* video games obscure both on- and off-screen space in order to convey the large scale of the video game world and to hint at the horrors located within the video game world. The fog that surrounds the town of Silent Hill, which is a consistent element of video game design across the four video games, emphasises this.

In *Silent Hill* and *Silent Hill 2*, the fog that surround the town and its outskirts appear immense in scale, especially since both video games feature more external environments. In *Silent Hill*, the fog first appears encircling Harry's crashed vehicle. The thick fog appears to flow around the vehicle like a liquid, which prevents both Harry and the player from grasping their relative on-screen location as the rest of the video game world is both off-screen and almost completely obscured. The movements and nature of the fog is made more prominent in *Silent Hill 2*. Unlike Harry, whose trek into Silent Hill is not shown, James and the player are made to walk to the town from the public restroom, where *Silent Hill 2* begins. As James walks down a dirt path, with trees on either side, the fog that appears in front of James and the player completely restricts James' vision and the ability of the player to get a sense of what lies ahead of James. Furthermore, the fog in *Silent Hill 2* is rendered in such a way that it has a sense of thickness to it, and is not only present in front of James, but also appears to move past James, as he walks into the fog, and reforms behind him, which places James and the player in a constant state of uncertainty. By limiting both the protagonist and the player's ability to physically locate themselves in relation to the rest of the video game world, *Silent Hill* and *Silent Hill 2* makes the world it creates ambiguous, both by obscuring the violence

hidden in the video game world and by preventing the protagonist and the player to construct a means to easily interpret the world of *Silent Hill*.

As *Silent Hill 3* and *Silent Hill 4* take place in more enclosed environments, the fog that surrounds the town of Silent Hill is not given as much prominence. In *Silent Hill 3*, for instance, the fog that appears is much wispier, and looks as if it is descending on Heather and her environment from above. The fog in *Silent Hill 4* is just as thin as it is in *Silent Hill 3* and appears to circle above some of the locations that Henry explores. The nature of the fog in *Silent Hill 3* and *Silent Hill 4* that appears to descend upon Heather and Henry further highlights the oppressive and all-encompassing nature of the video game world. The fog in these two video games demonstrates that despite taking place in smaller environments, Heather, Henry, and the player are constantly being encircled by a larger, ambiguous and even threatening world that escapes their immediate comprehension.

The world of *Silent Hill* itself can be broadly divided into two: the “normal” world and the Otherworld. However, the division between these two worlds becomes progressively unclear within each video game and across each video game as well. In *Silent Hill*, the creation of these two worlds stems from the machinations of the cult that occupies the town. The difference between these two worlds is rendered in the video game by a contrasting colour palette of greys and dark reds. The sections of Silent Hill, which still tentatively occupy the “normal world”, are rendered primarily in a dull grey, with dark red bloodstains appearing on streets and buildings. The contrast between the dull grey architecture of the town and the bloodstains serves as a constant reminder of the violence that has taken place in the town, which is further emphasised by the absence of people who previously populated the town. As Harry continues to explore Silent Hill, Harry soon comes across a large crater that was once a section of the town. The existence of this crater further prevents the player from gaining a sense of physical certainty, as it is not possible for Harry and the player to see

beyond or look downwards into this space that used to be Silent Hill. Since this off-screen space can neither be “explored” or “investigated” (Wolf 12), the player is left with not only a building sense of disquiet but with a strong reminder of the violence hidden in the town of Silent Hill.

The suggestion of violence and suffering in *Silent Hill* further manifests itself in the design of the Otherworld. One such place that has become part of the Otherworld is Alchemilla General Hospital. In contrast to the dull grey buildings that comprise the external environment of Silent Hill, the internal space of the hospital is cast in dark reds and dark browns. The location of a hospital already presents to Harry and the player a place where bodily invasion occurs, and the colour scheme of its interior brings out the horror of the setting through associations with decay, infection, blood, flesh, and bruises. Furthermore, the interior environments of the buildings in Silent Hill are reminiscent of open wounds, as the colour scheme and organic-looking infection of the Otherworld is combined with metal and other inorganic protrusions from the original buildings, suggesting wounds that are constantly opened and reopened. The Otherworld transformation of the interiors spaces of the town not only suggests that suffering is constantly present in the town, but the otherworldly nature of the transformation of these spaces and the strange hybridity between organic and inorganic makes it difficult for Harry and the player to comprehend the violence and suffering that is currently taking place in the world of *Silent Hill*.

Silent Hill 2 further develops the particular aesthetic of violence and suffering established by *Silent Hill*. In *Silent Hill 2*, the division between the normal world and the Otherworld is much less clear, reflecting the overall more ambiguous atmosphere in the video game and its resistance to explaining the origins of the supernatural occurrences in the town, unlike *Silent Hill*. The colour palette of the video game world as a whole in *Silent Hill 2* is much more varied, which lessens the division between the abandoned, but normal-looking

buildings and the supernatural presence affecting the town. For instance, the first location within the town of Silent Hill that James and the player encounters is the Toluca Graveyard. The graveyard, like most of the town, is surrounded in a heavy fog. There are trees of varying heights and shades of dark green surrounding the graveyard. The few tombstones in the graveyard seem to be made of stone, in differing shades of grey, and appear infested with sickly green moss or vegetation of some kind. A small mausoleum looms in the background of the graveyard, with its windows shuttered, and is similarly overgrown. The grounds of the graveyard are dark green and heavily speckled with white spots, suggesting either the growth of mushrooms or a spread of white flowers. The varied but muted colour palette present in the graveyard not only contributes to the oppressive atmosphere of *Silent Hill 2*, but the ambiguous objects represented by the shades of dark green and white in the scene are reminiscent of the spreading infection of the Otherworld from *Silent Hill*. The different use of colour here could suggest a subtler supernatural invasion of Silent Hill, leading to an even greater difficulty in comprehending the suffering present in the video game world.

Furthermore, there is a greater sense that the presently abandoned town in *Silent Hill 2* was previously populated, in comparison to *Silent Hill*. For instance, as James explores Woodside Apartments, James and the player can discover various rooms that are well furnished, albeit in a peculiar style. Room 202, which is located on the second floor of the building, contains a large bed, with the covers and pillow stained brown. A red-tinted fluorescent lamp looms over the bed. A few metal cages are stacked on top of each other on the left side of the bed. An oozing hole in the wall is located on the right side of the bed. Several framed and pinned butterflies and moths surround the head of the bed, while a few bodies of butterflies are found on the edge of the bed. The space of the room is thick with fluttering moths. The mix of familiar, normal furnishings and unsettling, bizarre detail in these interior environments heightens the invasive nature of the video game world. In

comparison to *Silent Hill*, there is a greater preoccupation with grime, dirt, and disuse in *Silent Hill 2*. The grungy details of *Silent Hill 2* are arguably reminiscent of the mix of the organic and the inorganic in the physical space of *Silent Hill*. However, in *Silent Hill 2*, the uncertain nature of the source of this filth and its continuous presence serves as a constant reminder of James and the player's lonely place in a deeply horrific, threatening world.

While *Silent Hill* and *Silent Hill 2* construct a vast, terrifying world for the player and the characters that they are playing to inhabit, *Silent Hill 3* and *Silent Hill 4* are smaller in scope, compressing and heightening the unsettling atmosphere into smaller interior environments. *Silent Hill 3* incorporates locations that are typically a source of familiarity and comfort to a stereotypical teenager. As such, the video game leads Heather and the player through places like Central Square Shopping Centre, Lakeside Amusement Park, and Hazel Street Station for a significant portion of the video game. However, these locations are made to be unfamiliar by the influence of the Otherworld and Heather's possibly subjective and unreliable perspective through which the player perceives these environments. In fact, as Heather walks into Lakeside Amusement Park, she wonders if she is dreaming. The aesthetic of these environments in *Silent Hill 3* is for the most part, unchanged from the previous two video games. The entrance to the amusement park appears gloomy, with some damage running down its now-dulled brick red walls. The signage of the amusement park looms over the entrance, with "Lakeside Amusement Park" rendered in a garish yellow. A cartoon depiction of a clown accompanies the sign. The eyes of the clown are painted white, or lit from behind, giving the cartoon clown an eerie, unflinching gaze. A few of the amusement park's mascots can be seen lying near the other side of the park's entrance. Each of these pink-furred rabbit suits are splattered with blood and appear motionless, suggesting the consequences of an attack on the amusement park. Instead of brightly lit attractions, *Silent Hill 3* instead emphasises the industrial appearance of the amusement park. As Heather

explores the park, her steps clang loudly off the rusty (or bloody) metal grates below. The unpleasant atmosphere that the amusement park exudes is emphasised when Heather explores the park's roller coaster tracks. The large metallic structure of the roller coaster looms all around Heather, and Heather's exploration of the amusement park ends when she is struck by a roller coaster and this section of the video game is revealed to be a dream. The false security and the temporary normalcy that *Silent Hill 3* grants both Heather and the player is undermined by the fact that Lakeside Amusement Park is a location that Harry also explores in *Silent Hill*. The existence of the amusement park as a location in *Silent Hill* further makes ambiguous the world of *Silent Hill*, by suggesting that the world itself exists in the space between conscious and unconscious.

Moreover, the sense of security that *Silent Hill 3* temporarily grants Heather and the player does not last long. After her adventure at Lakeside Amusement Park, Heather finds herself in Central Square Shopping Mall, which initially appears normal. However, like the rooms in *Silent Hill 2*, the apparent normalcy of the mall space is made uncomfortable and unfamiliar, even before it takes on its Otherworld appearance. Most of the shops in the mall appear closed and there are few, if any, shoppers about. The mall has a general geometric shape and is coloured in muted brown and blue marble, giving the place an air of sterility. As the mall becomes influenced by the Otherworld, the mall becomes increasingly unfamiliar and bizarre. For instance, the mall becomes populated with hospital gurneys, rooms resembling torture chambers begin to appear, and certain escalators appear to lead to nowhere. The strangeness of this space is compounded by its connection to Heather's mysterious past and her connection to the cult, which operates from *Silent Hill*. As with *Silent Hill* and *Silent Hill 2*, the space of the shopping mall continues to provide images of suffering and pain to the player, but still abstains from giving the player enough of a framework to truly comprehend what is happening in the video game world.

Silent Hill 4 goes on to further invade the protagonist's personal environment, by beginning the video game in Henry's apartment, which already occupies a space between the normal world and the Otherworld. The infection of the Otherworld even extends into Henry's bedroom, which increases the claustrophobic atmosphere of the video game world. Henry's first words upon waking up in the room (and his first words in the video game) are to question the circumstances of his bedroom's transformation. His bedroom appears considerably aged, with fire damage in parts. The windows of his room are boarded up, highlighting Henry's isolation and entrapment in his apartment. When Henry leaves his bedroom and enters his living room, Henry remarks how the "air is so heavy", which is emphasised by the sudden, overwhelming white noise that fills the space as well. Henry's front door is fused to the wall, which appears fleshy and sickly. Soon, black sludge starts leaking from the walls of Henry's apartment, and the twisted face on the wall of Henry's apartment turns into a sludge covered monster which attacks him. Much like in *Silent Hill 3*, Henry and the player are granted a brief moment of security, as Henry wakes from his dream to find himself unharmed and with his bedroom looking as normal as possible. However, as Henry's dream environment is mapped on to his "actual" environment, Henry's world is even further destabilised. Furthermore, this sense of security is quickly subverted as Henry first attempts to dial someone for help on his telephone, only to find the cord disconnected. However, a call soon comes in, despite the telephone being disconnected. As Henry leaves his bedroom again, ostensibly awake this time around, Henry soon finds himself standing in front of the stark image his front door heavily covered in chains and bolts. This image of Henry's front door emphasises the general sense of claustrophobia, isolation and entrapment that the protagonist and the player experiences. The abundance of chains, locks, and bolts also suggests that something, or perhaps, someone needs to be kept within the environment of the apartment. As Henry's character betrays more loneliness than violence thus far, the

enclosed space of Henry's apartment creates an ambiguous space, especially as the player attempts to read the potential violence that the door suggests.

Over the course of these four video games, the world of *Silent Hill* appears to be one that is significantly different in comparison to a *Die Hard* video game. The world of *Silent Hill* appears to generally eschew the spectacle of suffering and violence. Instead, most of the violence and suffering appears to be largely implied than portrayed. By creating an isolating external and interior environment around the protagonist, these video games encourage the player to view the world of *Silent Hill* in a more ambiguous way, especially in its representation of suffering. Furthermore, through the emphasis on creating an unknown, unusual space by restricting the appearance of violence, it would be possible for the player to now view any violence and suffering that occurs in the world of *Silent Hill* more in terms of its affective quality on the player as opposed to making a constant moral judgement or celebrating the suffering represented in these video games.

3) Mutilated Bodies in a Mutilated World: Representations of Bodily Suffering and Vulnerability in the *Silent Hill* Video Games

As the player continues their exploration of the world of *Silent Hill*, their isolation within this world and their vulnerability to potential suffering is further compounded by the human player's encounters with primarily non-human/monstrous characters that populate the world of *Silent Hill*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Silent Hill 3*, and *Silent Hill 4*. Throughout these four video games, the player encounter bodies (of their selves, their in-game selves, the bodies of others) that are "expose" and are "expos[ed]" to "gaze of others", "to touch", and "to violence" by their identification with their isolated player characters and the design and behavior of othered beings in the *Silent Hill* video games (Butler 26). Unlike other video games, the isolated position of the player, the design and the models of behavior present in non-human characters in these four video games leave both parties in a condition of shared suffering and exposes the player and the other's mutual vulnerability. Moreover, this experience is heightened in light of the notion of "horrorism", since suffering perpetuated in these four video games, in a sense, "exceeds death itself", by virtue of being set in a virtual world where encounters can repeat, and destroyed bodies (both of the player's self and othered beings) can regenerate.

However, before examining how the world of *Silent Hill* portrays suffering and vulnerable bodies, it is necessary to understand how video games generally depict monstrous and non-monstrous bodies. A common feature of game design is to portray the player's character as strong and powerful, to some degree. As per Gilson's definition of invulnerability, invulnerability implies a "sense of control" (albeit a false one), and the drive toward this state is to be a "self-sufficient, independent, invulnerable master subject", so that "we cannot be affected by what might unsettle us" (76). This "denial of vulnerability" is present even within the genre of horror video games, especially more action-heavy ones

(Gilson 76). Such video games continue to position the player as an invulnerable figure, capable of overcoming a hostile, horror-filled world, which leaves little room for the contemplation of what their violent actions mean within the context of the video game world.

One such example is the 2009 video game *The House of the Dead: Overkill*. This video game firmly locates its players within a setting where players are presented with a hostile world that they must overcome through violent means. *The House of the Dead: Overkill* begins bombastically: the very first cutscene that the player sees is an in-media-res confrontation between the two main characters of the video game, Agent G and Detective Washington. Detective Washington punches Agent G and the narrator emphasises the two “met as adversaries”, without much contextualisation as to why, thus framing the entire video game in terms of conflict and violence.

Presented in the style of a B-grade horror movie, the narrator of the video game goes on to announce the circumstances of Agent G and Detective Washington in *The House of the Dead: Overkill* over a montage of action scenes, further emphasising the overwhelmingly violent circumstances of Agent G and Detective Washington. Immediately after the narration ends, the player takes on the first-person perspective of either Agent G or Detective Washington. This parodic opening scene with its action scenes and its introduction of “Papa’s Palace of Terror” (complete with an organ riff) does not allow for players to question the true nature of horror and suffering that pervades the video game world, by highlighting the stylistic influence of the video game and firmly locating itself within the tradition of the B-grade horror movie.

Furthermore, the characterisation of Agent G and Detective Washington and the quick shift into the first-person perspective immediately immerses the player into a hostile world where aggression against the oncoming monsters is the only way forward in this video game

world. The immediate appearance of enemies and the easy accessibility of ammunition and weapons forces the player to take a combative approach towards the world of *The House of the Dead: Overkill*, which is compounded by the fact that the video game is a “rail shooter”, where players have little interaction with the video game world, except for a pre-programmed path, littered by monsters that are meant for players to simply destroy.

In “Monsters by the Numbers”, Jaroslav Svelch argues that the occurrence of “swarming” (199) as with the waves of mutants that attack Agent G and Detective Washington within the first few minutes of gameplay (and even in the opening cutscene where no gameplay has taken place yet), while “traditionally seen as monstrous” become less so in horror video games as “zombie games are all about performing crowd control” (199). The “continuous influx of identical monsters”, Svelch thus claims, portrays monstrosity, especially in the medium of video games as “conquerable” (199) and dispels “their mystery” (196). Svelch’s argument would no doubt apply to a video game like *The House of the Dead: Overkill*. The mutants that the player encounters throughout the video game are primarily humanoid in design—the player and the monsters are largely differentiated in the rendering of mutations and mutilations on the mutants—the seeming demystification and replication of monstrosity in this manner only serves to make violence and suffering a spectacle, with the act of defeating these monsters a way of constantly reinforcing the player invulnerability within the video game world.

However, Svelch’s argument applies more to the specific kind of monstrosity represented in *The House of the Dead: Overkill*—a monstrosity that is spectacularised, non-individuated, and serves as a means for the player to assert (and reassert) their strength over a vulnerable other without considering their own vulnerability. In contrast, the *Silent Hill* video games use the design of the monsters and the encounters between the (human) player and the

monstrous creatures in the video game to represent less spectacularised scenes of suffering, forcing the player to reconsider their own vulnerability to suffering.

For instance, the *Silent Hill* video games choose to delay the initial encounter between the human characters and the monsters that inhabit the world of *Silent Hill*, heightening the uncertainty and vulnerability of the player during gameplay. While in *The House of the Dead: Overkill*, Agent G and Detective Washington are immediately swarmed by “mutants” within the first few minutes of gameplay (and even in the cut-scene, where no gameplay has taken place as yet), it takes almost ten minutes of gameplay in *Silent Hill* before Harry first encounters any monsters in the video game. In fact, during Harry and the player’s initial exploration of Silent Hill, the presence of monsters in the town is only implied through the presence of bloodstains and skinned corpses littered throughout Silent Hill. After exploring the seemingly abandoned town for roughly nine minutes, Harry encounters a small pack of monsters for the first time. However, Harry is unable to fight back against these monsters, and subsequently collapses from the encounter. The screen itself fades to black, emphasising both Harry and the player’s unprepared and vulnerable response to the situation.

The delay between the first encounter between the human protagonist and the monsters that inhabit the world of *Silent Hill* is prolonged even further in *Silent Hill 2*, where James/the player only encounters a single monster after spending close to 20 minutes exploring Silent Hill. In a similar way to *Silent Hill*, the physical appearance of the monster is delayed and is instead preceded by radio static—an auditory cue to the presence of monsters in the video game. From being immersed in gameplay, the video game represents the shock and loss of control that James and the player experiences by shifting into a cutscene, where the vulnerability of James and the player is reflected in the absence of player control and James’ shocked expression. The video game camera focuses on a medium shot of James’ face, emphasising his and the player’s shock and horror at the encounter. Immediately after

this shot, the video game camera zooms out and returns to a more distant third person perspective. The player then regains control of the video game again and the opportunity to ameliorate this sense of vulnerability by taking control of James and attacking the monster with a nearby pipe. A sense of invulnerability is seemingly returned to the player when the monster collapses in three hits. However, a sense of uncertainty immediately returns to the scene, as James and the player are placed back in a cut-scene where James questions, “What the hell is it?”. James’ goes on to say “[the monster] is not human”, emphasising the monster’s otherness and reassuring himself and the player that the brutality of their actions against the creature is justified.

In comparison to *Silent Hill* and *Silent Hill 2*, *Silent Hill 3* instantly foregrounds the presence of monsters in the video game with the introduction of Valtiel in the opening minutes of the video game and suggestions of violence that have previously taken place. Furthermore, it is not long—a mere five minutes into the video game—until Heather/the player encounters monsters within gameplay. The uncertainty of the situation and the player/Heather’s vulnerability is heightened as the video game begins lacking the contextual information of *Silent Hill* and *Silent Hill 2* as the protagonist journeys into Silent Hill, further destabilising Heather and the player’s position through this lack of information. Moreover, the environment around Heather is largely cast in darkness, with a limited light source by way of Heather’s flashlight. *Silent Hill 4* likewise has Henry and the player encountering a monster much sooner than in the first two *Silent Hill* video games. However, this encounter in *Silent Hill 4* is confined to a cutscene where no gameplay takes place, taking away the player’s ability to retaliate and highlighting the vulnerability and helplessness of the player. The immediacy with which *Silent Hill 3* and *Silent Hill 4* place the player in conflict with monsters appears to evoke the video design of *The House of the Dead: Overkill*. However, *Silent Hill 3* and *Silent Hill 4* suspend the generic and video game conventions that are

present in a video game like *The House of the Dead: Overkill* and in turn, emphasise the helplessness of the protagonists and the player within the video game, by constantly undermining any sense of invulnerability that the player may acquire in the encounter with these monsters.

Unlike the “monstrous swarms” that Svelch describes as “conquerable” (199) monsters in the *Silent Hill* video games tend to be encountered individually and in small groups, and infrequently in-between long periods of gameplay as the player spends much more time exploring the video game world. In comparison to Svelch, Ewan Kirkland views the zombie as “a potentially useful metaphor in understanding the processes of game play” (230). Kirkland argues that the experience of playing video games may constitute “an experience of zombification” as “players identify the mathematical rules of the game, synchronize their actions with mechanical figures, and experience a disembodiment and reembodiment of the self” (231). While this thesis argues against the passive connotations of “zombification” in characterizing the player/video game relationship, Kirkland’s argument highlights the shared sense of othering that the player experiences when playing a video game. As the player navigates the world of *Silent Hill*, they are both in and out of control of the experience, guided on one hand by their decisions as a player and on the other by the design of the video game. Consequently, they enter their encounter with the non-human in an even more vulnerable state. Furthermore, the monstrous beings in *Silent Hill* remind the player of their precarious position within the world and the suffering that can be perpetuated on their bodies as well as the bodies of others.

The low frequency of these human-monster encounters in the *Silent Hill* video games emphasises the appearance of each monster, which look as if they are suspended in a state of suffering or represent an extension of the human characters’ suffering. Furthermore, these encounters allows for each human/non-human interaction to be more individualised,

forcing the player to carefully consider the monsters they encounter as more than a group of obstacles to overcome. Thus, the infrequent occurrence of these encounters in between the player's isolation and exploration of the world of *Silent Hill* (whether to simply orientate the player in relation to the rest of the video game world or in order to complete objectives within the video game) heightens the vulnerability that the player brings into each of their encounters with monsters in *Silent Hill*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Silent Hill 3*, and *Silent Hill 4*, which in turn constantly destabilises the presumed invulnerability of the player within the video game world.

Apart from that, the actions of the protagonist/the player during gameplay itself are framed ambiguously by the interface of the video game. In *The House of the Dead: Overkill*, for instance, the violent environment of the video game is emphasised by the player's health bar and quick accumulation of points at the top of the screen, alongside the accuracy of their shots, represented by a bullseye that registers the accuracy of their gunshots. On the lower left-hand corner of the screen, the player's unending supply of ammunition scrolls past. These details emphasise and provide an immediate record of the player's violent journey through this video game world. The player's health-bar in *The House of the Dead: Overkill* is further represented as grey squares, creating a sense of mechanisation and automation to the damage dealt to the player/damage dealt by the player.

In contrast, such details are absent during the gameplay of the *Silent Hill* video games (although *Silent Hill 4* does have a player health-bar). However, as a whole, the *Silent Hill* video games instead place all of this information – the player's remaining health, the player's available equipment/ammunition – on a separate screen during gameplay, which can be accessed by pressing the pause button on the controller. The lack of immediate access to this information deepens the player's vulnerability as they explore the world of *Silent Hill*. Moreover, being able to access information such as the player's health status does not

provide a sense of comfort in the *Silent Hill* video games as the player's health status is presented as a grainy screen-capture of the protagonist of the video game, as if from a security camera, evoking the sensation that the protagonist and the player are being watched by an unknown figure. The indication that the player has been harmed is even more ominous as a red filter (which grows darker the more the player is injured) is placed over this screen-capture, reminding the player of the hurt that they have endured, as the filter is only removed once the player chooses to heal themselves with the limited healing items in the video game.

Unlike *The House of the Dead: Overkill*, which forces players into combat by way of its design and format, the *Silent Hill* video games generally encourage a strategy of avoidance as opposed to aggression when dealing with the non-human. In order to emphasize the player's vulnerability and isolation, the protagonists of the *Silent Hill* video games are everymen—a writer, a clerk, a teenager, and a photographer, respectively—and their movements are correspondingly slower and less coordinated when under attack which questions the presumptions of power and the invulnerability of the player's position, even when the player does defeat a monster in these video games.

Despite placing an emphasis on avoiding monsters when possible, the *Silent Hill* video games do provide the player with the means to retaliate against monsters albeit in a limited capacity. The *Silent Hill* video games allows the player access to a variety of melee weapons and firearm such as pipes, knives, handguns, and shotguns. While firearms are present in *Silent Hill*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Silent Hill 3*, and *Silent Hill 4*, ammunition is limited within the video games, which leads players to depend more on melee weapons. Whether the player is playing as Harry, James, Heather, or Henry, a melee encounter between each of these characters and a monster is slow and cumbersome, highlighting not only the protagonists' nature as regular individuals but also enforcing a sense of vulnerability and

intimacy even when the act of defeating a monster should allow the player to regain a sense of control within the video game.

The prevailing sense of vulnerability that the player experiences even after defeating a monster during gameplay is due to the fact that the player has to make the conscious, repeated decision to tap a button on the controller that induces a melee attack on a monster, forcing the player to at least give more consideration to every attack that they might make, as opposed to the quick, almost automatic tapping of the fire button in a fast-paced video game like *The House of the Dead: Overkill*, where the onslaught of mutants in the video game leaves no room for the player to reconsider the conscious decisions they are making to inflict pain on other beings within the video game world.

Moreover, in the *Silent Hill* video games the player has to be in close proximity to a monster in order to deal the physical blow that will kill it. This violent intimacy between the human player/protagonist and monsters in the *Silent Hill* video games is expressed not only through the physical closeness of the encounter but through the auditory responses created when the player's melee weapon or firearm comes into contact with monstrous flesh. In these four video games, the monsters respond to the player's attack on them with pained moans that sound almost human, and which resonate through the video game environment as the player attacks the monster. The visceral nature of the player's actions is further emphasised by the squelching sounds made when a melee weapon makes contact with monstrous flesh. The auditory feedback that the player received as indication of their attacks making contact and affecting a monster in these video games forces the player to inhabit a position of vulnerability when hurting the monsters, due to the monster's human-like sounds and the shared sense of bodily vulnerability, even while the player is asserting (or attempting to assert) their invulnerability within the video game world through the attack.

The designs of the monsters in the *Silent Hill* video games further emphasises the constant instability and vulnerability of the player's position within the video game. The monsters of the *Silent Hill* video games are designed to “ghost the margins” and reflect the “[u]nnatural, transgressive, obscene, contradictory, heterogeneous, mad” (Kearney 4). As such, the monsters in the *Silent Hill* video games often reflect an element of hybridity, whether they are a combination of organic-mechanic, human-animal, amorphous-geometric and so on. The marginality and transgressive quality that Kearney uses to describe monsters is used in the *Silent Hill* video games to prevent the player from simply perceiving the monsters in the video games as simply obstacles to overcome as the hybridity of these monsters present them as creatures that appear half-formed, in the midst of being formed, or have failed to form, which remind the player of that the monstrous and human bodies in the video game are constantly exposed to suffering.

Furthermore, Kearney argues, “monsters are liminal creatures who can go where we can't go”, thus reminding humans “that we don't know who we are” (117). And in the *Silent Hill* video games, the overall design and behaviour of these monsters suggest to the player that these creatures have perhaps themselves experienced or are experiencing suffering that exists beyond human limitations and have returned irrevocably changed, reminding the player of their own proximity and potential to suffer and questions the limitations of their human presenting avatar to witness and bear suffering.

Silent Hill, for instance, introduces monsters that render animals grotesque, such as with the Creeper, and the Groaner. The Creeper has a cockroach-like appearance, with three pairs of legs. Its first set of legs are elongated, exaggerated, and end in a sharpened pair of claws. Creepers appear throughout *Silent Hill*, crawling on the floors of the environment. They are small in size in comparison to Harry, and are easily disposed of by being stomped on. The Creeper attacks the player by biting or nipping at Harry's ankles. The Groaner, on the

other hand, is dog-like in form, but is completely hairless with rotting brown skin stretched taut over its body. The limbs of the Groaner are thin and emaciated, while its skin has a reddish tinge, suggesting that it has injured something or someone or is itself perpetually injured. Groaners attack the player by lunging at the player and will attack Harry/the player on sight. The animalistic appearance of monsters such as the Creeper and the Groaner in *Silent Hill* and the way that they both attack the player at first emphasises their bestial nature seemingly creating a sense of distance between the monsters and the player in the video game in order to allow the player to more easily perceive them as a threat. However, in the instance of the Creepers, the player's comparative size and the fair amount of ease with which the player might destroy a Creeper illustrate how the player constantly moves between a sense of invulnerability and vulnerability throughout the video game.

Silent Hill also introduces humanoid monsters that *Silent Hill 2*, *Silent Hill 3*, and *Silent Hill 4* would develop further as manifestations of suffering, which reminds the player that their sense of invulnerability in this video game world is incredibly tenuous. One of the more humanoid-looking monsters that Harry encounters in *Silent Hill* are the Grey Children, which are humanoid in form, the size of children, and wield knives. The Grey Children have greyish skin, gap-like mouths, and a series of slits for eyes. Their physical appearance conveys a sense of vulnerability through the appearance of bodily injuries that likewise act for them as eyes and mouths, which is emphasised by their pale skin and stature. However, the graphical limitations of *Silent Hill* on the Playstation make it difficult to discern these details about the Grey Children and instead highlight the knives that they hold, reminding both Harry and the player of the threat of being wounded by the Grey Children as well.

Silent Hill 2 builds on the appearance of the Grey Children in *Silent Hill*, by introducing a larger variety of monsters that often appear to be previously human/animal bodies, which are at times fused with geometric and inorganic objects, to produce creatures

that appear and move as though in a constant state of suffering, which remind players of both the invulnerability and vulnerability of the human form. One of the monsters that appears in *Silent Hill 2* is the Mannequin, which comprises a headless, armless torso, on top of which is attached a pair of legs, while another pair of legs supports the Mannequin and grants the creature mobility. The pair of legs that sit on top of the Mannequin twitch and convulse like the mandibles of an insect, suggesting elements of both human and animal vulnerability. Furthermore, this top pair of legs is depicted as having no feet, reinforcing the vulnerability of the creature in the same segment of its body which is used to attack players in *Silent Hill 2*. Moreover, James/the player first encounter the Mannequin when it is posed and completely still as if it were an actual Mannequin. The various elements in the design of the Mannequin — from drawing on elements of animality, to the qualities of inanimate objects, to the distortion of a (feminised) human form — renders the monsters in *Silent Hill 2* as creatures that blend together different elements of invulnerability and vulnerability that in turn destabilise the position of the player whenever the player chooses to interact with the monsters in the *Silent Hill* video games.

Apart from the Mannequin, *Silent Hill 2* is populated with monsters that appear suspended in a state of suffering by further distorting the human form and hybridising the human form with inorganic elements. *Silent Hill 2* introduces monsters like the Lying Figure and the Flesh Lip, which combine these various design elements. The Lying Figure is humanoid in appearance, but its upper body is encased in a straitjacket made of its own flesh. Its lower body, in contrast, comprises a set of well-defined buttocks and legs, which end in a pair of bloody/rusted platform shoes. A zipper-like object runs down the length of what may be considered the “face” of the Lying Figure. Combined with its slow movements, especially the convulsing of its upper body, the Lying Figure looks like a creature struggling against the very body that the Lying Figure inhabits. One of the Lying Figure’s methods of attack is

spraying a poisonous mist at the player and when knocked down the Lying Figure skitters like an insect towards the player's legs. Both of the Lying Figure's methods of attack place both monster and player in close proximity to each other, forcing the player into a quick exchange of invulnerability and vulnerability as the player attacks and is attacked by a creature that confronts the player constantly as a symbol suffering.

In comparison to *Silent Hill 2*, there is a wider variety of monstrous creatures in *Silent Hill 3* and *Silent Hill 4*. While monsters such as the Lying Figure and the Flesh Lip in *Silent Hill 2* represent an embodied sense of suffering, the design of the monsters in *Silent Hill 3* and *Silent Hill 4* are bigger in scale in comparison to Heather and Henry, respectively. The proportions of the monsters in *Silent Hill* and *Silent Hill 2* represent a movement towards fully representing the state of suffering that the player may potentially inhabit especially when the monsters are comparable in size to the playable characters in these two video games. In *Silent Hill 3* and *Silent Hill 4*, the monsters are much larger in comparison to Heather and Henry and the design of the monsters in these two video games tend to draw from an exaggeration or an excessive representation of a vulnerable part of the human body, highlighting the increasing vulnerability of the player in the world of *Silent Hill*.

In *Silent Hill 3*, for instance, a creature called the Numb Body appears throughout the video game. The Numb Body has an upper half which is tadpole-like in shape, with a pair of thin legs which support this upper half. Its legs end in a shapeless lump of flesh. The skin of the Numb Body is pale and covered in bright red veins. The rounded head of the Numb Body, which has a single hole in it gives the Numb Body the appearance of an eyeball as well, with its legs representing optic nerves. The Numb Body is typically found in groups throughout *Silent Hill 3*. The individual vulnerability and the threat that the Numb Body poses when in a group reflects the constant exchange between strength and weakness that the player faces when inhabiting the world of *Silent Hill*. Furthermore, *Silent Hill 3* also introduces the

Pendulum, which builds on the hybridisation of the human and the inorganic from *Silent Hill* 2. The Pendulum combines segments of the human body with metallic-looking parts. The Pendulum comprises two human torsos which are placed on top of each other and joined at the hip by a circular metal device. Each of the heads of the Pendulum, which appear heavily bandaged have a blade attached to the top of them, while another pair of blades protrude from either side of the circular metallic device which connects both of its halves. The sharp edges of the Pendulum may reflect a sense of overcompensation with regards to the vulnerable human parts that embedded within the Pendulum. Both the Numb Body and the Pendulum tend to attack in groups, reflecting the increasing sense of suffering and vulnerability that accumulates from one video game to the next, especially since *Silent Hill 3* has direct connections to *Silent Hill*.

Silent Hill 4 further exaggerates the human form through such monsters as the Twin Victim. The Twin Victim wears a hooded, tattered robe which conceals most of its larger body. Underneath the hood of the Twin Victim is a pair of heads, which are twinned in features and look fairly young. Apart from its heads, the only other exposed part of its body is its pair of large, pale arms, which serve as its legs. The motif of doubling reflected in the Twin Victim's design reflects both an increased sense of potential harm and the need for the Twin Victim to be harmed twice as much. Furthermore, the Twin Victim is one of the few creatures throughout the *Silent Hill* video games that is able to vocalise and "speak". When Henry approaches the creature, the Twin Victim will point at Henry and whisper "Receiver of..." and will sob and writhe on the ground like young children when knocked down. These human qualities that the Twin Victim possesses creates a sense of accusation towards the player, complicating the player's attempts at regaining a sense of invulnerability when attacking the Twin Victim.

While *The House of the Dead: Overkill* encourages the player to progress through the video game in a confrontational, violence manner, the *Silent Hill* video games present a few more varied options when dealing with monsters. For instance, the player is encouraged to generally avoid confronting monsters, but also has the option to attack monsters (albeit in a limited capacity). Alternatively, the player may have to deal with a challenging monster through non-violent means (for instance, through puzzle-solving), while other monsters are either invincible/incidental to the video game world and do not interact with the player, although the reverse is possible. The variety of interactions between the human player/protagonist and the monstrous beings in the world of *Silent Hill* complicates the representation of suffering/violence in these interactions. With the exception of boss battles, the player does not necessarily have to perform violent actions against the monstrous others that populate the video game world in the *Silent Hill* video games.

Julia Kristeva argues that “as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live” (3). The *Silent Hill* video games may be far from “true theatre” (Kristeva 3), but by presenting these various possible interactions between the human and the monstrous, the player’s performance of violence and the complicity in perpetuating suffering in other video games is brought into question, especially the methods through which they are guided into this violent performance. In the *Silent Hill* video games, the player thus has to contend with the driving nature behind overcoming monsters and by extension, suffering, in the video games—all so the player can engage in the performance of an invulnerable self to hide from their deeply vulnerable self.

In *Silent Hill*, for instance, there are creatures that may approach Harry but will not do any damage to him. These monsters are also invincible, which precludes players from harming the creature in any way. One of these creatures is the Larval Stalker, which is the size of a small child and is almost completely opaque. The Larval Stalker is humanoid in

form and cannot be killed, only dispersed by shining a torchlight on it. The non-combative means of encountering and dealing with the Larval Stalker arguably allows players to be more focused on the form and nature of these creatures. The diminutive size and ghostly form of the Larval Stalker implies the occurrence of past (or possibly sustained) sufferings which in turn force the player to continuously confront their own invulnerability and vulnerability to suffering. Furthermore, the dispersion of the Larval Stalker via flashlight could be interpreted as an act of implication as the player's refusal to see the monsters in the world of *Silent Hill* as more than simply monsters/obstacles to avoid or overcome.

The non-combative nature of a few of the monsters that appear throughout the world of *Silent Hill* is further developed in *Silent Hill 3* which has direct connections with *Silent Hill*. The appearance of Valtiel during the opening scenes of *Silent Hill 3* and Valtiel's main role as the deity worshipped by The Order in *Silent Hill* and *Silent Hill 3* reflects the way that both the "material" and the "non-material" worlds of these four video games are populated by creatures that embody or reflect a constant state of suffering. Valtiel is considered a divine figure within the world of *Silent Hill* but its appearance is in stark contrast to conventional depictions of divine figures. Valtiel is humanoid in shape, with a featureless face covered in leathery skin. Valtiel's head twitches erratically. A narrow incision in its head appears to serve as its mouth. Valtiel wears a pair of bloodied gloves and its robes are similarly stained. The similarities between this supposedly divine figure and the other monsters that inhabit the *Silent Hill* universe indicates how a constant sense of suffering is part of the *Silent Hill* cosmology itself and within the design of the video games themselves.

In furthering the connection between *Silent Hill* and *Silent Hill 3*, *Silent Hill 3* introduces two more monsters that are not only invincible but are also non-combative, much like the Larval Stalker in *Silent Hill*. One of these monsters is the Glutton, which serves as an obstacle that hinders Heather's progress in the video game. The Glutton is a monster encased

within a circular, rusty cage. The Glutton has a pair of mouths in the middle of its body which convulse constantly. The Glutton serves as an obstacle and is defeated by non-combative means—via the collection of pieces of an in-game fairy tale named “Tu Fui, Ego Eris”, a story that centres are the Glutton itself. The use of a text, especially the reading of it, to defeat the monsters suggests that the player needs to move beyond preconceived notions of the encounter between the self and the monster.

The notion of “incidental” monsters that exist within the world of *Silent Hill* is further developed in *Silent Hill 2* and *Silent Hill 4*. *Silent Hill 2*, in fact, introduces monsters that are seemingly “unseen” in the Toluca Prison of Silent Hill. The absence and inability of players to gain a visual confirmation of the monstrosity of these creatures contributes to the all-encompassing sense of suffering in the world of *Silent Hill*, especially since the nature of the Prisoners is determined through a different sensory experience—that of sound. The only indication of the Prisoners’ monstrosity is the distortion of their voices, which appear to chant the word “ritual” in a growling, monstrous voice, highlighting similarities between the Prisoners to other monsters that appear throughout the video game and the almost human vocalisations they make when harmed.

In *Silent Hill 4*, while there is a wider variety of monsters that appear in the video game, a number of these monsters are “ghosts” of the victims of the main antagonist of the video game. These ghosts which are identifiably or previously human are also invincible or un-killable within *Silent Hill 4*. The ghosts are capable of inflicting harm on Henry, but can at best only be temporarily fended off. The loss of the ghosts’ humanity after becoming Walter Sullivan’s victims draws out the uncertain way that the world of *Silent Hill* positions the player in relation to images of suffering. They present the potential suffering and vulnerability of the player and the fact that the ghosts cannot be destroyed permanently within the video game only perpetuates the uncertainty and constant exchange between

invulnerability and vulnerability that the player experiences within these video games. Furthermore, some of these ghosts haunt the very apartment that Henry lives in, giving a sense of intimacy and proximity to the instability that the ghosts represent.

Apart from these monsters, there are other monsters that appear in the *Silent Hill* video games as seemingly incidental creatures that are not particularly relevant to the progression of the video game, which brings into question the existence of monsters, representing suffering in video games and the player's response to this kind of embodied suffering as a whole. One of these monsters is a non-combative monster that Heather finds trapped in a locker in *Silent Hill 3*. The monster appears trapped in a full-body restraint of some kind with a further layer of wire mesh preventing it from escaping. Like most monsters that appear in the *Silent Hill* franchise, its body and surroundings are stained with blood. The inexplicable appearance of the monster enhances both the inevitability and incomprehensibility of suffering that appears in the world of *Silent Hill 3*, although Heather offers one possible way of interpreting the monster's presence by describing it as looking "like a child locked up in there with no chance of escape".

On a larger scale, Eileen's disembodied head, which appears in the Otherworld version of St. Jerome's Hospital in *Silent Hill 4* further emphasises the experience of suffering that takes place in *Silent Hill*. The head takes the form of Eileen Galvin's head, except the skin of the head is scarred and the eyes are bloodshot. The eyes of this enlarged head follow Henry around the room, perhaps in an accusatory fashion at both Henry, and by extension, the player, as Henry and the player are allowed to leave the room and ignore the suffering present, which is emphasised by the pained moans that the head makes. Furthermore, even though the head is immobile and non-combative, it is possible, within the limitations of the video game, to attack the head with a stun-gun, which lights up the head's

eyes, and emphasises the performance of violence that the player is constantly engaged in whenever encountering the suffering of others in the video game.

The different modes of interaction between the player character and the monstrous, while admittedly limited, creates a more neutral space through which the player is able to reconsider their default reactions to their own position as invulnerable and their approach to doing away with othered bodies in other video games. Through interactions with the non-human, the *Silent Hill* video games provide a means through which the player is left open and vulnerable to themselves, to others, and in their relationship to others. The shared suffering of the player's self and othered selves emphasizes this shared experience of vulnerability and demonstrates alternative affects that can be produced through the interaction between the player and the medium of video games.

4) Earning Your Happy Ending: Trauma and the Narrative Structure of the *Silent Hill* Video Games

Andreas Walther, in his reflections on the relationship between *The Last of Us* and *Bioshock Infinite*, violence, and trauma concludes that such video games, while complex in their treatment of trauma are nonetheless limited, since “a game that offers traumatization as the only means of player expression” tends to eventually conclude their narrative with either “redemption or atonement”, which are narratively and artistically “limiting”. However, it could be argued that video game narratives of trauma need not face such limited directions within the medium, especially since video games have the capacity to provide multiple endings to their narratives, without canonizing one ending over another, in a reflection of the complex experience of trauma.

In *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth describes “the experience of a trauma [as] repeat[ing] itself”, through the survivor’s “unknowing acts”, and “against his very will” (2), and possessing an “unassimilated nature” (4). Within Caruth’s framework, it is possible to represent narratives of trauma and suffering that move towards/between/avert “redemption or atonement”, as is the case with the *Silent Hill* video games. Each of the *Silent Hill* video games contain multiple endings, which range from seemingly “good” to “bad”, and even contain parodic/comedic endings. The variety of endings present in the four *Silent Hill* video games prevent the narrative of each video game from reaching true conclusions, keeping these multiple threads from becoming “assimilated” into a narrative whole. Moreover, the recurrence of similar scenes and motifs in each ending and from one video games to the next arguably reflect the repetition of a trauma that continues to present and re-present itself across different endings and video games. The absence of resolution to suffering in these four video games continues to call attention to the player’s body within and without the video games and their relationship to the bodies of the characters that inhabit the world of *Silent Hill*.

Furthermore, the branching out of the endings further evokes the sense that the player and their selves within the video game need to continuously “struggle for rights over [their] bodies” (Butler 26) especially as they inhabit a fractured, unresolved narrative of suffering.

The *Silent Hill* video games build on the ambiguous atmosphere of each video game world, even as each video game approaches one of the endings of the video game by framing the atmosphere with a sense of overall uncertainty as opposed to finality. The last boss battle typically serves as a confrontation between the player and the last antagonist of the video game, acting as one final obstacle that the player needs to overcome before the protagonist/player is allowed to reaffirm their sense of invulnerability and return to the “normal” world, especially within horror narratives.

For instance, in *Resident Evil*, another horror video game, the video game ends with a boss battle between the protagonist, Chris Redfield, and the Tyrant, a mutated humanoid creature. In this final battle, Chris is seen fighting the Tyrant alongside his teammates, using a variety of firearms. The battle between Chris and the Tyrant is straightforward, as the creature is fought by slowly whittling away at its health. After the Tyrant is defeated, a helicopter arrives to pick Chris and his teammates up. As the helicopter flies away from the mansion where the video game takes place, the mansion is seen to explode all at once. The quick and total destruction of the mansion serves as a literal and figurative representation of the destruction of a space of otherness and suffering, signifying the players/protagonists’ return to the “normal” world and the resolution of the narrative of *Resident Evil*. The helicopter bearing Chris and his teammates goes on to fly into the sunset, before the silhouette of the helicopter disappears and the sunlight fills the screen. The evocation of this image further emphasises the completion of the video game’s narrative and the return of the player and the protagonist to the light/a “normal” environment, which is emphasised by the medium shot of a female teammate resting against Chris in the helicopter, reminding the

player that these characters are not only returning to the normal world but also a normative one.

In comparison to the certainty with which *Resident Evil* ends, the final battles in the *Silent Hill* video games only sustain a sense of uncertainty and serve as a prelude to the absence of a resolution to the sufferings that occur in the world of *Silent Hill*, which is emphasised by the multiple endings present in each of these video games. For instance, the final monster that Harry encounters in *Silent Hill* may change depending on the player's actions from earlier in the video game. Depending on whether the player chooses to save Michael Kaufmann from earlier in the video game, the player may either encounter the Incubus or the Incubator before the video game ends. These two monsters are hybrids, comprising the fusion of Alessa Gillespie and Cheryl Mason, Dahlia and Harry's daughters, respectively, and ultimately frame the endings(s) of *Silent Hill* with a note of combined trauma.

Similarly, in *Silent Hill 2*, the final encounter with a monster is framed ambiguously. Much like in *Silent Hill*, James and the player ultimately have to overcome the same final monster—"Mary", who at first appears as an apparition of Mary Sunderland when she was healthy and alive, before transforming into Mary's corpse which is suspended upside down in a metal frame. The depiction of the final monster in *Silent Hill 2* lends a further ambiguity to the nature of the video game's narrative and the seeming resolution of the video game. For instance, depending on the player's choices from earlier in the video game, the character that James encounters at the top floor of the Lakeview Hotel may be either Maria, who is physically similar in appearance to Mary Sunderland, although dressed in much more provocative clothes, and is more sexually forward with James, or a manifestation of the original Mary Sunderland.

In the first instance, James rejects Maria, which instigates her transformation into the monster known as “Mary”, whereas the apparition of Mary Sunderland is more accusatory, blaming James for her death before transforming into “Mary”. In comparison to *Silent Hill*, *Silent Hill 2* more firmly grounds the personal connection and the personal journey that James/the player undergoes in the video game but the ambiguous nature of the apparition and the origins of Mary/Maria and their hostile reactions towards James could reflect a rejection of both James and the player’s attempt to come to terms with the suffering that pervades the world of *Silent Hill*. That the last monster in *Silent Hill 2* again is best dealt with a ranged weapon suggests that the world of *Silent Hill* itself continues to refuse a resolution to the suffering that makes up the world of *Silent Hill*.

In contrast to the depiction of the Tyrant in *Resident Evil*, the final enemies in the *Silent Hill* video games overall appear more closely connected to the protagonists of each video game, whether through personal connections or having been part of their bodies. This intimate, visceral connection suggests that on some level, it should be easy for the protagonists to comprehend and fulfil the objective of their journeys, since they are, ultimately, dealing with an aspect of themselves. However, the constant theme of expulsion of these elements from themselves furthers the notion that there is a difficulty (and perhaps, even refusal) within the video game and the video game’s portrayal of their protagonists in taking apart and comprehending the suffering that they endure and the overall suffering that permeates the world around them. For instance, *Silent Hill 3*, which directly builds on its connection to *Silent Hill*, features a final boss that emerges from Heather’s body. In *Silent Hill*, the Incubus emerges from the back of the Incubator, evoking images of a birth, whereas the birth imagery is more explicit in *Silent Hill 3*, where the “God” that Heather faces towards the end of the video game is portrayed firstly as a fetus-like creature that has been germinating inside of Heather and feeding off Heather’s negative emotions. The birth of

“God” in *Silent Hill 3* is complicated as Heather rejects giving “God” a proper birth and instead expels it from her body by vomiting it out. The bloody, fetus-like “God” is subsequently passed on to Claudia, as she devours the fetus instead and has her body overtaken by the monster. The process of expelling “God” from Heather’s body reflects the removal of both her/the player’s literal and figurative cause of suffering, but as highlighted through Claudia, plain denial and expulsion of suffering only results in the transference and perpetuation of suffering.

The narrative further compels the suffering present in the video games as Heather goes on to confront “God”, which has developed from a small, bloody fetus to a monster easily twice Heather’s height and size. The “God” in *Silent Hill 3* is depicted as malformed—it is skeletal in places, with its pelvis and spine are exposed, while its face is cracked and mask-like. In the room where Heather confronts “God”, Claudia’s empty robe is prominently displayed, lying in the middle of the room. In terms of the narrative, *Silent Hill 3* postpones and prevents Heather’s narrative fulfilment as Claudia, the main antagonist and the cause of Heather’s conflicts throughout the video game, appears to have been overcome by “God”, preventing Heather from truly avenging her father’s death directly on Claudia.

Instead, Heather has to confront a physical manifestation of suffering in the form of a malformed “God”. The battle here continues to reflect the choice of video game design of the previous two video games, where it is best to approach the monster using a ranged weapon. After defeating “God”, Heather tiredly says, “I guess it’s time to roll credits”. The exhausted tone with which this line is delivered suggests that the line itself could be commenting on the way horror video games conventionally end. In *Silent Hill 3*, Heather does not achieve true retribution, which is emphasised when she falls on her knees in exhaustion after the battle with “God”. Furthermore, the self-reflexive line of “roll[ing] credits” points to the artificiality and ambiguous nature of the ending, as accessed through a final boss battle. The inclusion of

“guess” into the line emphasises the continuing uncertainty of the narrative/video game and reflects how when viewed together these four video games tend to avert the conventional narrative where the protagonists/the players easily find their suffering in the narrative resolved and are allowed to return to a world of normalcy.

Similarly, in *Silent Hill 4*, the Conjurer serves as the final monster for the video game and the Conjurer, like the final bosses that appear in the previous three video games, is created from the body of one of the characters of the video game. In this instance, the Conjurer is created from the body of Walter Sullivan, the antagonist of *Silent Hill 4*. The Conjurer is significantly larger than the other creatures that precede it such that only the Conjurer’s large upper half is visible. The Conjurer is covered in grey skin which resembles a funeral shroud stretched over its entire body. The rest of the creature stretches off into the space beneath the arena where the battle takes place. In comparison to *Silent Hill – Silent Hill 3*, the boss battle of *Silent Hill 4* comprises two phases. Despite the imposing appearance of the Conjurer, the creature does not harm Henry. The purpose of the Conjurer instead is for Henry/the player to stab eight spears into it, which, in turn, allows the true boss of *Silent Hill 4*, Walter’s ghost, to be harmed by the player. The helplessness of the Conjurer reflects the overarching sense of ever-present suffering in the world of *Silent Hill* and the use of Walter’s ghost, which simply resembles Walter when he was alive, re-emphasises the persistent and personal suffering that pervades the characters, the players, and the whole world of *Silent Hill*.

As a result, each of the endings that the player now gains access to is preceded by an atmosphere of ambiguity, which is only emphasised by the multiple endings present in the *Silent Hill*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Silent Hill 3*, and *Silent Hill 4*, which have five, six, three, and four endings, respectively. When the player arrives at one of the endings to these video games, gameplay often transitions into another extended cutscene, much like the beginning of the

video game. Through repeated playthroughs of the same video game, the “book-ending” (Krzywinska 211) function of these long cutscenes in video games not only heightens the lack of closure in each video game but emphasises the circularity and perpetuation of suffering in the video game and through the player’s actions of repeatedly playing through the video game. This oscillation between “states of being in control and out of control” that argues are integral to the mechanics of horror video games as the interplay of these two states subjects the player to the discomfiting experience of “being subject to a pre-determined [...] Othered force” and “the promise of player autonomy” within the gameplay elements of the video game (208).

On the first playthrough, the player will not know which of their actions during gameplay will lead to a particular ending (unless they consult an external source, such as a video game guide online). As such, the player will not be able to truly experience the entirety of the narrative immediately or have a proper resolution to the video game, which, in turn, leaves the suffering in *Silent Hill*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Silent Hill 3*, and *Silent Hill 4* unresolved and sustained across each of the video games. The endings that exist in each of these video games can broadly be categorised into those that present seemingly good or bad outcomes for the characters, with at least one comedic ending in each video game, except in *Silent Hill 4*.

In his examination of *Life after Wartime*, an interactive database, David Carlin describes the project as a “machine for generating narratives” (140), created from “fragments” which are “designed to engage our fantasies to fill in the gaps” (133). In a similar way, when examined individually and collectively, the *Silent Hill* video games generate various narratives of trauma that recur thematically and remain unresolved over the course of each video game, and across the series as whole. The purportedly “good” endings present in any of these video games are undermined by the presence of the other endings, especially through similarities in framing from one ending to the next.

There are a total of five endings in *Silent Hill*: two of which are considered good, another two present bad outcomes for the characters, and one more ending is considered the “joke” ending. In the “Good+” ending, Harry defeats the Incubus, while the Incubator gives him a baby (who will later grow up to be Heather Mason in *Silent Hill 3*). The Incubator helps Harry, Cybil, and the baby escape Silent Hill together. The Good+ ending reflects a return to a seemingly heteronormative normalcy, which is, in turn, a reflection of the initial normalcy in the opening scene with Harry and his wife in the opening scene of the video game. However, the similarity between these two shots also leaves open the possibility that the suffering that Harry experiences in *Silent Hill* may repeat, especially in light of Cybil’s absence in *Silent Hill 3* and Heather’s relationship to Silent Hill in that video game. Furthermore, the Good+ ending has the song “Tears of...” playing over it. The song has a melancholic tone, and combined with its title, suggests a sense of mourning, despite the seemingly positive imagery of the ending, which further casts Harry, Cybil, and the baby in soft focus. One of the other possible positive endings for *Silent Hill* is the “Good” ending, where the Incubator gives Harry the baby, and only Harry and the baby escape the town of Silent Hill. In this ending, as Harry leaves Silent Hill with the baby, his face bears a forlorn expression, perhaps suggesting that despite gaining a child again, he carries too much of the suffering he has experienced in Silent Hill with him.

There are two bad outcomes possible for Harry and the player in *Silent Hill*. In the “Bad+” ending, Harry defeats the Incubator, who wishes him goodbye before she disappears. The Incubator’s disappearance causes Harry to call out to Cheryl, before collapsing after realising his daughter has passed on as part of the defeated Incubator. Harry struggles to accept the death of his daughter. The Otherworld of Silent Hill begins collapsing around Harry and Cybil. Cybil slaps Harry and tell him to leave the town, but it is unclear whether both characters leave the place as the camera pans away from the characters and fades to

black. In the “Bad” ending, Harry also fights against the Incubator who thanks Harry and wishes him goodbye. However, in this ending, the events of *Silent Hill* are revealed to be Harry’s dying dream as the video game camera shows a shot of Harry, who is injured, and still seated in his car. This is the only ending that features a song sung in Spanish, which gives emphasis to the themes of the song due to the difference in language. According to the *Silent Hill Wiki*, a fan-created website for information about the *Silent Hill* video games, the song is titled “Esperandote” or “Waiting for You”, and features lyrics, which may be translated as:

I’m dreaming, yes

I just imagine

Everything is real

I wish it were.

The focus on dreams and dream-like states places this ending in contrast to the three other endings and builds on the notion that the events of the video game are not real (a notion suggested throughout the video game at points by Harry himself), and the use of a different language with the lyrics of this song gives further emphasises to the Bad ending, if the player were to acquire this ending first. The existence of multiple endings in *Silent Hill*, all of which have different outcomes for Harry and the player bring the narrative and the video game world into question, especially in terms of whether the suffering perpetuated throughout the video game through the narrative or choices in the video game design can be truly resolved, and poses the question to the player about their ability to look at suffering over and over again in light of the existence of multiple endings.

The realisation that the player has with regard to the existence of multiple endings in the *Silent Hill* video games would likely encourage the player to replay each video game in

order to acquire the best outcome or to simply view all possible endings to these four *Silent Hill* video games. This process of replaying is, in a way, similar to the “styles of imprisonment” described by Maggie Nelson in *The Art of Cruelty* (11). “[S]tyles of imprisonment” are “the sometimes simple, sometimes intricate ways in which humans imprison themselves and their others, thereby causing suffering rather than alleviating it” (11). The repetition of multiple scenes across endings, especially in *Silent Hill 2* and *Silent Hill 4*, and the act of replaying these video games reflect how the endings in these video games ultimately distort even the seemingly most positive of endings, which, in turn, heightens the player’s experience and reception of suffering via multiple playthroughs.

Later on in *The Art of Cruelty*, Nelson writes of artists and their seemingly cruel works questioning their viewers, “How will you participate in this?” (79). For the player of these video games, the playing and viewing of the multiple (in their own respect) cruel and violent endings is a sustained implication of the player who seeks closure and a respite from suffering in video games. Instead, by taking away control from the player after they have made a choice leading to a particular ending, and muddying the interpretation of even “good” endings, the *Silent Hill* video games allow the repetition of suffering in the video games to affect the player all the more.

Silent Hill and *Silent Hill 2* have the most endings out of the four video games discusses here. *Silent Hill 2* builds on the ending conventions of *Silent Hill* by giving the player a resulting six endings (four of which are “serious” endings, with two comedic ones). Unlike *Silent Hill*, however, the endings available in *Silent Hill 2* are more ambiguous in tone. One of the endings available to the player in *Silent Hill 2* is known as the Rebirth ending. The cutscene for this ending begins with a black screen and the player hears the sound of moving water before a scene of James in a rowboat fades in. James appears to be rowing the boat to Toluca Lake Island. However, the sense of movement in this scene is

unclear as the lake seems as opaque and featureless as the fog that permeates the town of Silent Hill, giving a sense of ambiguity and re-emphasising the sense of isolation and loneliness that the video game has built from the beginning. James appears to speak to himself and presumably to Mary's corpse in the boat. He says, "But without you I just can't go on." and goes onto explain that the supernatural forces in the area are able to grant the "power to defy even death", suggesting that James aims to resurrect Mary. However, the actual attempt is not seen, as the in-game camera gradually zooms out, putting distance between the player and James to the point that the player is no longer able to see James. The framing of this ending suggests that there is a sense of repetition/continuation of suffering, which is reflected in James' continued dependency on Mary and his desire to "resurrect" her. The ambiguity with which this ending leaves James gives rise to the suggestion that the tragedy of the relationship between James and Mary may repeat itself even if James is successful in resurrecting Mary.

There are several similar elements that recur over three of the endings for *Silent Hill*

2. For instance, in the Maria ending, James is shown after defeating "Mary" at Rosewater Park staring out into the water. The in-game camera once again obscures the expressions on James, and later, Maria, by staying at a distance behind or above the characters, leaving players to deduce the tone of the scene from the delivery of the lines alone. It is only when Maria asks, "What about Mary?" and James responds, "It's ok I have you" that the camera shifts to a medium shot of the two characters and emphasises James' delivery of the line. The cutscene ends as Maria and James leave the town together. However, Maria soon starts coughing, suggesting that she might meet the same end as Mary, which is further reinforced by James' that he has Maria now, which appears more like an instance of emotional transference, rather than James moving on from his guilt/feelings for Mary. As James and

Maria leave Silent Hill, the text of Mary's letter scrolls over a shot of the parking lot at the start of the video game. The text of the letter is voiced-over by Mary.

In the In Water ending as in the Leave ending, after James defeats "Mary", the boss creature, the scene moves into a cutscene where James sits by Mary's bedside, presumably in the Sunderlands' home. Mary appears sickly and corpse-like, and it becomes clear from her dialogue that this version of Mary may be an apparition. Most of this scene is cast in darkness, giving the scene a sense of placeless-ness and timelessness, and bringing into question the sequence of events that occur after James' battle with the creature known as "Mary". This is emphasised again by how the in-game camera lingers behind and above James and Mary, as is the case in the other endings. The framing of this scene leaves parts of James and Mary's motivations and characters inscrutable and the similar framing over the course of the four serious endings of *Silent Hill 2*, which is heightened by the flat/unusual delivery of lines of dialogue throughout the video game.

In the In Water ending, the scene between James and Mary ends with James carrying Mary's corpse off the bed and leaving the undefined space where they had been previously conversing. The scene cuts to black, and after a moment of silence, James intones: "Now I understand. The real reason I came to this town." James' words linger as the player has nothing but James' words apart from the black screen to focus on before the sound of a car screeching and crashing plays. The scene subsequently fades into an image of water, where the perspective of the player suggests that James and the player are under water, indicating that James has committed suicide by driving into the lake. The music that plays over this ending is "Angel's Thanatos", one of the more aggressive/boisterous-sounding pieces of music which plays in the video game, filled with harsh guitar riffs, perhaps evoking a sense of accusation towards James and the player. Like in "Maria", the music cuts out and Mary's letter accompanied by a voice-over plays again in this ending.

In the last of the non-comedic endings that the player can acquire in *Silent Hill 2*, the Leave ending, the cutscene between James and Mary plays once again, with the same framing and lighting, except that at the end of the scene, James leaves Mary's body in the room before the scene cuts to a shot of the cemetery from the beginning of the video game. The text of Mary's letter and her voice-over also plays over the scene. As the letter ends, two distant figures enter the scene. Based on their heights and appearances, the two characters appear to be James and Laura, who are seen walking through the graveyard and presumably leaving Silent Hill. When examined together, the four non-comedic endings do not truly provide a sense of resolution for the narrative that occurs in *Silent Hill 2*. All four endings reinstate a sense of distance between the player and the characters within the video game. The framing of these endings, which tend to obscure the expressions of the characters, only serves to avert the sense of a return to normalcy that would exist in more conventional horror video games.

In comparison to the ending to *Resident Evil*, which focuses on the relief and sense of resolution portrayed on their characters' faces in both medium and close-ups, the video game camera in *Silent Hill 2* obscures the characters' expressions, rendering all endings with a sense of ambiguity, and arguably no sense of an ending—even in the Leave ending, players do not actually witness James and Laura leaving the bounds of the town of Silent Hill. Furthermore, the recurring appearance of Mary's letter, which triggers the events of the video game also return at the end of three of the four non-comedic endings, reinforcing a sense of repetition and circularity especially when the endings are considered together. Apart from that, the last three lines of the letter which read, "Do what's best for you, James. / James... / You made me happy." would seem applicable to the three endings where the letter and the voice-over appear since the cause of Mary's emotional turmoil in her reading of the letter equally changes during each of the endings. Since *Silent Hill 2* is one of the video games in the franchise that does not have a direct continuation of its story, each of these endings can, in

turn, be viewed as canonical or equally non-canonical, reinforcing the continuation of and absence of resolution to the suffering with the world of *Silent Hill*.

There are fewer endings in *Silent Hill 3* and *Silent Hill 4*. There are ultimately two main non-comedic outcomes that exist in *Silent Hill 3*. In the normal ending to the video game, Heather defeats God and subsequently return to the amusement park, where she acts strangely as she approaches Douglas, before revealing that she is simply joking. The cutscene is seen mostly in medium shots and close-ups which appear to highlight the sense of supposed resolution that Heather has achieved at the end of the video game. However, even in the midst of seeming resolution, Heather further reveals that she has, in a sense, been portraying an artificial representation of herself throughout the video game, by asking Douglas to refer to her by her “real” name, Cheryl, and the revelation that Heather’s hair is not naturally blonde. The themes of deception, artificiality, and duplicity that begin with the Normal ending are further built upon when paired with the Possessed ending. The Possessed ending begins with a medium shot of a blood splatter, before changing to a shot of Heather’s hand holding a blood-stained knife. The cutscene gradually reveals a dead body on the ground before Heather, which is slowly revealed as Douglas’ body. While the video game camera in this ending stays close to Heather, it lingers behind her, obscuring Heather’s face and her expressions. The persistent ambiguity in the framing of these ending scenes, especially since by this point the player no longer has control over the actions of the characters, enforces a sense of incompleteness and loss of control as the suffering perpetuated throughout the video games remain unresolved.

In *Silent Hill 4*, there are four different endings to the video game, and *Silent Hill 4* is the only of the four video games not to have a comedic ending. In the 21 Sacraments ending, after defeating the Conjurer/Walter’s ghost, Henry experiences a sharp pain in his head. The cutscene then cuts to a child manifestation of Walter in Henry’s apartment/Room 302, who

says that “[Walter] will stay forever in the apartment” as he lies on the sofa in the apartment. A radio bulletin subsequently reports on Henry and Eileen’s death. The disembodiment of this voice over a slow pan over Room 302 from a lower perspective gives the impression that the player is watching these events cowering and still fearful, giving a sense of foreboding to this ending. Eventually, the in-game camera stops and lingers on an image of Walter standing still and looming in a corner of the living room of the apartment. This final shot of Walter, haunting the apartment demonstrates a return to a space that remains fraught with ghosts, pain, and suffering, which is emphasised by the absence of characters in it, apart from Walter’s ghostly form. The 21 Sacraments ending directly does not provide the player a sense of healing and relief from suffering and instead, instead foregrounds the symbol of/cause of the suffering in *Silent Hill 4*, and through Walter’s abuse by The Order, his ghost further represents the generational suffering (in all senses) through four video games.

In the Eileen ending, a young version of Walter is shown knocking on the door to Apartment 302, while calling out to his mother. This child version of Walter then collapses and disappears, and only then does the door to Room 302 open. The scene then cuts away and the player is returned to the first-person perspective, much like in the opening cutscene to the video game and the player presumably occupies Henry’s perspective once again. The return to the first-person perspective in the ending highlights the perpetuation and continuation of suffering in the *Silent Hill* video games. The absence of healing and resolution is emphasised when the motif of the radio returns, in this ending, as it reports Eileen’s death. Since the player experiences the entirety of this cutscene from a first-person perspective, they are given the space to contemplate Eileen’s death and the horrifying events of the video game on their own. The cutscene subsequently shifts into a third-person perspective, and the player is able to see Henry falling to the ground as he hears the news of Eileen’s death. This possible overlap between the player and Henry’s reaction in this final cutscene suggest that Henry and

the player may continue to hold onto the experience of suffering, which further colours even the best of endings that they are able to achieve.

The next two endings, Mother and Escape, share a number of scenes, although these scenes eventually end with very different outcomes. In the Mother ending, a young version of Walter is seen asking his mother to let him into the apartment. The recurring image of this young version of Walter across multiple endings recalls the abuse and manipulation of children by The Order in *Silent Hill* and *Silent Hill 3*, demonstrating that even across video games, the seemingly resolved suffering in *Silent Hill* continues to perpetuate itself. After this scene with young Walter, the player is presented with an external shot of the building that the characters previously occupied. Henry gradually enters the scene, appearing hurt in his arm and leg. The scene then cuts again, revealing a title card, which read: “The day after”. Henry is seen visiting Eileen in the hospital, where Eileen suggests that she might return to live in South Ashfield Heights before the scene fades to a still-haunted Room 302.

The Escape ending cuts immediately to the hospital scene, except towards the end of this cutscene, Eileen plans on pursuing a “new place to live”. However, even with the potential to move on from suffering in this ending, the repetition of certain scenes and motifs in the endings of *Silent Hill 4* suggest a sense of repetition/inescapability. Most of these cutscenes begin and end within a particular space, highlight the characters’ and the player’s entrapment within a space permeated by suffering.

J. Yellowlees Douglas writes that reading is “an act of faith” that readers believe that by the ending of text, it will finally “make perfect sense” so that the reader “lay [the text] to rest before comfortably turning [their] backs on it” (90). However, with texts that come with multiple endings such as the *Silent Hill* video games, this promise of a complete, coherent ending is denied to those who would experience these texts, even perhaps leaving the player

in a sustained state of discomfort. Douglas goes on to ask, in the absence of true resolution, “Will [the reader] impose or even invent some [resolution], to confer some shred of purposiveness on [the reader’s] readings?” (107). In the case of *Silent Hill*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Silent Hill 3*, and *Silent Hill 4*, the player is, in a sense, offered the possibility of constructing an entirely different resolution to the *Silent Hill* video games by seeking out the comedic endings of the first three video games. The alternative continuity/world of *Silent Hill* presented in these endings is stylistically and tonally different from the rest of *Silent Hill* video games, and act as a further criticism of the player’s desire not to face the horror and suffering that pervades the world of *Silent Hill*.

The alternative universe within these video games begins in *Silent Hill*, with the UFO ending. Harry is abducted from *Silent Hill* by a group of aliens in a spaceship in this ending. The ending cutscene is animated in 2D, and parallels the style of B-movie posters. As Harry repeats a line he says in the main story of the video game to the aliens, he is comically attacked by the aliens with a laser gun. The UFO subsequently flies away and disappear, as cheerful science-fiction inspired music, heavy with synth and beeps, plays over the scrolling credits.

There are two comedic endings for *Silent Hill 2*. One of these endings is the Dog ending, where James discovers a dog has been the cause of his entire time in *Silent Hill*, perhaps even serving as a criticism of the kind of player who might want to understand the fundamental cause of suffering in the world of *Silent Hill*. The control room where this ending takes place is rendered closer to a cartoon in style. The control room buttons have a clear, metallic sheen and bright colours in comparison to the rest of *Silent Hill 2*. The confrontation between James and the dog is followed by a credit montage juxtaposing some events that do take place in the video game with cheerful carnival-like music, accompanied by a dog’s barks. The UFO ending in *Silent Hill 2* is rendered in a similar fashion to the

ending of *Silent Hill*. However, this time around the UFO ending takes on the stylistic conventions of a silent era film with intertitles for dialogue and actions. James is shown meeting Harry who asks James if the latter has seen Harry's daughter. James ignores Harry's question and asks about Mary before being shot with a blaster gun. Harry and a grey alien are subsequently seen dragging James away with Harry giving a thumbs up to the events that are currently occurring.

The UFO ending of *Silent Hill 3* continues the events of the previous two endings, and is also rendered in a different style in comparison to rest of *Silent Hill 3*. This third UFO ending is presented in the style of a brightly coloured storyboard/comic book. Heather is shown arriving home, where Harry is seen having tea with one of the aliens, while James lurks behind, observing this scene. There is no comment made on the absurdity of this event and the events that follow in this ending. Harry splits a piece of wood with a high kick, and tells Heather that he intends to go to Silent Hill to "bust some heads". An army of UFOs is then seen destroying the town of Silent Hill. The ending credits then start rolling. In comparison to the more melancholic and atmospheric songs/track that accompany the other endings of the *Silent Hill* video games, the ending credits in this UFO endings start with whoops and cheers, and a singalong of what the *Silent Hill Wiki*, describes as the "*Silent Hill* song", which is sung in Japanese, as if by the developers of the video game itself.

The fundamental existence of these comedic endings serve as a reflection of the player's capacity to bear the experience of suffering in video games, especially through multiple playthroughs of any of these video games. When viewed together, even these endings do not provide a resolution to the suffering that exists in the rest of the *Silent Hill* video games. Instead, the incorporation of these endings suggest that should the player seek a sense of proper resolution to the *Silent Hill* video games, the player may have to instead play something else entirely.

5) Self-Imposed Suffering: Accumulating Affect in the *Silent Hill* Video Games

The experience of playing through the *Silent Hill* video games is thus the experience of witnessing and playing through scenes of suffering and ultimately accumulating a sensation of vulnerability from which there is no convenient resolution. This affective response is sustained even through repeated playthroughs of the four *Silent Hill* video games, since each player can encounter the video games in myriad ways, exposing the player to their own vulnerability and their own aversion to witnessing and participating in suffering. This, in turn, reflects Lipkin's notion that the player engages and is engaged by the medium of video games to construct, in this instance, different ways of viewing and experiencing suffering within the *Silent Hill* video games, even as the actual content of the video games is unchanged. The experience of replaying through these video games could be seen as being engaged continuously in the condition/affect of vulnerability, as the player is constantly located in the "ambiguous region" between/within "receptivity and responsiveness" (Butler 25). Moreover, the act of replaying may be interpreted as the player engaging in the development of their "ability to respond" (Hirsch 84), by employing the video game as an "[a]esthetic wor[k]" to 'reflect on the vulnerabilities they elicit within [the player]' and "practice openness, interconnection, and imagination" and "acknowledge [their] own implication and complicity" (Hirsch 82).

In a retrospective on the concept of the "magic circle" within video games, Eric Zimmerman clarifies that the "magic circle" is the "idea that when a game is being played, new meanings are generated". Zimmerman goes on to explain that these "meanings" created by playing a video game "mix elements intrinsic to the game and elements outside the game".

Zimmerman's definition of the magic circle as it pertains to video games suggests that the experience of playing through a video game does not simply end when the player stops playing. Consequently, it could be argued that by making the choice to play and replay a

video game, the player is constantly creating and experiencing new reactions to the scenes of suffering that are present in the video game, even if the fundamental details of the representation of suffering within the video game is unchanged.

Part of these elements “outside” the video game that the player brings to the gaming experience include their purpose for playing a video game, and, in the instances of video games like the *Silent Hill* video games, where there are multiple endings and a video game world that encourages the player to explore it, these player-derived elements can give a greater affective quality to the representation of suffering in the *Silent Hill* video games. For instance, by bringing together the player’s desire to acquire a particular ending and the at times obscure nature of the choice that the player has to make in order to arrive at a specific ending, the player thus has to become more attuned to the events and details within the video game, which, in turn, forces the player to cumulatively witness and carry with them the horrific scenes that take place over the course of each video game.

The ending that the player may get at the conclusion of a *Silent Hill* video game is often based on the choices or the way that the player plays through the video game. However, the often obscure nature of the actions that the player must take in order to acquire a particular ending in these video games emphasises the way that the world of *Silent Hill* continues not to provide an easy journey for the player through the video game world. The frustrating experience from continued suffering and a lack of resolution posed by these video games may linger in the player, such that they move onto external resources and other players in order for them to seek the best ending possible (although all endings in the *Silent Hill* video game are not necessarily happy ones).

Even if the player has an idea about what these choices are (perhaps by consulting video game guides/forums online), when playing through any one of these video games, the

player still has to make the choice that leads the player towards a particular ending. The choices that the player has to make when working towards a specific ending often involve sacrificing one character over another or even both. In *Silent Hill*, for instance, the main factor that affects the player's resulting (non-comedic) ending is the choice of saving/completing the Kaufmann side-quest and the choice of saving or killing Cybil when the player is forced to defeat her when she is possessed in *Silent Hill* (both of which are optional). While the pre-requisites towards acquiring a particular ending are fairly straightforward in *Silent Hill*, these choices and the variety among them tend to change over the course of the video game.

In *Silent Hill 2*, in comparison, the necessary choices that the player has to make in order to acquire any of the six possible endings is fairly complex – some of which the player would not recognise the significance of on the first playthrough of *Silent Hill 2*. The requirements for each of the four non-comedic endings range from keeping James' health high or low, the immediacy with which the player heals James, checking objects such as Mary's photo and Angela's knife, and listening to incidental occurrences throughout the video game (e.g. listening to headphones and a conversation in Lakeview Hotel, reading a patient's diary on Brookhaven's roof) or collecting an assortment of "secret items" throughout the video game, such as the "white chism" at Blue Creek. The variety of options open to the player, in turn, reflects how the player may be encouraged by the design of the video game to submerge themselves in the world of *Silent Hill* in order to gain an awareness of not only these choices but the suffering that exists within the world of *Silent Hill*.

The requirement of each ending in *Silent Hill 3* and *Silent Hill 4* are comparatively simpler than those in *Silent Hill 2*, but nonetheless require the player to be more deeply immersed in these video game worlds. In *Silent Hill 3*, for instance, whether the player acquires the Normal or Possessed ending is dependent on the player accumulating a set

number of points (4000) through killing creatures, or getting hurt, or forgiving an unseen confessor, who admits to having murdered a child in revenge for her “poor murdered daughter”. Similarly, in *Silent Hill 4*, acquiring one of the four endings available in the video game is dependent on saving Eileen or allowing her to perish during the boss battle with the Conjuror and clearing Henry’s apartment of a certain number of hauntings. The focus on more conventionally quantifiable pre-requisites in *Silent Hill 3* and *Silent Hill 4* suggests an attempt in the design of these two video games to enumerate/make more tangible the scale of suffering that exists within the world of *Silent Hill*.

In his analysis of *Silent Hill 2*, Dan Whitehead describes the experience of playing the video game as more akin to a “psychological experiment”, in which the player is as much a subject of study as James. Whitehead explains that the video game grants the player access to an ending not “just based on what you did, but rather how you did it”, by judging James, and the choices that the player as James, resulting in “true role-playing”, where the actions of the player “blee[d] from the digital to physical and back again”. And it is not just in *Silent Hill 2*, where the player’s gameplay may create the space for the player to better reflect on their own ability to tolerate suffering. The methods through which the player arrives at one ending in *Silent Hill* and *Silent Hill 2* are more focused on less obvious actions that the player takes throughout these two video games, as a reflection of Harry/James/the player. In contrast, *Silent Hill 3* and *Silent Hill 4* have fewer endings and seemingly simpler methods of acquiring these endings, primarily through accumulating a set amount of points or other more quantifiable objectives and the process of doing so is a much more direct reflection on how the player performs violence and perpetuates suffering within their video game of choice.

In *Silent Hill*, for instance, the unlocking of endings is contingent on whether the player saves and completes Kaufmann’s side-quest and saves Cybil/otherwise. Since Kaufmann’s side-quest is an optional one, the player has to actively pursue the option if they

wish to acquire the Good/Good+ endings, where Harry appears to leave Silent Hill. Kaufmann is complicit in the Order's activities, caring for Alessa, and not intervening in Dahlia's abuse of Alessa in order to prepare Alessa for birthing God in *Silent Hill 4*. The player's saving of Kaufmann thus allows his continuing complicity in the suffering of all the character in *Silent Hill*—at least until the end when saving Kaufmann compels Kaufmann to use the Aglaophotis on Alessa, expelling the Incubus and contributing towards the Good/Good+ ending. With regards to Cybil, the player is forced to either save Cybil who is possessed by a parasite towards the ending of the video game or to kill her. Cybil is one of the few characters who has a connection to the world outside Silent Hill, and is one of the characters that acts to ground Harry, when Harry questions the reality he presently occupies. If the player makes the choice in the video game to save Kaufmann and Cybil, these choices suggest that Harry, and by extension, the player's character is more strongly tolerant of suffering – going out of their way to save Kaufmann, complicit in the suffering happening in Silent Hill and keeping Cybil alive despite the harm inflicted on Cybil during the player's fight with her, which necessitates shooting Cybil repeatedly with a firearm. Saving neither character, in turn, suggests that Harry and the player chooses to be capable of ignoring and avoiding the suffering of others.

The variety of factors that determine which ending the player may acquire in *Silent Hill 2* further changes the perception of James and the player depending on how the player plays the video game. For instance, if the player were to maintain James' health and quickly heal James when James is hurt, this method of play would suggest that the player is a cautious one, and may take a largely non-confrontational approach to the video game. As such, James/the player's character can be read as even more insular, unwilling to be affected by and/or confront the suffering present before them, especially by maintaining James' health conscientiously, emphasising how worried the player is, even by the potential of injury.

Furthermore, since the ending of *Silent Hill 2* is determined by how often the player checks certain items in their possession such as Mary's letter and Angela's knife, the frequency of this action portrays James and the player as a character that has a strong fascination or dependency on other characters who experience some form of emotional/psychological turmoil. The checking of these objects can thus be seen as an affinity with these mementos of suffering. Moreover, the overall complications that determine which ending the player will acquire is determined by the player's willingness to explore the world of *Silent Hill* – a world which the player may now recognise as one filled with horror and suffering. Whether by reading the patient's diary on the roof of Brookhaven Hospital or stopping to listen to the headphones and the conversation in Lakeview Hotel, the player is made all the more intimate with every detail of suffering (both past and present) that has occurred in *Silent Hill*. The exposure to and further exploration of suffering is given more emphasis in the "Rebirth" ending, which can only be unlocked by playing through the video game once. The items necessary for this ending will only be accessible in a second playthrough of the video game, requiring the player to already have experienced the video game once.

Unlike *Silent Hill* and *Silent Hill 2*, the player gains the Normal ending by default in *Silent Hill 3*, which grants the player some degree of freedom to their approach to the video game, e.g. whether to play Heather as a more aggressive character by confronting more monsters or otherwise, which reflects how deeply Heather/the player experiences the trauma that compels her narrative. Heather is already presented through the in-game dialogue, cut-scenes and voice-acting as experiencing a great deal of emotional turmoil due to her father's death and the uncertainty of her identity. Through a more aversive form of play, the player would be able to better empathise with Heather and this would forge a deeper connection between Heather's narrative-driven suffering and the player's structural/game-driven suffering. The Possessed ending in *Silent Hill 3* can only be acquired after playing through

the video game once, and the player must accumulate up to 4000 points in order to unlock this ending. During gameplay, the player acquires points by killing various monsters, which are worth 10 points each, getting hurt, with each attack on Heather/the player worth one point, and forgiving an unnamed/unseen character called the confessor (1000 points). As the player is only given a tally of the points they have scored at the end of the video game, the player thus has little choice but to actively pursue more suffering than they would have in their first playthrough by aggressively affecting harm on non-human creatures and by allowing themselves – in a self-flagellating gesture – to be harmed in turn. Furthermore, Heather and the player’s pardoning of the Confessor is an ambiguous gesture, to say the least. The Confessor is discovered in a confession booth where she addresses “God” to absolve her of her sins. The Confessor has committed “a wicked act of revenge”. The Confessor’s daughter was murdered and she decided to exact revenge on another girl. The act of forgiving the Confessor grants a significant contribution to the player’s points towards the end of the video game. However, the act of forgiving the Confessor casts the woman into a delusion as while this scene foreshadows Heather’s true relationship with The Order, Heather does not necessarily have the authority to grant forgiveness to an individual who may continue to perpetrate or perpetuate suffering on others. If not forgiven, the Confessor may continue to live in a state of personal suffering, and the responsibility for the suffering of this other character, in turn, further accumulates onto the player and Heather’s experience of suffering in *Silent Hill 3*, much like the points that the player is attempting to pile up. The acquiring of points in *Silent Hill 3* serves as a further critique of other video games located within the horror genre, such as the previously mentioned *The House of the Dead: Overkill*, where the killing of groups of monsters is enumerated/considered only in terms of high scores/bonuses provided to the player without much thought given to the nature of the monsters and the relationship between non-human-human suffering that exists in those video game worlds.

In *Silent Hill 4*, the player's ability to acquire one of the four endings available in the video game depends on being able to save Eileen during the final battle and clearing a certain number of hauntings from Room 302/Henry's apartment. Henry's ability to prevent Eileen from walking to her death further depends on Eileen's physical state (if Eileen has sustained too many injuries over the course of the video game, it may be difficult to save her). In *Silent Hill 4*, Eileen accompanies Henry through much of the video game, much in the same way Maria accompanied James in *Silent Hill 2*. The ability and willingness of the player to protect Eileen/Maria not only determines which ending the player will be able to access at the end of *Silent Hill 4/2*. For Henry, protecting Eileen requires the player to be constantly aware about the potential monsters lurking throughout the video game, making them keenly aware of the sheer vulnerability of both these characters. Furthermore, Eileen is already wounded by Walter's first attempt to kill her, heightening Eileen's vulnerability especially since the player is not certain if Eileen can truly "die" during gameplay as well. The cautiousness that the player has to exude over Eileen who has other limitations in the video game as well, such as a slower pace and a limp due to her injuries and an inability to climb ladders, necessitates the player take into consideration her limitations/suffering as well and further explore the world in order to provide for both Henry and Eileen. For Henry, the care expressed through gameplay gives the character a sense of openness towards others, which also reflects the player's tolerance/capacity for challenge/suffering. Furthermore, the attempts to clear Henry's apartment of hauntings indicate a desire to perhaps return Room 302 to a state of normalcy/absence of suffering. This is emphasised by the nature of the hauntings in Henry's apartment, which comprise, for the most part, non-human or even inanimate objects that have been affected by the influence of the Otherworld. Among the haunted objects in Henry's apartment are a bloody chair, cracks in the wall, Henry's phone and television, and even the ghost of Walter's first victim, Jimmy Stone. The extent to which the player works to expel

these hauntings from Henry's apartment reflects the degree to which Henry/the player desires an escape from this world of suffering and a return to the seeming normal world.

The player's multiple playthrough of a video game not only reinforce the thematic suffering within the video game world and the design elements of these four video games, but the process of playing allows the player to experience and bear the responsibility of perpetuating the suffering in these video games by continuing to play and to acquire these various endings. The player thus has to bear the sight of suffering over multiple iterations of the same video game. That said, the *Silent Hill* video games do adopt some conventions from more action-based video games by providing rewards to the player, who decides to endure the experience of playing/suffering through the video games repeatedly, whether to further explore or to gain a sense of completion in one of these video games. One of the main rewards that these four video games provide to the player is by way of a special weapon or a special costume that can be unlocked in the video game. In *Silent Hill*, the player has the opportunity to collect a katana after completing the video game twice with a Good ending and once with a Bad ending. The katana is not only a much stronger weapon than the other weapons available to the player during other playthroughs of the video game, but its presence is also incongruous to the rest of the video game, which has more commonplace firearms and melee weapons such as rifles and pipes, respectively. The stylistic incongruity is emphasised by the option to unlock the weapon known as a Hyper Blaster in *Silent Hill*. While the katana is a powerful weapon, it is considerably slow with its pace of attack. The Hyper Blaster, unlocked only after the player acquires the UFO ending, is an immensely powerful weapon that acquires no ammunition, has a long range, and will automatically aim itself at any enemies, making it so that the player will be unlikely to miss their target. The absurdly powerful features of this weapon and its availability after the player acquires the UFO ending (considered a joke ending in the video game reinforces the attempt to seek catharsis from and

to deny the ongoing suffering that pervades the world of *Silent Hill*. The fact that this weapon would be able to make any encounter with non-human creatures in *Silent Hill* not only easier but perhaps desirable could be seen as part of an on-going desire to resolve/heal the suffering in the world of *Silent Hill* that the video games themselves continue to deny the player.

Silent Hill 2, *Silent Hill 3*, and *Silent Hill 4* likewise grant the player the ability to gain such comically powerful weapons that appear at odds with the overall aesthetic and themes of these video games. For instance, in *Silent Hill 2*, the player may acquire the Great Knife which is the weapon of one of the major, recurring monsters in *Silent Hill 2*, Pyramid Head. The Great Knife, true to its name, is a large, powerful blade, capable of killing and knocking down enemies in a single hit. However, in practice, James' personal strength (and the player's) has not changed. As a result, when the Great Knife is equipped, James has to drag the Great Knife behind him due to its heft, and move even slower than his usual pace. Furthermore, James, an everyman, (in comparison to Pyramid Head, who has supernatural strength) wields the blade slowly in combat. The juxtaposition between the heft and strength of the weapon against James' still very human abilities and vulnerabilities demonstrates that even with being granted such a powerful tool James and the player remain painfully vulnerable to the harm that the world of *Silent Hill* can bring them, such that even this obvious symbol of power cannot ameliorate.

In *Silent Hill 3* and *Silent Hill 4*, the player is given further access to weapons such as a submachine gun with unlimited ammunition and different play modes, which grant the player a greater degree of accessibility to weapons, respectively. *Silent Hill 3* gives the player access to a submachine gun with unlimited ammunition after the player completes the video game once and by defeating God with a melee weapon. The overall unlimited access to ammunition echoes the conventions of action-heavy horror video games such as *Resident Evil*. However, within the context of *Silent Hill 3*, the access to ammunition only comes after

the player has made their first playthrough of the video game more difficult especially during the final confrontation with God. The access to ammunition can thus be seen as a reaction to the suffering and the way that having a continuously firing submachine gun will allow for an attempt to seek catharsis in a video game that continues to deny the player genuine catharsis.

Silent Hill 4, in turn, introduces two different video game modes that gives the player access to all of the firearms and melee weapons in *Silent Hill 4*. The first of these modes is the One Weapon mode which is acquired only after the player completes the video game on Hard and achieves a 10-star rank—no doubt forcing the player to engage in a more taxing form of play than the player otherwise would have to endure and thus, already subjecting the player to a greater deal of suffering. The second mode is known as the All-Weapon mode and is in turn acquired by completing the previous mode with a 10-star rank. The One-Weapon mode presents the player with all of the weapons in *Silent Hill 4* (barring the submachine gun) and the player only has the ability to choose one weapon, after which the others completely disappear, thus, limiting the player's choice of how to encounter the video game world, and complicating the challenge of finishing their playthrough of the video game with a high rank. Thus, the acquiring of All-Weapon mode necessitates the player to play the video game more cautiously, heightening each monstrous encounter that the player enters. All-Weapon mode serves as a reward for the player's ability to accomplish that. In All-Weapon Mode, the player has the choice of any weapon they want, without the weapons vanishing, and the video game grants the player additional (regenerating) 10 nutritional drinks and ammunition whenever Henry returns to Room 302. The sense of invulnerability that the video game allows the player to acquire suggests how the player is ultimately vulnerable towards the notion of unresolved suffering that in order to acquire at least some degree of healing at least within gameplay, the player ironically has the capacity to force themselves to endure and re-experience the thematic suffering that pervades the world of *Silent Hill*.

Another interesting feature that is exclusive to *Silent Hill 3* and *Silent Hill 4* pertains to the female characters in these two video games. *Silent Hill 3*, for instance, introduces the ability to dress Heather in a variety of alternate costumes, introducing an element of customisation to the main characters for the first time in these four video games. One of the more interesting costumes that the player can dress Heather in is the Princess Heart costume which stands out in contrast to the overall atmosphere of the video game, as it appears to be a parody of a magical girl uniform. Equipping the uniform by using the Transform Costume item, in fact, triggers a cut-scene, which is reminiscent of the Japanese animated series, *Sailor Moon*. Heather thus transforms into Princess Heart, who is dressed in a short, white dress with bright pink decorations, including a pink heart on her chest, with a matching pink belt that has a heart-shaped buckle, candy-coloured hair ornaments, pink gloves, and dark blue knee-high boots. This costume allows Heather to attack enemies with multiple beams of light that emanate from her eyes and are accompanied with a flurry of small hearts, whenever she fires it. This parodic reward may serve as an implication on the part of the developers of the video game towards the player for their desire for catharsis and levity within the narrative of *Silent Hill*. Furthermore, this costume is reminiscent of the inclusion of the UFO ending in this video game, and may be seen as an assertion of a different genre onto the ongoing narrative of *Silent Hill 3*. The recasting of Heather as a magical girl through this change in attire again reflect the desire to escape from or even make light of the traumatic events that Heather and the player experience over the course of *Silent Hill 3*.

This system of rewards likewise occurs in *Silent Hill 4*, where the player is once again able to provide customisation for the female characters within the video game, and curiously enough not the protagonist, Henry. The customisation in these two latter video games could reflect a desire to exercise greater control over the characters with these video games, especially in light of an overwhelming narrative of suffering that appears out of the

player's control. The costumes that the player is capable of unlocking in *Silent Hill 4* entail a "nurse uniform" for Eileen and a set of lingerie for Cynthia. The overt sexualisation of these female costumes brings to mind the convention of unlockable achievements/features in other video games. The inclusion of these features represent the assertion of authority (especially a masculine one, in light of the player's position as an everyman) over the two major female characters in *Silent Hill 4*. By forcibly dressing up Eileen and Cynthia in costumes that emphasise sexual appeal, the vulnerability of these two female characters in comparison to the player is highlighted, especially with the appearance of Eileen's injuries, even in a different outfit. The emphasised vulnerability of others in comparison to Henry/the player through this video game feature, in turn, demonstrates the player's own aversion to suffering, such that the player may make others appear more vulnerable or more in pain in order not to remind themselves of their susceptibility to suffering.

Jesper Juul goes onto elaborate that the magic circle, despite its name, "is an imperfect boundary", where anything "potentially relevant" to the gaming experience is thus "subject to the negotiation of the magic circle" (62). Rotschild, Ochsner, and Gray go on to explain that "no amount of designer induced constraints" is capable of completely "limit[ing] a player's agency" to infuse the video game space with their own "ideas, goals and identifications" (84). As a result, even when different players of the *Silent Hill* video games are working towards the game goal of completing the video game or acquiring all the endings, there are an assortment of other influences that render the representation of suffering on-screen as affective on the player off-screen. The variety of player experiences of the *Silent Hill* video games is captured through the comments on posts about these video games on a website like *GameFAQs*.

While the overall narrative and design elements of the *Silent Hill* video games may be unchanging, myriad other factors affect the player's experience of the video game, and by

extension, allows the scenes of suffering in the *Silent Hill* video games to retain their affective quality on the player. For instance, in a *GameFAQs* post titled “I can only play this in short spurts.”, “Rango” laments how *Silent Hill* type video games “stress [them] out”, even when they have only inhabited the video game world for a short period of time. “Rango” goes onto elaborate that they can only engage with the video game world “for a little bit” while interspersing their playthrough with breaks and returning to *Silent Hill* after having played “another game”. The actual length of “Rango’s” play sessions suggests that for some players the experience of being in the world of *Silent Hill* and having to engage with every aspect of its horror and suffering can lead to a heightened state of experience to the point that the player has to experience the video game in a series of short spurts as opposed to one continuous playthrough. As such, experiences like “Rango’s” suggests that the representation of horror/suffering in the *Silent Hill* video games and the self-imposed exposure to the video game world allows the suffering therein to constantly affect players differently.

Giving further emphasis to the affective response to video games like *Silent Hill*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Silent Hill 3*, and *Silent Hill 4* may provoke is a post titled “Back into the fog—replaying SH”. A user named “gamemaster712” describes the video game as having “left quite a dent” on their psyche and emphasises “find[ing] the inner strength” to venture into the different worlds of *Silent Hill*. “Gamemaster712’s” hyperbolic language reflects the visceral and emotional experience that playing a *Silent Hill* video game might entail. Furthermore, the use of the word “dent” indicates the affective strength of the video game in impressing its representation of suffering even when the player is re-experiencing any one of the four *Silent Hill* video games.

The medium of video games offers a wider range of possibilities for the affect of vulnerability acquired by playing through an experience of suffering to remain with the player, especially since each player’s experience of video games can vary from player to

player. The differing experiences of/reactions towards these scenes is reflected even in the player's reception towards each individual video game. For instance, in a thread titled "Revisiting the *Silent Hill* series years later", the various users commenting on the post discuss their experience with each of the *Silent Hill* video games and often have differing opinions about which video game remains with them, even years after they first played it. "Friendlydude" writes that "[*Silent Hill*] is so damn impressive at horror", despite "remember[ing] too much" of their previous experience with the video game. "Friendlydude" goes on to comment that they consider *Silent Hill 4* to be "underrated" in its ability to scare players. The post overall becomes a discussion over which of the *Silent Hill* video games remains the scariest even years after their initial release.

Reflecting on the influence of the *Silent Hill* video games on the genre of horror video games, Alexander Leigh describes the experience of playing these older video games as akin to having a "belly full of battery acid" but nonetheless notes that there is a "graceful" quality to these video games. The simultaneous attraction and revulsion expressed by Leigh reflects how the *Silent Hill* video games, through a combination of choices in video game design and player response, is capable of sustaining the affect of scenes of suffering, such that even playing these video games years later, the player can still be affected by the representations of suffering on-screen.

Playing through the experience of suffering allows for a different development to the relationship of suffering between the player/viewer in comparison to representations of suffering in other forms of media. The representation of suffering across these four video games is presented in a manner that does not allow for the suffering to become simply part of the world or spectacularised. The ever-present and even confrontational rep of suffering in these four *Silent Hill* video games allows for a reconsideration of the affective potential of media when conveying suffering as demonstrated through the vg design, which implicate the

player in their desire for a more conventional narrative and resolution. Subsequently, especially based on individual player experience with the *Silent Hill* video games, it becomes clear that the experience of suffering can be further individuated & made more/less affective depending on a variety of factors, especially with how the player encounters each video game and in what order. Arguments about which *Silent Hill* video game is the scariest reveal how the experience /playing through of suffering remains, and this engagement with other players could be seen as a means of attempting to seek healing/closure that the video games themselves do not provide.

6) Conclusion

The entirety of this thesis has dealt primarily with representations of suffering within the context of horror video games, through an examination of *Silent Hill*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Silent Hill 3*, and *Silent Hill 4*. In comparison to the spectacle of violence in other horror video games, the *Silent Hill* video games subject the player to individuated scenes of suffering that bring into question their experience of pure violence in other video games, their approach to the suffering of others, and the vulnerability of their selves to suffering. By considering the subject of suffering as opposed to the moral debate over the inclusion of violence in video games, the medium of video games may be viewed more in their potential for producing greater affective, experiences, especially through the careful consideration of video game design, the relationship between the video game and the player, and the fluid space of influence between the video game and the player.

With the *Silent Hill* video games, the developers of these video games have made necessary design choices (through environmental and character design, the use of multiple endings, and a consideration of how players play, among others) in order to create a series of video games that present scenes of suffering that involve, confront, and remain with the player even years later. By extending some of these video game design principles, recent video games have been developing in the direction to represent suffering that draws from present-day crises so that the player may be confronted with reality-based scenes of suffering and as a result, become perhaps more empathetic to the suffering of others in the non-game world.

Florent Maurin describes video games like these as “reality-inspired video games”. In the same article, discussing the rise and concretisation of this genre of video games, Maurin, a video game developer of such video games himself, outlines several principles, which guide

the development of “reality-inspired video games”. According to Maurin, these video games must “make a direct reference to the real world”, or at least adapt real-world events with sufficient detail that the event referenced is not lost on the player. Secondly, the video game must incorporate “interactive mechanics” that both convey to the player a particular representation of reality and reflect what the developer wishes to say about that event. Thirdly, a “reality-inspired video game” has to give the player the ability to “manipulate” and occupy this constructed space, thus allowing the player to “see things through an unusual perspective”. Maurin admits that by the nature of video games, even reality-inspired ones are not “reality”, as they allow the player “to fail and try again”. Nonetheless, Maurin presents a hopeful perspective on the use of the medium of video games in this way as he argues “what we learn in those games sticks with us as real human beings”.

Maurin’s description of “reality-inspired video games” is no doubt fairly optimistic in tone. One of the major issues that may come with representing suffering that draws from real-life events, especially humanitarian crises, may be the issue of seemingly turning these events into a game/spectacle. However, as the *Silent Hill* video games demonstrate, it is possible to represent suffering in a less spectacularised manner, and even sustain their affective quality over time. By representing suffering in one form of media or another, there will, of course, always be a sense of distance between the viewer of a scene of suffering and the affective quality of that scene may be lost to some degree. The medium of video games, and development of “reality-inspired video games” hold the potential to confront the player with experiences of suffering that remain affective and that the player has only seen reported in other forms of media. This is perhaps the best that can be hope for, especially with regards to newer forms of media, like video games—that by creating lasting, affective experiences for the player (which the player also contributes towards) the distance between the suffering of others and the self can be brought closer together. The player of video games like these may

not only just learn and retain these different perspectives on suffering, but may even, one day, move their capacity for action off-screen and into the real world, in order to reduce the amount of suffering present around them.

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