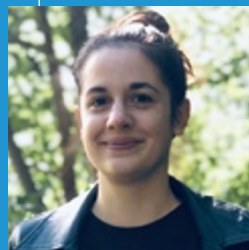# The Medicalisation and Dissemination of Cosmic Horror in *Bloodborne*

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ABSTRACT:

The aim of the paper is to interpret the themes of dissemination of cosmic horror via the transformation of human bodies in the *Bloodborne* digital game. The analysis' central operative concept is the medicalisation process introduced by Michel Foucault, when he described the birth and emergence of biopolitics at the end of the 18th century and showed how medical science, built on new paradigms, led to a specific control of the population, especially its natality and mortality. Within *Bloodborne*, we can see the mechanisms of medicalisation through the constitution of a powerful institution, which subsequently introduced the ritual of transfusion when experimenting with blood. However, this led to the transformation of human/mortal bodies by means of the beastly scourge, and thus to the alteration of the properties of mortal bodies, into a form of *becoming-of-the-monster*. As a result, medicalisation allows for the dissemination of cosmic horror and the loss of humanity. This type of analysis seeks to expand our understanding of the intersection of digital games and sociocultural phenomena at the level of representation, and their involvement in the construction of game fictional worlds.

Introduction

The digital game *Bloodborne* (FromSoftware, 2015) falls under the umbrella of 'souls-like' games (Caracciolo, 2024), which arrived with a radical transformation of design, narrative and gameplay mechanics in the early 2010s. With its iterations, the *Dark Souls* series is based on the player being thrown into a world fraught with danger, where their progression through the game is not linear. The player gradually discovers a horizontally and vertically connected environment, with individual locations being constrained hubs, and containing shortcuts and secret areas. Highly challenging boss fights mark transitions between locations, and the player is forced to learn the enemy's moveset to successfully defeat them.

Dark Souls (FromSoftware, 2011-2016) games belong to the genre of (medieval) fantasy. The visual structure of the world corresponds to this – it is full of ruins, half-decayed old castles or underground dungeons, and the protagonist has different swords, spears or magic at their disposal, being often dressed in armour reminiscent of medieval attire. In contrast, the enemies are skeletons, wyverns, dragons or other mythical creatures (Dooghan, 2023). The games are also narratively innovative. Developers restructured previously standard narrative conventions and storytelling in digital games. The information the player learns is brief, delivered in aphorisms, metaphors, and vague messages, while the NPCs can never be fully trusted. Aside from vague hints, the descriptions of the items the player acquires are the primary source of familiarity with the world's lore.

Bloodborne adopts many elements from the *Dark Souls* series (Hoedt, 2019), such as the hazardous and high-paced combat system, the boss fight design and the narrative

structure, but the overall setting differs. *Bloodborne*'s locations are aesthetically akin to Victorian London:

> *Bloodborne* is largely set in the city of Yharnam, resembling a dark and sinister rendition of a Victorian London cityscape especially dominated by Gothic architecture. Towering spires and clock towers loom over the streets, and arabesque gargoyles watch over a realm of ruin and desolation. Grotesque monsters roam the streets that are lined with broken carriages, coffins, and bodies of the hunted beasts pinned to wooden crosses and set ablaze. It is eternally dusk or night all through the duration of the game. The design of the city is akin to a maze. (Mukherjee, 2024, p. 101)

Miyazaki, the game producer behind both *Dark Souls* and *Bloodborne*, has explicitly stated in an interview that there is an intentional adoption of gothic tropes in *Bloodborne* (Hoedt, 2019, p. 53). In a recent book, Kirkland (2022) points out that the combination of gothic and digital games is logical and intuitive. As he notes:

> Videogames have always featured labyrinthine spaces, patrolling ghouls, locked doors, secret rooms, hidden passageways, arcane puzzles, and death. Games designers working across different series, cycles and genres have incorporated dungeons and dragons, neo-medieval fantasy, spooky houses, dark industrial spaces, detective protagonists and narratives of traumatic pasts into their work. The prominence of these tropes, all traceable back to traditions within Gothic fiction, shows how the Gothic mode suits the particular requirements of the videogame format. (Kirkland, 2022, p. 4)

In the present text, we focus on the dissemination of cosmic horror through mortal bodies. In particular, we analytically employ the concept of *medicalisation*, which Foucault (2003; 2006; 2009) established when he described the birth and emergence of biopolitics at the end of the 18th century, and showed how medical science, built on new paradigms, led to a specific control of the population, especially its natality and mortality. Within *Bloodborne*, we can see the mechanisms of medicalisation through the constitution of a powerful institution, which subsequently introduced the ritual of transfusion when experimenting with blood. However, this led to the transformation of human/mortal bodies by means of the beastly scourge, and thus to the alteration of the properties of mortal bodies, into a form of *becoming-of-the-monster.* As a result, medicalisation allows for the dissemination of cosmic horror and the loss of humanity. This type of analysis seeks to expand our understanding of the intersection of digital games and sociocultural phenomena at the level of representation and their involvement in the construction of game fictional worlds. Specifically, we are interested in adapting nineteenth-century medical knowledge in its various forms into digital games, and we consider *Bloodborne* to be an appropriate example of this phenomenon.

The Old Ones and the Human World

For the following interpretation, a basic explanation of the narrative and the cultural and mythological setting of *Bloodborne* is necessary (Redgrave, n.d.). The game takes place in Byrgenwerth and its surrounding area, particularly in the town of Yharnam. A long time ago, a group of disciples discovered the blood of the Old Ones, cryptic beings from outer space, in a secret labyrinth. Scholars used the blood to conduct experiments that led to the establishment of the Healing Church. This powerful organisation

founded a new religion and promised a cure for any disease using the miraculous Blood Ministration. Both the townspeople and strangers from distant places were drawn to the blood and became addicted to it. The healing effect was quickly replaced by transforming human individuals into different life and animal forms, resulting in the emergence of monsters – beastly scourge. This transformation elevated their humanity in a problematic way, as they became non-human creatures. The disease spread through blood dissemination, infecting all bodies that encountered it.

The Old Ones, their discovery by scholars and their presence in the game world are similar to Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos (see Joshi, 2001). In his writings, the Old Ones are a cosmic force from the outer universe that came to planet Earth tens of thousands of years ago, creating a cult of worshippers around them who preached the violent end of the world, absolute submission to these gods, and the making of a whole host of human sacrifices. Their description is also offered in the forbidden book *Necronomicon*, which presents the secret knowledge and methods of communicating with the Old Ones. The Old Ones are indifferent to the human world; while they use human subjects for their purposes, this does not prevent them from brutally disposing of them at any time; they feel no obligation to their worshippers. Finally, the world that the Old Ones inhabit is characterised by the fact that, at first glance, it appears normal, like the everyday ordinary world. However, this is only an illusion; behind this veil of normality, those select individuals who glimpse it find a world of terror, horror, and inhuman darkness that often leads to the madness of those who peek the world's true nature. Hiranya Mukherjee's writing on *Bloodborne* is primarily concerned with the inspiration of Lovecraft and the gothic genre. In addition to the overall setting, he shows that both classic Lovecraftian and Gothic elements, such as concepts of "doubling/ doppelganger", "imposter", and the "monstrous child" motif, are present in both the digital game and Lovecraft's writings (Mukherjee, 2024, p. 96). Nor does he leave aside the moment mentioned above, the moment of awakening or seeing that the world is not what it seems to be but that it is a place dominated by the Old Ones.

The adaptation and remediation of Lovecraft's work into digital games is characterised by a particular variation, partially dependent on the genre within which the transposition unfolds (Garrad, 2021). For example, the seminal *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth* (Headfirst Productions, 2005) is based on Lovecraft's short story *Shadows over Innsmouth* (Lovecraft, 1936) and combines first-person action with survival horror. The game inventively incorporates the mechanics of the gradual loss of sense of reality through the shocks the character experiences, namely blurred vision, impaired coordination or hallucinations. Similarly, *Call of Cthulhu* (Cyanide Studio, 2018) uses the first-person perspective, but the story is interwoven with detective elements, fights are almost absent, and at the same time the town – Darkwater – where the playthrough takes place is not a place from Lovecraft's stories, but all the motifs, characters and situations take various elements from Lovecraft's work. Even the main character follows one of Lovecraft's conventions: the player takes on the persona of a detective who suffers from terrifying dreams and has a strong propensity for drinking. A combination of the approaches mentioned earlier is represented by a third-person action-adventure game called *Sinking City* (Frogwares, 2019), where the main character finds himself in a slowly sinking city and is thrown into a sequence of events that explicitly draws on Lovecraft's stories. The end of the game follows the leitmotif, common in Lovecraft, that the conclusion or solution of the mystery is not even remotely positive.

Bloodborne finds a different path to Lovecraft. Kerry Dodd primarily focuses on narrative differences, where, in contrast to other Lovecraftian games, in *Bloodborne*, the player has to perform a robust interpretive activity: "the player becomes the Weird explorer who

must piece together dissociated knowledge or lore from object descriptions, arguably a more faithful adaptation or even development of this original ontological interrogation" (Dodd, 2021, p. 10). But there is also another distinction between *Bloodborne* and 'typical' Lovecraftian games. In particular, this is a structural inspiration (Hoedt, 2019): the overall setting and arrangement of the game world is interwoven with allusions to Lovecraft, but *Bloodborne* builds its own mythological framework that adheres to the ideological legacy of so-called 'cosmic horror', which takes place in a city inspired by an era of Victorian London stripped of the pervasiveness of the Industrial Revolution and modern machines.

In the case of *Bloodborne*, the realisation that the world is not what it seems to be happens gradually; it is a specific narrative construction and a narrative shift that appears about halfway through the game. At the start of the game, the player is narratively in the position of a person suffering from a disease, which is the motivation for going to Yharnam, a city famous for its healing methods. The player's first encounter with an enemy is terrifying; they are forced to fight a werewolf, which they succumb to as this is the beginning of the gameplay (Sen, 2024). They subsequently find themselves at a local medical clinic, where they are revived through a blood transfusion. The player is transported to a specific location called Hunter's Dream, where they meet the legendary retired hunter – Gehrman. Hunter's Dream is a safe space where the player is not in danger; it is a primary hub from which they travel to different locations and can also level up. At the same time, in Hunter's Dream, they receive a single, and from the perspective of the gameplay, main task from Gehrman: as the moon is about to descend, the city is becoming full of beasts that need to be got rid of to protect the inhabitants from possible death. This is not a overlly challenging situation; beast hunting happens regularly and periodically, and Gehrman tells the player that they have become one of many hunters whose goal is to kill as many monsters as possible while finding special blood that can cure them. The player then ventures into the heart of Yharnam, killing bosses and slowly unravelling the mysterious and terrifying history of the place. A skill called *insight* helps them to learn its true nature. Once their *insight* reaches a certain threshold, the player is

> able to perceive gigantic spider-like creatures called "Lesser Amygdala" clinging to the tall buildings of Yharnam, silently, unmoving, and unabashedly observing the PC [player's character] down below. This revelation seems to hint that these creatures were there all along, but were not perceivable to the player because of the lack of insight that the PC possessed. (Mukherjee, 2024, p. 108)

The player hears distant echoes of other mysterious creatures weeping and other strange noises. This disrupts the initial facade of the world, which is shattered entirely after a boss fight with Rom, the Vacuous Spider, on a vast lake. Once the player successfully survives the fight, they fall through the lake, and the entire environment takes on a completely different complexion: the moon descends, and it becomes clear that everything is far more complicated than it might first appear. At the very end of the game, the player will face Gehrman, and has two options; once they kill the final boss, they can be freed by Gehrman, i.e. killed, thus escaping this nightmare, or challenge him to a duel, kill Gehrman and take his place. Both endings, however, do not change the primary mechanism around which the events in Yharnam revolve: the player discovers that the Old Ones created the entire concept of the hunt. This repetitive cycle reinforces and extends their power. The Old Ones cannot be defeated. If the player dies at that time, all events will repeat themselves, and another hunter will take his place; if the player replaces Gehrman, they themselves will become a guide for the other hunters, constantly experiencing the nightmarish miasma of the endless dialectic of the descent of the moon and the only temporary restoration of order. The cosmos is always determined by those whose existence must not be spoken of.

Transformation of Mortal Bodies

Regarding the mechanism of the dissemination of cosmic horror in Byrgenwerth and Yharnam, the primary vehicle of this mechanism is the blood transfusion, i.e. the use of human bodies as vessels for the spread of non-human contagion. As is often the case in Gothic and Lovecraftian narratives, they did not abandon the find after the disciples and scholars discovered the Old Blood. They began experimenting with it while creating a cult around the Old Ones, as Alfred, Hunter of Vilebloods describes:

Byrgenwerth is an old place of learning. And the tomb of the gods, carved out below Yharnam, should be familiar to every hunter. Well, once a group of young Byrgenwerth scholars discovered a holy medium deep within the tomb. This led to the founding of the Healing Church, and the establishment of blood healing. (FromSoftware, 2015)

The Healing Church, led by Master Willem (other main characters include Laurence, Micolash, Carrryl, Gehrman and Maria), sought to gain secret knowledge, and its goal became to push further the evolution of humanity, the expansion of human intellect and communication across space and time with cosmic beings. Some scientists were convinced that evolution would occur primarily through studying the newly discovered materials, while others argued that it would only occur through mixing human blood and the Old Blood. There was a schism, but this did not change the fact that the experiments underway were beginning to take on a frightening tone. Strange and non-human creatures began to move around in the underground crypts and occasionally appeared in the city streets.

Micolash was one of the most active experimenters. He attempted to initiate a secret ritual that would unleash the entire existence of the Old Ones upon the *Bloodborne* world. The encounter with his failed medical experiments takes the shape as a boss fight with an entity called One Reborn. The One Reborn is an amalgamation of the bodies of the abducted inhabitants, a monstrous creation that came about when humans wanted to create their version of the Great One – the giant mass of human remains is an index of the failure of the attempt to ascend to the new level of being.

On the other hand, the Old Blood proved very effective in curing various diseases. Therefore, the townspeople voluntarily came under the control of the Healing Church, which invented with the mechanism of *blood ministration*, that is, the differentiation and distribution of the Old Blood in medical facilities using blood vials. The Old Blood thus functions as a *pharmakon* (Derrida, 1981), as a cure and a poison at the same time because, on the one hand, it allows for a certain period to cure human ailments and on the other hand it paves the way for the spread of the beastly scourge or the transformation of the human body into phantasmagorical forms. To interpret the conception of the body thus presented, we turn to the philosophy of Deleuze (1988), respectively to Deleuze's reading of Spinoza. Spinoza was convinced that we do not know in principle what the body is, or instead that it is never possible to determine a priori what the (human) body is capable of. We can only make inferences based on how the body reacts to what it encounters. The body is a modular organic entity that actively responds to its environment. Deleuze refers to the body's reactions, transformations, and transmutations as *affects* or the distinction between affect and *affection*.

Affections are all situations where there is an increase or decrease in the strength of the body. A typical example would be that if we eat a poisoned apple, the strength of our body decreases until we die. However, we cannot predict what this contact will do to our

bodies. And vice versa; if we eat nutritious food, the strength of our body increases. This is why Spinoza says that we can compare or observe similarities primarily between bodies that work and operate with similar types of forces and show similar reactions to situations. There is a more significant difference between a racehorse and a draft horse, as opposed to a draft horse and a bull working in the field: the bull and the draft horse produce similar movements because they operate with similar material (Deleuze, 1988, pp. 48-51).

In contrast, the racehorse simply runs. At the same time, Spinoza adds that every organism is inherently perfect and that there are certain variations of increasing and decreasing the body's capacities. But here comes, in the case of *Bloodborne*, the miscalculation of human nature by the Healing Church, which believes that humans are "idiotic" creatures whose present existence does not allow them to know the deeper truths about the nature of the universe. That is why the rituals and the Old Blood are so important; from the Healing Church's perspective, they expand the body's capacities and the human intellect.

However, once the experimentation occurs, the (human) body changes and transforms, but to the point where it loses its humanity and takes on monstrous shapes. It is possible to hold the line of interpretation that there is an increase in the body's strength; only then does the body lose its resemblance to the human body and become one resembling the Old Ones. Thus, in this respect, experimenting with the Old Blood expands the body's abilities and the influence of the Old Ones, not the human body. That could be why Willem and Laurence eventually claim to "fear the Old Blood" (FromSoftware, 2015). They have become non-human monsters, bloodthirsty entities that the player must deal with in boss fights. To interpret the body transformation, we turn to the concept of affect. Affect refers to a description of the transition between two states based on affect. The state before "blood transfusion" is the zero point of the transformation, and the result, i.e. the infection of the 'beastly scourge' and thus the transformation into a monster, is the resultant state. The passage leading from the zero-point state to the final state is an affect. In this respect, it can be argued that the transformation is explicable as a becoming-of-the-beast/monster (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), in which there is a loss of humanity and the acquisition of "monster" status, which is characterised by rampage and savage attacks on everything human.

Once an individual becomes a monster, all the abilities and powers of their body are rearticulated on a new plane of being, for which the intimate connection with cosmic horror and the Old Ones is determinative. To put it another way, becoming-of-the-beast means getting to the level of the attribute of cosmic essence, where cosmic horror is disseminated through the Old Ones not only in the form of their physical existence but also through the individual lower bodies of monsters/beasts. This gradual extension of the influence of the Old Ones is also present in *Bloodborne*'s setting. The appearance of beasts and monsters gives Yharnam a new twist; militia, hunters and terrifying creatures roam the streets, striding among burning carts or defending the entrances to churches and temples. At the same time, each location is "inhabited" by a different kind of enemy, which can be understood as indexical or territorial signs (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 55) of the domination of the Old Ones over the whole city. The inhabitants, the part of them that the player can encounter, mostly crouch quietly behind the barricaded windows of the Victorian houses in terror and horror, lest they accidentally interfere with the hunters' ongoing hunt. The whole town has become an embodied nightmare for all those the beastly scourge has not yet struck.

Although all the inhabitants of Yharnam are at risk of contracting the beastly scourge, it is essential to mention that this also applies to the player's character. Thus, monstrosity is simultaneously coded in "terms of morality" and degeneration (Hoedt, 2019, p. 31), where becoming a *beast* is a sign of the loss of being human. Hints throughout the gameplay

indicate that the protagonist is always close to becoming a *beast*. An example of this is the so-called 'visceral attack', which momentarily turns their character's hand into a beast-like hand when used by the player. Here, we point out that the player has depended on blood vials since the beginning of the game. They are an item that replenishes their health and keeps the player alive, but they are also an item that they gain for killing enemies, and thus, it is an endless sequence of fighting, healing, and gaining blood vials. On a meta-level, the blood vials symbolise the narrative structure on which *Bloodborne* is based: even if the hunter defeats all the enemies, the moon will still descend again, and the whole process must be repeated.

Medicalisation and Dissemination of Cosmic Horror

The dissemination of the beastly scourge, secret rituals, blood ministration, and experimentation with cosmic dimensional knowledge led at some point to the Healing Church establishing a section of hunters whose sole purpose was to purge monsters and beasts, in the interest of keeping the people of Yharnam safe. Firstly, it is essential to describe the power monopoly of the Healing Church, which has made Yharnam a significant place for treating all ailments. Medicine is dependent on socio-economic-political spheres of influence, which, for example, Foucault and others explain through the concepts of biopolitics and medicalisation (Ballard & Elston, 2005).

The concept of medicalisation, as described in Busfield's review article, appears in the context of the problem of social control in the 1960s. The primary assumption is that illness itself is the result of the social construction of reality, or there is no 'natural illness', because what is labelled as 'illness' is the result of a range of cultural, scientific, political and power practices that find expression in various medical taxonomies of illness. These taxonomies constantly change depending on the social and historical context (Busfield, 2017). Foucault emphasised in particular the power aspect of medical knowledge: the designation of such and such a person as 'sick' was, in particular, an act of exercising power and control over subjects who did not seem to belong to a 'healthy' society (Busfield, 2017, p. 762). As Foucault continues, the modern regime of biopolitics focuses on the health of the whole population, or the population becomes the object of the exercise of power, and biopolitics operates through statistical data to prevent and or, with the help of codified procedure, quickly resolve threats that can radically shake human health on a large scale. Hand in hand with biopolitics is medicalisation, or the fact that more and more problems are becoming the subject of medical insight and diagnosis. Life itself is biopolitical and, therefore, it is a medicalised life (Lock, 2004).

In addition to the cultural, social, and medical contexts, there was repeated experimentation with blood transfusion in the 19th century, particularly in England during the second half of Victorian Era. A whole range of devices and instruments were improved to make transfusion successful and to avoid inflammation; the use of the syringe, in particular, can be highlighted, and especially after 1865, the emphasis on disinfection and sterilisation of instruments under the influence of Louis Pasteur. Logically, until the discovery of the various blood groups, transfusions were only successful to a lesser extent. At the same time, interspecies blood transfusion was also considered. Although this was

supposed to be lethal, for example, sheep-to-human transfusion "resulted in symptoms of dyspnoea, cyanosis, back pain, chills, vomiting and convulsions", the German physician Oscar Hase argued that these were symptoms of stimulation and "over-activation of the patient by the animal's fresh spirits" (Learoyd, 2012, p. 375).

The concept of medicalisation can be used as an analytical tool to interpret how *Bloodborne's* experimenting with blood expresses the power tendencies of a small group of individuals who subsequently form themselves into an institution (the Healing Church), thereby consolidating their rule over others by creating a hierarchical social order. The power struggle is then exemplified by the conflicts within the Healing Church and its separation into several factions that battle each other. As Watson points out, *Bloodborne* illustrates

> the ways in which both desire for communion with divinity and desire to police the forms of this communion are characterised by paradoxical ambivalence. Within the game's universe, the desire to transcend creaturely limitation catalyzes bestial transformation: desire for divine communion effects a collapse in humanity. (Watson, 2024, p. 173)

Medicalisation and its institutionalisation are evident within the hierarchy of the Healing Church itself, where the Healing Church nuns play an important role. If the player obtains an item called Blood of Adella, who was one of the nuns, the in-game description reads as follows: "The Healing Church nuns are chosen for their merit as vessels for blood, and groomed as Blood Saints. The mere chance of being treated with their blood lends legitimacy to the Healing Church and communion" (FromSoftware, 2015). Nuns are the media that transmits, disseminates and reinforces the ideology and the very position of the Healing Church, and their actions and behaviours are the embodiment of the techniques and practices formed by the Healing Church, which means that they are not ordinary members of the church, but are an important tool for maintaining its power. Even the visual representation of the nuns conforms to the gothic mode of narration. They are dressed in robes and embody the dialectic of death and life (or its transcendence) as they distribute and operate with blood (blood treatment) while at the same time transgressing the boundaries of the human and the non-human as they can become monsters (see Milbank, 2009). Adella is full of devotion to the church and innocent; on the other hand, when the player repeatedly prefers the blood of the prostitute Arianna to her blood, Adella becomes jealous and murders Arianna. It is also possible to interpret this act as an attempt at purification. However, it is purely a power struggle as the (Old) Healing Church describes Arianna's blood as "what was once forbidden" (FromSoftware, 2015).

The transfer of blood between humans and animals or non-human creatures is framed in *Bloodborne* as part of the process of medicalisation, following the example of Oscar Hase. Humans are elevated to a new plane of being when they connect with the universe and its creators. If, in some cases, the infection by beastly scourge occurs, and the contagion spreads, it is only a slowing down or marginal obstacle to the achievement of the primary goal of scientific engineering: advancement to another plane of existence: "Now, let's begin the transfusion. Oh, don't you worry. Whatever happens … you may think it all a mere bad dream," says the Blood Minister (FromSoftware, 2015).

In the case of *Bloodborne*, we encounter a model of medicalisation based on both the acquisition and gatekeeping of secret knowledge, where, at the same time, using the Old Blood for medicinal purposes is essentially an act for which positive results cannot initially be predicted. Indeed, in the first phase after the application of the Old Blood, the patient/sick person feels better; however, not long after, the beastly scourge slowly begins to manifest itself with relentless certainty. Lastly, almost all of Yharnam's inhabitants

depend on a regular blood supply, and while alcohol is forbidden in the city, the only substance enabling the intoxicated state is that very blood. Thanks to this, however, there is a continuous expansion of the disease or transformation into an inhuman form: "Prepare yourself for the worst. There are no humans left. They're all flesh-hungry beasts, now" (FromSoftware, 2015). That's why hunt and hunters were 'invented' as a tool of biopolitics, as a tool to maintain society, when closures or quarantines, which we know from the Middle Ages and modern times, were also part of contemporary society at the moment of the spread of deadly contagious diseases. Once a quarantine is imposed on a city, hunters take to the streets to deal with the threat. In some cases, entire neighbourhoods have been burned (as was the case of old Yharnam), and very often, the hunters themselves were infected and slowly lost awareness of their humanity, becoming machines for killing not only random inhabitants but also their loved ones.

As mentioned, the grandmaster of twisted medicalisation was Micolash. His experiments were driven by a desire to communicate with the Old Ones, with the cosmic force itself: "Ahh, Kos, or some say Kosm ... Do you hear our prayers?" (FromSoftware, 2015). Micolash founded the School of Mensis, in a place called Yahar'gul, where he experiments with the remains of the Old Ones, especially the umbilical cord, which he hopes will allow humans to know other dimensions. However, based on all sorts of rituals, the entire environment of Yahar'gul is filled with moaning and bloodthirsty creatures.

This can be illustrated by one of the first quests. A female resident behind a barricaded window asks the player if he can find her mother, who has entered the inner city, to find her husband, one of the dreaded hunters. After some peripeteia, the player stumbles upon a boss fight with an enemy identified as Father Gascoigne, who is wanted, for they have killed their companion in a fit of beastly scourge. One of the many motifs in the *Bloodborne* lore develops here: some time ago, Father Gascoigne came to Yharnam because he suffered from voices in his head that led him to violent behaviour. He became a hunter to acquire a supply of the Old Blood, but over time, he transformed into a monster longing for blood: "Ohhhh. What's that smell? The sweet blood... Oh, it sings to me. It's enough to make a man sick" (FromSoftware, 2015). By killing him, the player removes the cosmic curse.

Father Gascoigne is not the only one to suffer such a fate. Similarly, the player arrives in Yharnam to cure their illness. To do so, they must become a hunter: hunting monsters and beasts is their only chance of a cure, but as they discover during the game, the whole mechanism of the hunt is the creation of the Old Ones, who thus maintain and extend their domination over the world. That is why one of the huntresses, who has seen the world's true nature, says: "The hunters must die... The nightmare must end" (FromSoftware, 2015).

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates how the digital game *Bloodborne* builds on themes borrowed from the work of H. P. Lovecraft. Specifically, the focus of the analysis was how cosmic horror is disseminated in the virtual world of *Bloodborne*, with an emphasis on the cultural technique of medicalisation, which in the material analysed is contextualised primarily by the 'blood ministration', through which the population of this virtual world is seemingly healed. Medicalisation is here interpreted in Foucault's terms, i.e. the very concept of 'illness' is a construction of biopoliticised life, which is seen as diseased in some form, thus becoming medicalised, i.e. a life and body that must, for the sake of the sociopolitical system, be healed, and in a way that is beneficial to that system, not necessarily to the needs of the individual being treated.

We traced the way in which the mythological mechanisms of *Bloodborne* interpret experiments in nineteenth-century, that is, Victorian England, related to blood transfusion. Both blood transfusion and the blood itself are drivers of the mythological framework. Blood ministration is here, as analysed in the present text, the way in which cosmic horror transforms human/mortal bodies into monster form, a process of becoming-of-the-monster. For the process of transformation of mortal bodies we use Deleuze's analytical concept of affect, describing the transition between two states based on affect. In *Bloodborne* there is a transition between body blood transfusion and the subsequent infection of the beastly scourge. This becoming-of-the-monster consists in the loss of humanity and the acquisition of monster status, characterised by rampage and savage attacks on everything human.

Medicalisation itself is here described as a hierarchical, power-based operation following Foucault's interpretation of this concept. Specifically, we show how medicalisation is an expression of the power of a small group of individuals who subsequently form an institution, thereby institutionalising the processes of medicalisation itself, primarily associated with blood transfusions. This institutionalised ideology is disseminated in *Bloodborne* through the nuns, who are also the embodiment of that institutionalisation and the position of the Healing Church, thus maintaining the power position of this small group of people. We consider that an important part of the medicalisation mechanism in *Bloodborne* is that it involves both the acquisition and gatekeeping of secret knowledge, even though the positive outcomes of applying this knowledge are fundamentally unpredictable. At its core, then, *Bloodborne* is a tragic tale of failed medicalisation that always turns into a power struggle.

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