Digital Narratives of Oppression: Surveillance and Control in *Detention* and *Devotion* Depicting Taiwan During the White Terror

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ABSTRACT:

Fang Ray-shin, a Taiwanese teenager during the White Terror, faces a harrowing choice: expose her classmates in a forbidden book club or remain silent, a decision that highlights the pervasive surveillance of the era, where silence equates to betrayal. This moral dilemma lies at the heart of Red Candle Games' *Detention*, a digital game that immerses players in the atmosphere of suspicion and distrust prevalent in Taiwan under martial law. Alongside its successor, *Devotion*, these games are meticulously crafted narratives that reflect the paranoia and psychological trauma caused by constant monitoring. While existing studies have explored the historical context of these games, they often overlook their engagement with Foucault's surveillance theories presented in *Discipline and punish*. This study bridges this gap by analysing the games as virtual representations of Taiwan during the 1960s-80s, investigating the portrayal of historical events under authoritarian rule and the concept of 'playable surveillance'. This paper also argues that these games challenge and reinforce players' perceptions of agency, morality, and resistance in the face of systemic oppression.

Introduction

> Public Announcement – Due to our ongoing war with mainland China, instructor Bai is asking students to rat out anyone who may be pro-communist or show signs of treachery. There are big rewards for informants.
>
> *– Detention*

This announcement within *Detention* (Red Candle Games, 2017) serves as a poignant reminder of the historical period when students were incentivized to report individuals suspected of communist ties – a period which was characterized by an atmosphere of apprehension and mistrust, where the possibility of treachery was always looming. It symbolizes the extensive surveillance that was prevalent in Taiwan during the White Terror era (1949-1987), a period marked by the suppression of dissent and the violation of human rights. Red Candle Games masterfully translates the abstract shadows of Foucault's (1977) *Discipline and punish* into tangible gameplay mechanics. The warped perspectives, intrusive radio broadcasts, and omnipresent spirits in *Detention* externalize the constant gaze of the state, immersing players in a society where living under surveillance has become second nature to its people. Two years later, Red Candle Games launched *Devotion* (Red Candle Games, 2019) which delves even deeper. Its fractured narrative and unreliable memories mirrored the fragmented identities formed under the White Terror's relentless gaze. Here, the most chilling prison was not the regime's, but the one built within, brick by brick, from years of surveillance and self-policing. This paper argues that the game displays complex layers of surveillance, as in Foucault's (1977) *Discipline and punish*

in the tapestry of 1960s and 1980s Taiwan. The inclusion of Taiwanese perspectives in this research is important for preserving and promoting Taiwanese voices in the global discourse, particularly in the realm of digital media and interactive storytelling.

By dissecting the layers of surveillance, this paper explores how these games translate the lived experience of paranoia and surveillance into tangible gameplay mechanics. This research employs discourse analysis to explore how *Devotion* and *Detention* illustrate the power relationships inherent in Taiwanese society during the White Terror period.

Discourse analysis, as articulated by Foucault, examines how power is exercised through language, symbols, and cultural artifacts. In the context of game studies, however, discourse extends beyond traditional textual analysis; it encompasses the multimodal elements of games – visuals, mechanics, player interactions, and narratives – creating a dynamic space where meaning is negotiated between the game and the player. According to Gee (2015), the syntax of a game refers to its underlying structure – how various elements combine to create a coherent experience. This includes the game's mechanics, rules, and narrative flow. The semantics, on the other hand, encompass the meanings assigned to these elements within the game's context, shaped by players' interactions and the cultural knowledge they bring to the gaming experience.

By viewing games through this dual framework, we can analyse how they communicate meaning and engage players in unique ways. For instance, in *Detention* and *Devotion*, the representation of surveillance is not merely a narrative device; it is embedded in the mechanics and interactions that players experience. The way players navigate through environments, interact with objects, and confront challenges offers a means to critique real-world surveillance systems. Foucault's concepts of biopolitics, biopower, and governmentality will be central to understanding how these games depict the intricate ways in which power operates and is internalized by individuals. Both games insightfully capture the representation of horror in response to socio-political turmoil and cult culture in the specific historical contexts of the local community.

The White Terror in Taiwan

White Terror's origin can be traced back to World War II. According to Shattuck (2017):

> In Taiwan, the period immediately following the 228 Incident is known as the "White Terror" for the massive suppression, murder, and imprisonment of political dissidents, or anyone who the Kuomintang (KMT), known as Nationalists in English, perceived as a threat to its one-party rule. The Martial Law that was implemented in the aftermath of the incident was not lifted until 1987. The story of the 228 Incident – named after the day on which the terror began, February 28 – can be traced back to 1945 and the rampant dissatisfaction that local Taiwanese had for the governing officials of the Republic of China after the end of World War II. (Shattuck 2017, paras. 1-2).

However, within two years of this transition, the KMT government, the ruling party of China and Taiwan faced numerous allegations of corruption while their economy was deteriorating alarmingly. This was largely because the KMT struggled to tackle the charismatic Mao Zedong's growing influence in mainland China and stay in power. Following their defeat by the Communist forces led by Mao, the KMT, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek, strategically retreated to Taiwan. Taiwan became the last bastion for the KMT, marking the commencement of a complex and repressive chapter in the island's history. To counter KMT's policies, the local population organized a protest, which was

met with severe suppression from the government. The February Twenty-Eighth (228) Incident in 1947 marked a pivotal moment in the history of the country. It was a violent uprising against the ruling Kuomintang government, sparked by an altercation between a cigarette vendor and a government official. The protests, fuelled by frustration with corruption, economic hardship, and a desire for self-determination, quickly spread across the islands. Shih and Chen (2010) note that Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the KMT, responded with ruthless force. He sent 50,000 troops to Taiwan to quell the rebellion, leading to widespread arrests, executions, and disappearances. The exact number of people killed during the 2-28 Incident in 1947 remains unknown, but estimates range from 10,000 to 20,000.

The government then imposed martial law in 1949, which lasted till 1987 and came to be known as the White Terror. This period between 1949-1987 was characterized by political repression, censorship, and widespread human rights abuses, and had a profound impact on the social and cultural fabric of the country. Over the ensuing decades, the KMT government employed a multifaceted approach, utilizing informants, propaganda, and censorship to oversee and control its citizens. Numerous Taiwanese residents were apprehended, detained, and exposed to brutal treatment, including coercion for confessions, without receiving fair trials, often leading to their execution. The KMT government effectively implemented a network of informants to monitor and report on the activities of citizens, subjecting suspected dissidents to surveillance at all societal levels. This pervasive surveillance created a "state of conscious and permanent visibility that guarantees the programmed functioning of power" (Foucault, 1977, p. 201).

During this period, citizens in Taiwan existed under the constant gaze of surveillance, living in perpetual fear of being observed and reported upon. This 1984-esque situation permeated from the political sphere to the personal and public spheres very effectively with operatives infiltrating schools, workplaces, and religious institutions (Chen, 2008). As Foucault (1977) aptly observed, "the school tends to constitute minute social observatories that penetrate even to the adults and exercise regular supervision over them" (p. 211). This comprehensive monitoring discouraged active participation in public life, fostering a society marked by apprehension, suspicion, and social isolation.

After the death of the KMT's longtime leader, Chiang Kai-shek, in 1975, his son, Chiang Ching-kuo, who succeeded him, was more open to reform and initiated gradual political liberalization measures. His successor, Lee Teng-hui began to try to settle accounts of Taiwan's past; Ching-kuo was portrayed as the initiator of democracy, and his followers – collaborators with the repressive regime, even if they had not all been perpetrators of abuses themselves – stayed in power during a period when the truth about the past was starting to become a matter of public discussion (Shih, 2014). After the end of the White Terror in 1987, efforts were made to give voice to the victims through personal narratives and critical examination of historical records. For instance, Chen Yingzhen's (1988) *Lingdang hua* [Bell Flowers], first released in the April 1983 edition of *Wenxue Jikan* [Literary Quarterly], sheds light on Taiwan's post-Nationalist retreat situation. Following the KMT's complete retreat to Taiwan, they would utilize the declaration of martial law to maintain an ongoing state of emergency on the island, and in conjunction with other legislation, they would wield authoritarian control over its citizens and government (Cheung, 2016). Subsequently, various films and novels were created to recount numerous tales of disappearances, punishments, and death. Films such as *Super Citizen Ko* (Jen, 1995), and *A City of Sadness* (Hou, 1989) cinematically portrayed the condition of Taiwan during that time. These multimedia platforms played a major role in bringing the accounts of White Terror's victims into the limelight.

Playable Surveillance: Oppression in Digital Games

One specific medium that emerged to explore the impact of White Terror in Taiwan on individuals and society was digital games. Digital games not only allow exploration of White Terror's impact in Taiwan but also provide an experiential view of its effects on individuals and society. Lima (2019) considers digital games to be a highly political medium. This is attributed not only to their ability to expose political content but also to their capacity to question hegemonic thought through their stories and mechanics. Additionally, Digital games are capable of mobilizing the public towards action.

Within this landscape, Digital games like *Detention* and *Devotion* have provided a distinctive digital portrayal of Taiwan's White Terror regime, marked by pervasive surveillance, control, and psychological consequences. The two critically acclaimed games from Red Candle Games have recently been added to the collections of the Harvard-Yenching Library at Harvard University for preservation and educational purposes (Carpenter, 2020). These games provide an immersive platform that offers unique perspectives on the intricate facets of White Terror and how power was implemented through surveillance. Players of these games first-hand experience the consequences of surveillance, experiencing the fear and paranoia that the characters undergo and grappling with the psychological toll it extracts. *White Day: A Labyrinth Named School* (Sonnori, 2001) is a similar survival horror game developed in South Korea, drawing its terror from the school's former use as a hospital during the Korean War. The disruption of feng shui from associating with the morbid setting transforms the school from a safe space into one fraught with danger. As with *Detention,* players experience the consequences of the site's tragic history first-hand, preserving the historical narrative in a distinctive and immersive manner. Rather than providing simplistic answers, these games invite players to navigate the complex and often contradictory dimensions of surveillance, making surveillance playable. This concept integrates Foucault's theory of discipline and surveillance within the interactive domain of digital games, offering a means to understand how these digital environments simulate, critique, and reconfigure real-world systems of power and control. It highlights the active, participatory nature of surveillance within games, where players engage with and, at times, become agents of these mechanisms. In doing so, *playable surveillance* reveals how games can simulate the tension between agency and control, drawing attention to how these dynamics unfold in a game. This framework is particularly useful for analysing games with themes of surveillance, especially those situated in historical, political, or dystopian contexts. For instance, the security camera mechanic utilized in *Five Nights at Freddy's* (Cawthon, 2014), and the documented experiments performed on unwilling asylum inmates in *Outlast* (Red Barrels, 2013) shows the powerful impact of surveillance as a tool, revealing how it can backfire on those who use it. The concept of playable surveillance functions not only as an analytical tool but also as a comprehensive methodology for examining the ways games simulate and critique power, control, and authority. It emphasizes identifying the specific mechanics that simulate surveillance and mechanics that are embedded within the narrative – whether they reinforce or challenge the surveillance theme and how player agency is shaped by these dynamics. This study will examine these elements to demonstrate the effectiveness of this framework.

Detention and *Devotion* respectively address the traumatic past of Taiwan's White Terror period and the rise of religious cults, these horror games offer their players immersive experiences by reintroducing them to the past in hopes of reshaping their

relationships to the living present - given the fact that such terrors still loom over Taiwan in alternative forms today (Tse, 2022).The spectres of surveillance, self-censorship, and repression introduced during the White Terror era still echo today in alternative forms, such as heightened government monitoring in public spaces, tensions around national identity, and a complex relationship with powerful neighbouring states. This subtle, yet pervasive influence shapes Taiwan's cultural and political landscape, where fears of external control and ideological suppression still resonate. Both *Detention* and *Devotion* revolve primarily around puzzles and adventures set in liminal spaces. These games focus on the players' ability to escape from ghostly apparitions and disturbing memories by deciphering clues scattered throughout the gameplay. Flashbacks, seamlessly integrated into various cutscenes, offer glimpses into the past, revealing the profound complexities of surveillance and control during the White Terror era. Playable surveillance in *Detention* and *Devotion* is a multifaceted concept that manifests through gameplay mechanics, narrative structure, and environmental design. By integrating surveillance into the core gameplay, these games create an atmosphere of pervasive watchfulness, where players must constantly monitor their actions and decisions.

In *Detention*, which immerses players in a world where characters grapple with the spectres of their past and the oppressive forces of a surveillance state, white terror is represented using its narrative and horror setting. In *Detention*, players navigate a school under martial law, where every corner could hide a monitor or informer. The gameplay forces players to be cautious and stealthy, embodying the experience of living under a regime of surveillance. Two years after the release of *Detention*, Red Candle Games released *Devotion* on Steam, a global platform for digital video game distribution. *Devotion* explores the psychological consequences of surveillance within a family. According to Wu (2022), *Devotion* approaches historical horror and gaming politics more subtly than *Detention*, which focuses explicitly on the White Terror theme. While the primary theme of *Devotion* revolves around the religious fervour in Taiwan during the martial law, it conceals a political subtext that has ignited heated debates regarding cross-strait relations.

The game's protagonist, Du Feng Yu, is a scriptwriter entangled in a web of devotion to a cult, exerting control over his daughter, Mei Shin. *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* (Capcom, 2017), another survival horror game, has used this premise to a similar effect, as its protagonist Ethan Winters, who is determined to recover his missing wife, is caught in the schemes of Eveline, a young girl who is fixated on the notion of having the couple as her 'parents'. Feng Yu's actions epitomize the biopolitical aspect of power, where control extends not only over bodies but also over minds. A discourse analysis is required to understand how these games use their narrative, gameplay, and symbols to explore themes like surveillance and control during the White Terror in Taiwan. In this context, Foucault's (1977) seminal work, *Discipline and punish* becomes indispensable. His comprehensive analysis provides an essential framework for comprehending the operational mechanisms of control, pervasive surveillance, and the manifestations of authority during the White Terror era. Chen (2008) argues that the theories of discipline, punishment, and domination in Foucault's (1977) *Discipline and punish* can help explain the KMT's success in dominating Taiwanese society. According to Chen (2008):

> When one examines the history of Taiwan, the 228 massacre and the initial capture and execution of Taiwanese community leaders solidified Taiwan's Damien experience, whereas the consequential KMT oppressive control methods fits with the Foucault's over all theory on successful management to oppress by modern authoritarian regimes. The Taiwanese learned through gaining the knowledge from the collective experience that the consequence of violating the power of the KMT was either imprisonment or death. (Chen 2008, pp. 191-192)

Foucault's work is particularly relevant to understanding how the KMT regime managed to maintain its grip on power during the White Terror period in Taiwan. Applying these theories to digital games can provide a more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding Taiwan's dark period. By examining the Taiwanese digital games, *Detention* and *Devotion*, this study will explore how these games navigate the intricacies of Taiwan's tumultuous past. Through a careful analysis of the games' themes, narratives, and gameplay mechanics, this study seeks to explore how digital games can be used to engage with historical events and facilitate a deeper understanding of complex historical contexts. Through the analysis of these game, the study also seeks to introduce a new methodology of playable surveillance for games with themes of surveillance, especially those set in historical, political, or dystopian contexts.

Monitoring the Space of Learning: Depiction of Surveillance and Power during the White Terror Period in *Detention*

Detention quickly accumulated hundreds of thousands of downloads on the digital platform and attracted a large group of loyal gamers domestically and internationally (Wu, 2021). Lee (2019) highlights that *Detention* draws inspiration from an actual incident occurring in 1949 at Keelung Middle School, where the discovery of an underground newspaper led to the execution of the school principal and the imprisonment of hundreds of students. The game takes some elements from this incident and many other incidents of that period. According to Foucault (1977), surveillance is a tool to exercise control and implement a particular ideology.

The game is a mix of nostalgia and horror with religious and horror themes drawn from Buddhist, Taoist and Chinese mythology as well as Taiwanese culture of the 1960s to depict the psychological and emotional torment experienced by the people of Taiwan. The horror in the case of *Detention* stems from its recollection of events of White Terror whether it is in the form of the image of a prisoner handcuffed in the background or the disturbing scene of Wei ChungTing's body – Ray's junior, whose death she envisions as part of her guilt – hanging upside-down.

Foucault's concept of the Panopticon is central to understanding the mechanisms of surveillance depicted in *Detention*. The Panopticon, a design for a prison by Jeremy Bentham, allows a single guard to observe all inmates without them knowing whether they are being watched, creating a state of conscious and permanent visibility that ensures the automatic functioning of power. This idea is evident in this game's setting, where the constant threat of being observed by authorities, even in the absence of visible guards, instils a sense of perpetual surveillance among the characters. In *Detention*, the school functions as a microcosm of the larger surveillance state. The character Ray navigates through the corridors, classrooms, and hidden spaces of the school, which are imbued with the haunting presence of surveillance. This design ensures that students are aware they could be under observation at any time, fostering a sense of being constantly watched. This leads to

self-regulation and compliance with the regime's ideology. The environment itself becomes a tool of discipline, as described by Foucault (1977): "The perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary" (p. 201). Throughout the game, players interact with various characters who embody different responses to the surveillance state. Dialogues often reveal fears, compliance, and resistance, highlighting how individuals internalize the expectations of authority figures. The conversations players engage in are not just passive; they require choices that can influence the narrative. This aspect of playable surveillance allows players to reflect on the moral complexities of collaboration versus resistance, echoing the pressures faced by individuals in authoritarian regimes.

The main character, Ray, is trapped in the school and must solve puzzles to free herself. Players go on a journey with Ray as they piece together her memories and uncover what must have happened in the school. There is no one in the school, but there are patches of blood. Lingered spirits, reminiscent of hungry ghosts of Buddhist lore and images of prisoners form the background. Ray is alone but her memories are here to remind her why. Even though she is trapped in school, the rules of time and space are suspended. Ray is not in an ordinary realm; the school has transformed into Diyu – the Chinese underworld. Ray's memory embodies the darker side of a state that claims to just remove the evils of Japanese education. There are benches with blood, clues revealed after cutting Wei's throat, and prohibition of some books. The approaching typhoon is a metaphor for the dangers awaiting students inside and outside the school during martial law.

There is a propaganda movie playing and we see Ray openly admitting to how the military plays this movie as part of the government's ideology. They are not allowed to read certain books, they are not allowed to listen to certain music, and anyone who dares to defy it is labelled a 'communist spy' and punished. By 1958, KMT established 28 newspapers, 498 journals, and magazines to be used in schools. Their ideology was extensively promoted in schools. Foucault argues that power and knowledge are intertwined, with power producing knowledge and knowledge reinforcing power (Chen, 2008). This relationship is evident in *Detention* through the control of information and the propagation of state ideology. The game depicts how the KMT used education as a tool to shape the minds of young Taiwanese, promoting pro-Chinese and anti-Communist narratives while suppressing Taiwanese culture and language. The game's use of journal notes, symbols, and puzzles reveals the hidden history and forbidden knowledge that the regime sought to erase. Ray's journey to uncover these truths mirrors Foucault's assertion that power operates by concealing certain realities and constructing an official narrative that serves its interests. The presence of forbidden books and the clandestine book club led by Miss Yin represent acts of resistance against the state's control of knowledge, challenging the hegemonic discourse imposed by the KMT.

Teachers from mainland China were favoured and Taiwanese teachers were treated as secondary. Even the songs and anthems in schools such as "I am a Chinese", and "Fight our war back to the mainland" promoted the KMT's ideology. Taiwanese culture was repressed and even the use of the Taiwanese language was not allowed. Mandarin became the official language of Taiwan and KMT justified its repressive policies by stating that communist organizers were able to deceive the Taiwanese because of 'evil education from Japanese' (Chen, 2008). These measures ruled the lives of all the people living in Taiwan. The situation in Taiwan was that of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon coming to life. Foucault (1977) discussed Jeremy Bentham and his modern prison design, talking about how removing those who are considered 'trouble-makers' from society and rehabilitating and disciplining them is one of the best ways to maintain control over the rest of society. Ray and her friends are not allowed to study the other side of the Chinese Civil War, they are not allowed to read books apart from those approved by the system. They are prisoners waiting to be punished the moment they fail to follow the path laid down for them by the

KMT. To achieve this, it is at once too much and too little that the prisoner should be constantly observed by an inspector: too little, for what matters is that he knows himself to be observed; too much, because he has no need in fact of being so (Foucault, 1977).

Statues of Chiang Kai-Shek are in every institute, a reminder of who people need to obey. There is a note on the school board with a message about instructor Bai requesting students to report individuals displaying pro-Communist sentiments or indications of disloyalty. Generous rewards are promised for informants. Instructor Bai stands for Chaing Kai-shek here. Rewards are a testament to the KMT's deep entrenchment in Taiwan's society and a clear indication of their capabilities. Foucault's notion of discipline involves the meticulous control of bodies to produce docile and obedient subjects. In *Detention*, this is depicted through the school's strict regulations and the severe punishments meted out for any deviations from the prescribed norms.

Instructor Bai's announcement requesting students to report individuals displaying pro-Communist sentiments or indications of disloyalty is a direct reflection of the disciplinary measures employed by the KMT regime. The promise of generous rewards for informants further incentivizes surveillance, turning individuals into agents of the state's disciplinary apparatus. This aligns with the idea that discipline imposes a relation of docility-utility on individuals, transforming them into compliant subjects who serve the interests of the power structure (Foucault, 1977).

Ray finds pieces of her past scattered and hidden, puzzles putting together the horrors of living in a society where fostering dreams became a crime. Ray's home is in disarray, her mother reports her father, and he is jailed for crimes unclear. The only bright spot in her life is the counsellor in whom she finds love and solace. The stability in Ray's life, however, is threatened when the counsellor, Mr. Chang, stops seeing her, and Ray fears losing him for good. This fear is exacerbated when she eavesdrops on a conversation between Mr. Chang and Miss Yin and misinterprets their discussion. Mr. Chang, believing that Ray is old enough to make her own decisions, takes her to see a movie, crossing professional boundaries and blurring the lines of their relationship. This budding affair, though kept relatively private, is problematic due to the significant power imbalance and Ray's emotional vulnerability. The relationship comes to an abrupt end when Miss Yin intervenes, asserting that Mr. Chang should not date a student. This intervention underscores the ethical boundaries that Mr. Chang has overstepped and highlights the potential harm in such an imbalanced relationship. The situation leaves Ray feeling abandoned and misunderstood, intensifying her emotional turmoil and sense of isolation. According to Ray, Miss. Yin was the reason behind her loneliness and separation from Mr. Chang. Lonely and angry, she picks the way she feels would provide her with revenge. She became the 'merciless patriot'. In anger, she submits to instructor Bai GuoFang the list of books that the Miss Yin-led hidden book club is reading. She did this by using Wei ChungTing, her junior, by telling him she wanted to read the books as well, but all she wanted was the list. Wei and his fellow book club members, in an attempt to dispose of the banned books, set them ablaze. Ray has become what she initially recognized as part of propaganda, she becomes the spy that will lead to the arrest and imprisonment of her classmates. Chang, implicated in the crime, faces execution. The game's narrative explores practices of exclusion, as those who do not conform to the regime's expectations are ostracized or punished. This is evident in the fate of Fang Ray Shin's classmates, who suffer under the weight of societal and political pressures. The disciplinary mechanisms at play, which exclude deviant behaviours and enforce conformity, echo Foucault's analysis of how power operates through exclusion and normalization. Instructor Bai, acknowledging Ray's role in informing on her friends, rewards her with an accolade. This reward has two purposes, showcasing the KMT's ability to track any hidden activity and punish people who are not following the right path.

Ray's actions render her an outcast, ostracized by her peers. This leads to Ray taking her own life. Surveillance here not only harms the people incriminated but also the very harbingers of surveillance suffer. The player is revealed to be Ray's tormented spirit, trapped in a cycle of guilt and unable to find solace. People who commit suicide cannot pass through Acheron and reincarnate, according to Taiwanese and Chinese tradition. As a ghost confined to Earth, one may only relive the horrific memories. After being refused many times, Ray's spirit shattered, and she lost her memories. Ray aims to use this game to absolve her guilt, confront her past crimes, and move beyond her sorrow to achieve reincarnation. The shift from overt physical control to more subtle forms of psychological manipulation and internalized control is depicted through the characters' experiences. The gameplay ultimately invites players to reflect on their own responses to authority and the choices they make under pressure. This evolution of power dynamics aligns with Foucault's idea that modern power operates more through normalization and self-regulation than through direct coercion. As Wu (2022) claims, beyond being a victim of historical forces, Ray embodies the agonizing question of individual responsibility within a repressive system. This internal turmoil is mirrored in the game's haunting interrogations: "Have you forgotten...? Or do you not want to remember?" and "Forgotten? Or just too afraid to remember?" These questions challenge Ray, and by extension, the player, to confront the complex relationship between personal choice and systemic oppression. Fang Ray Shin's journey is one of both complicity and resistance. Her involvement with the book club, which is a front for anti-regime activities, represents a form of resistance against the oppressive power structures. The game portrays her internal conflict and the heavy price of dissent, reflecting the assertion of Foucault (1977) that where there is power, there is resistance.

The only survivors of this incident are Miss Yin, who sought refuge across the waves, exiled for half a century, and Wei Chung Ting, who was imprisoned for fifteen years, his youthful curiosity condemned as radical. As Chen (2008) argues, the KMT employed a four-pronged strategy to control and mold Taiwanese civil society into its vision: brutal coercion, pervasive indoctrination through education, a reshaping of social hierarchies, and the fabrication of a 'pro-Chinese' identity for indigenous peoples. *Detention*, a politically astute game, transforms these KMT methods into unsettling spectres haunting the player's supernatural journey. As the game concludes, *Detention* raises questions about the extent of the violence and surveillance it depicts, prompting reflection on just how brutal and suppressive that era must have been for the people of Taiwan.

Monitoring the Homestead: Representation of Surveillance and Control during White Terror in *Devotion*

In 2019, two years after the haunting exploration of Taiwanese history in *Detention*, Red Candle Games released *Devotion*, a chilling first-person psychological horror game that immerses players into the heart of 1980s Taiwan. The game delves deep into the socio-political landscape of 1980s Taiwan, juxtaposing personal tragedy with broader

historical narratives. The game is set in the 1980s when the KMT's rule came to an end. At face value, the main setting of *Devotion* fixates on the religious frenzy that occurred in Taiwan as the island was approaching the lifting of martial law. However, the political message hidden behind the storyline of the video game has fuelled raging controversies over cross-strait relations (Wu, 2022).

While its narrative revolves around the intimate ties of family, it expands outward to embrace the island nation itself as a home for its citizens. Through this lens, *Devotion* reflects upon the effects of white terror on the psyche, societal structure, and the very essence of Taiwanese society. However, the game's rapid success faced a halt when it caught the eye of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Just two days later, the digital game was accused of featuring a Taoist charm that intentionally mocks Chinese President Xi Jinping. It was discovered that the charm combined two written parts: "Xi Jinping Winnie the Pooh" (Xi Jinping xiao xiong Weini 習近平小熊維尼) in Chinese cursive writing and "Ni ma ba qi" (呢 嘛叭唭) in Chinese, which sounds like "Your mom is an idiot" in Taiwanese dialect (Wu, 2022). Cultural memes featuring Xi and Pooh went viral on Chinese social media back in 2013, but this comic parallel has been censored by the Chinese government for years, perhaps because Pooh describes himself as a "bear of very little brain" (AFP, 2017, para. 2). Consequently, *Devotion* faced swift repercussions: banned in China and removed from the Steam platform.

But amidst the controversy, the impact of *Devotion* on the global gaming landscape remained undeniable. As of today, *Devotion* is only available for download on the official website of Red Candle Games (Wu, 2022). The story revolves around Du Feng Yu, the patriarch, who clings to tradition and unwavering faith, his mind clouded by a past he struggles to confront. Gong Li Fang, his wife, sacrifices her dreams for the family's sake, her resilience masking a simmering resentment. Du Mei Shin, their daughter, trapped in a web of her psychological battles becomes a tragic pawn in their desperate game of devotion. Foucault's concept of the "docile body" describes individuals molded through constant, internalized surveillance – not just by physical forces, but through social norms, cultural expectations, and the fear of reprisal. *Devotion*, the family members are positioned within a discourse of devotion and control, where their roles are dictated by societal and familial expectations. As Foucault (1977) noted, individuals are 'effects' of power, created by and within discourse. The concept of playable surveillance is particularly significant in *Devotion*, as it allows players to experience the oppressive dynamics of the household and societal expectations through interactive gameplay.

Du Feng Yu and his family's tragedy stems from external pressures and the insidious panopticon they had built within themselves. Feng Yu becomes his own most vigilant jailer. Li Fang, burdened by unspoken resentments and the weight of expectations, polices her desires, turning inward like a prisoner in a self-made cell. Disciplining the soul via the medium of religion is another tactic explored in the game. It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion or an ideological effect. Discipline:

> is produced permanently around, on, and within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished – and, in a more general way, on those one supervises, trains and corrects, over madmen, children at home and school, the colonized, over those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives (Foucault, 1977, p. 29).

Religion, often seen as a space for liberation and individual growth, can under certain circumstances morph into a powerful tool for shaping docile bodies. The pressure to conform to specific doctrines, the internalization of religious authority, and the fear of divine retribution can all contribute to creating individuals who readily self-regulate and comply with prescribed norms. In this way, *Devotion* becomes a powerful allegory for the

psychological impact of political control, where the fear of external surveillance becomes internalized, shaping the very fabric of family dynamics and ultimately leading to the tragic consequences of blind devotion. The television, posters, and religious artifacts reflect the omnipresence of external and internalized surveillance. These cultural artifacts serve as constant reminders of the power structures that shape the family's life.

Beadle (2022) notes that the spaces and dimensions of the game are in a constant state of flux and displacement, throwing players disorientingly between the domestic (Feng Yu's flat), textual (in one scene, players inhabit the 2D illustrations of a children's book), televisual/intra-digital (players piece much of the plot together by watching Mei-shin on television), and the spirit realm (afterlives, Palace of the Primordial Soul, sanctuary). The game begins with the TV blaring a weather report of an approaching typhoon which seems appropriate considering 1985 was the year the Pacific typhoon season came. The flickering gaze of television becomes Feng Yu's sole window to the world beyond these walls. There are moments when static swallows the picture whole, the hiss a chilling echo of Feng Yu's fractured mental state. Feng Yu's screenwriting career, once promising, was choked by censorship, his words deemed subversive, his voice silenced. The fear of being constantly watched and judged influences characters' behaviours and decisions, aligning with the assertion that "power is everywhere" and comes from everywhere (Foucault, 1977, p. 205). The KMT regime, determined to forge a unified Chinese identity on the island, wields television as a weapon of assimilation, chipping away at the vibrant tapestry of Taiwanese voices and replacing them with a single, homogenizing melody. Soon after the establishment of the KMT regime, all indigenous languages and Japanese were banned from use in public. As a result, many public offices were given to the Chinese population since most Taiwanese could not speak the national language (Tsao, 2000). This linguistic silencing was not confined to the radios and televisions. The KMT regime banned public performances of Taiwanese songs, music and theatre. The KMT prohibited the performance of Taiwanese opera and replaced it with the Peking Opera, which was the favourite of Chiang Kai-Shek (Chen, 2008).

Li Fang, the mother, is introduced as a former movie star and singer, embodying beauty and talent. Her daughter, Mei Shin, aspires to follow in her footsteps, dreaming of singing competitions and stardom. As time passes, it becomes evident that Feng Yu's desperation grows with each passing year. His career stagnates, and the pressure he puts on his daughter Mei Shin to succeed intensifies. Blinded by his love and fear, Feng Yu refuses medical advice for Mei Shin's anxiety, clinging instead to the promises of Mentor Heuh's cult of Cigu Guanyin. In *Devotion*, the dissemination of cult beliefs and the suppression of medical knowledge regarding Mei Shin's condition illustrate the struggle between different forms of knowledge. Feng Yu's reliance on the cult's teachings over medical advice reflects how power can shape and distort knowledge. The game portrays how ideological power can manipulate individuals, making them complicit in their subjugation. Even when she discovers a potentially healthier coping mechanism for her mental health, the fear of disrupting the fragile family ecosystem and disappointing her father keeps her silent. The effects of a biopolitical environment, in which familial control operates in tandem with societal pressures to repress human autonomy and impede healing, are embodied in the stillness. This feeling of desperation culminates in a ritual involving snake wine and confinement, which ultimately leads to Mei Shin's death. Her silence is a testament to the effects of panopticism within the family, where the fear of disrupting the delicate equilibrium of power supersedes individual needs and critical thinking. While Feng Yu enters the bathroom, a symbol of his controlling gaze, only to be engulfed by light and Mei Shin's ethereal melody, the preceding events paint a grim picture of Mei Shin's demise. This subversion, where surface appearances mask a horrifying truth, echoes Foucault's critique of disciplinary

power's hidden mechanisms, where control operates through subtle manipulations rather than overt force. In terms of the ludic experience, *Devotion* reaches high levels of "engrossment" and "empathy" that are made possible through players' "emotional investment" and "attachment to the game" (Hook, 2015, p. 317).

However, a glimmer of hope emerges in the final, spectral dialogue. Mei Shin's forgiveness, embodied in her invitation to 'go home', offers a potential path for Feng Yu to break free from the cycle of guilt and self-torture. This ambiguous resolution, where even death does not provide definitive answers, resonates with Foucault's notion of power's enduring presence, even in the afterlife. The static-filled television, Feng Yu's final companion, becomes a haunting symbol of the empty promises and inescapable gaze of oppressive systems. Heuh's fate, like the game's ending, remains shrouded in ambiguity. Did she face justice for her manipulative practices, or vanish with her ill-gotten gains? This uncertainty mirrors the elusive nature of power in Foucauldian analysis. Heuh's absence reinforces the notion that power structures themselves are often diffuse and unattributable, operating through networks of influence and societal norms rather than singular entities.

Conclusion

The psychological horror games *Detention* and *Devotion* highlight the deep scars left by oppression, showing how these experiences shape individual lives and national identities over time. These games encourage important conversations about healing and reconciliation while stressing the need to protect democratic values from the dangers of forgetting history. By depicting the widespread surveillance and control found in authoritarian regimes, *Detention* and *Devotion* challenge players to engage with the complex moral issues and psychological impacts of political persecution. In *Detention*, the constant surveillance reflects Foucault's idea of the panopticon, where power operates through ongoing observation and normalization of behaviour. This theme continues in *Devotion*, which explores how internalized surveillance within families and society can turn individuals into compliant subjects. The main characters, Fang Ray and Feng Yu, exemplify the 'docile body', as their actions and thoughts are shaped by both external pressures and internal fears. By immersing players in the struggles of these characters, the games make the horrors of the White Terror feel real and relatable, fostering empathy and encouraging reflection on past injustices.

The central contribution of this paper is the concept of playable surveillance, which we have framed as a critical and interactive methodology for analysing how surveillance, power, and control are embedded within digital games. This framework demonstrates that surveillance in these games is not just a visual or narrative device but is intricately tied to the mechanics of player choice, agency, and consequence. By requiring players to engage directly with these systems of control, the games transform abstract concepts of surveillance into embodied experiences. This perspective offers new insights into how digital games simulate societal power dynamics, encouraging players to actively negotiate their roles within these oppressive structures. The implications of playable surveillance extend beyond the specific examples of *Detention* and *Devotion.* As a framework, it provides a robust methodology for game researchers to analyse other games that explore similar themes of authority, compliance, and resistance, particularly within historical, political, or horror genres. Future research can build upon this framework to investigate how different game mechanics, such as player choice, environmental constraints, or the

design of non-playable characters (NPCs), create immersive experiences that challenge or reinforce players' perceptions of agency and morality.

Looking forward, the potential for further research on playable surveillance is substantial. By broadening the scope of analysis, this concept can contribute to a deeper understanding of the interactive experiences that shape cultural narratives and individual identities, ultimately fostering a more comprehensive examination of the role of digital games in reflecting and critiquing societal structure.

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