

Chapter 4

Homo Aestheticus’ Search for Violence: An Examination on the Aestheticization and Reception of Violence in Digital Games

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ABSTRACT

Homo-Aestheticus is a term that describes human art aesthetics and evolution under its effect. When we look at the artworks that came to our date million years ago, the similarities we encounter are the signs that our aesthetic preferences, understanding of beauty, and our tastes are a legacy from our ancestors. Aesthetic is not only an understanding adopted by our cultures; it has been with us for centuries. Similarly, violence appears as a concept that has been part of humanity for ages. It is an interdisciplinary concept that is center of attention of scientific fields particularly social sciences, art, sociology, psychology. As a result of digital developments, virtual reality, anonymous identities and together with the fantasy of the virtual world emerging with uncontrolled digital media eases presentation of the violence in digital medias. In video games, violence is presented to the player in an aesthetic way. This study aims to reveal how the aesthetics of violence in video game are received by the players and fill the gap in the literature.

INTRODUCTION

With today’s scientific knowledge, it is possible to see that the formation of the world is based on violence. Millions of years ago, a celestial body hitting the earth had caused all living existence to reform itself. The survival of all living species arises from the great destructions we see today as disasters. The human species was born out of the consequences of these destructions. When even the formation of our existence is caused by violent destructions, it is not surprising that the concept we call violence exists in human life. Human history has been shaped by thousands of devastating wars. It seems that

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-7464-8.ch004

the path of all known cultures of the human species somehow intersects with violence. Violence is not only an action performed by humans against one another but also is performed against other species as well. The bullfights that are still continuing today are among the most known examples of the violence against other species.

Therefore, leave aside being the species that practices the violence, the need to investigate the causes of this situation has arisen. That is why, the issue of violence has been the focus of fields like psychology, sociology and communication for years. On the other hand, Huizinga (2006: p. 127) says that violence and play are immanent. The concepts of play and violence are accepted to be realities of the human species. Because, Huizinga states that play exists in every living creature, and he defines the person who is a player as *Homo Ludens*, and many researchers such as Freud, McDougall and Lorenz argue that violence has a motivational need (Freedman, Sears and Carlsmith, 1989: p. 194).

Another reality for humans is aesthetic perception. It is understood that the common or personal tastes and preferences of people go back for centuries. Our aesthetic concerns, our tendency towards art, the things we call beautiful and their appeal have been with us for centuries. In this context, Ellen Dissanayake (1995) and Denis Dutton (2009) define human species as "*Homo Aestheticus*". The understanding of art, beauty, and aesthetic is a legacy left to *Homo Aestheticus* from its distant ancestors and our aesthetic tastes are linked to our evolutionary past and development.

This study focuses on the aesthetic presentation and reception of violence. Considering the transformation of the 21st century into the digital, this research has been conducted concentrating on digital games. The purpose of this study is to reveal how digital players receive aestheticized violence elements in digital game contents.

In the first part of the study, information related to the concept of aesthetics and the nomenclature of *Homo-Aestheticus* are presented. In the second part, the digital generation is touched on in order to understand what their pursuits are. In the third part, information is given about the studies and classifications on violence and aggression, and then the presentation of violence in digital games is mentioned. Lastly, a focus group discussion centered on the reception practices of the players who face with aestheticized violence elements in digital games is given a place.

ON AESTHETICS AND HOMO-AESTHETICUS

The word aesthetic, which comes from the Greek word "aisthesis", can be defined as "the philosophical branch that examines beauty and the nature of the fine arts". Aesthetics as a research area was developed for the first time by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. According to Baumgarten, aesthetics is the science of sensational knowledge. But aesthetic is also the essence of everything related to experience. It deals with the basic components of meaning, understanding, reasoning, and values of the human. For this reason, it is at the heart of having a meaningful experience and the ability to think wisely about it. The concept of beauty, which is within the field of aesthetics, was discussed for the first time by Plato and Aristotle. From ancient Greece to the Renaissance, beauty is thought to be an objective, physical feature, and that beauty is inherent in the object. However, over time, the idea that aesthetics is a subjective concept and that beauty is in the eyes of the viewer has become prominent (Tekel, 2015: p.150; Keskin, 2018, p. 16; Marc, 2018, pp. 200-201; Web_6, Access Date:14.12.2019; Web_3, Access Date: 03.12.2019). Although it is Baumgarten who added its current meaning to aesthetics, Immanuel Kant, who combined philosophical knowledge with aesthetics, should not be forgotten. According to Kant,

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