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**BIOSHOCK INFINITE AND THE PHENOMENON OF  
LEGITIMATE VIOLENCE: AN ANALYSIS BASED ON  
THE CONTRIBUTIONS BY HANNAH ARENDT**

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**ABSTRACT:** This research aims at contributing to the understanding of the contemporary “legitimate violence” phenomenon. For this, the paper presents the analysis of the fictional work *BioShock Infinite* through the philosophy of Hannah Arendt, considering the link between Law and art forms. The methodology employed is that of a bibliographic research, based on Gilbert Durand’s mythocritique, which aims at revealing the imagistic meanings behind art. It resulted in the advancement in understanding the symbology behind the name Columbia, the different forms of manifestation of tyranny and the role of the founding fathers as ancestors for American society. In addition, it resulted in a better perception of how the artistic work symbolizes the erosion of freedom in tyrannical regimes, of how propaganda is an essential tool for lying in politics, of how violence is the weapon of a government without authority, and of how the privileged citizens tolerate the oppression of the less favored people due to the banality of evil, *depersonalizing* them. Finally, it culminates in the idea that necessity operates as one of the worst types of violence and that civil disobedience is the true form of legitimate violence

**KEYWORDS:** theory of the imaginary; Hanna Arendt; narrative.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the era of scandals such as those of the NSA and Cambridge Analytica, it is no wonder that book-selling peaks occur, such as was the case with *Origins of totalitarianism* (Arendt, 2012) and *1984* (Orwell, 2005). Neither Arendt nor Orwell would imagine that we would ever give up our freedom and privacy so easily. They would be surprised to see the consequences of the Islamic threat or, even more trivially, of the convenience of using social networks. No use of force, but strangely close to the intolerable and oppressive lives described in dystopias<sup>3</sup>, such as Orwell's. Thus, it is necessary to conjugate the philosophy of Arendt and the contemporary dystopia which is one of the most insightful caricatures of Western society: *BioShock Infinite*. Released in 2013 and written and directed by Ken Levine, the videogame in question deals with a dystopian society, where there is a theocratic, intensely exclusionary and prejudiced dictatorial process, based on the ideology of the “American dream” and in a deeply nationalistic spirit.

Thus, this study has the intention of answering the following research questions: To what extent can analyzing the game *BioShock Infinite* through Hannah Arendt's philosophy contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon of legitimate violence?

Of course, the work by the political scientist is of great factual relevance, and it has been thoroughly read in the academic production of recent years. However, the research developed here is unique as it innovates in its object of analysis, since it makes use of Arendt as a tool in Law and Literature for the analysis of a video game – a rich media, although very recent and little explored<sup>4</sup>.

From the methodological bases pointed out by the Theory of the Imaginary, Gilbert Durand's mythocritique is used, combining psychology, classical positivist criticism and existential psychoanalysis. The use of these antagonistic techniques makes it possible, centrally, to

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<sup>3</sup> The Portuguese language dictionary *Priberam* (2018) defines dystopia as “an idea or description of an imaginary country or society in which everything is organized in an oppressive, frightening or totalitarian way, as opposed to a utopia”.

<sup>4</sup> The questions raised here come from discussions developed in the Research Group (In)Tolerance and Violence: Reflections from the concept of *Love Mundi* in Hannah Arendt, coordinated by Professor Rita Tabosa.

focus on the symbolic forms. Based on this, we propose, firstly, to define the theme that composes the lore of the work. Secondly, the aim is to delimit the characters, situations and other issues implicit to the chosen artistic-literary work. And, finally, to identify the lessons of the mythology in the game and to what extent they relate to other existing mythologies (Durand, 1985). This analysis was preceded by a literature review of the work by Hannah Arendt, aided by the reading of some of her interpreters such as Seyla Benhabib and Celso Lafer.

Following to that is a discussion of the chosen aspect in Hannah Arendt's work, clarifying her position on the phenomenon of violence. Then we set out to lay the foundations between law and other artistic-literary premises. Finally, and as a deepening process of the notions between law and the object of study, we relate the use of the imaginary theory in Gilbert Durand and the premises constructed from this methodological construction.

## **2 HANNAH ARENDT'S READING ON THE PHENOMENON OF VIOLENCE**

First of all, it is necessary to weave the concept of *vita activa* in the work of the author, in particular in *The human condition* (Arendt, 2007), since they permeate all her thought, especially with respect to her considerations on the phenomenon of violence. *Vita active* is, for the author, a form of social life that is full of occupations external to the man himself, is manifested through three fundamental activities: labor, fabrication and action.

In this way, labor would be the ephemeral human creation for his own subsistence. In Arendt's words (2007, p. 15), "it is the activity that corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism and eventual decline has to do with the vital needs produced and introduced by labor in the process of human life". As a simple example, she mentions a man who sows wheat to survive and be fed.

On the other hand, fabrication is the act of modifying the physical human world, remedying the fugacity of human life as it creates works that go into eternity (Arendt, 2007). As an example, we have the ruins of the Aztec cities, which survived centuries despite the death of the society that created them.

Finally, action is to take initiative or put something in motion, creating an immaterial human world. Therefore, it is a direct consequence of what the author calls the birth condition, which in turn consists of the coming of a completely new being to a world that is foreign to it. Precisely because he emerges as newbie in the world, man is capable of creating the new (Correia, 2007). Another necessary condition for action is that of plurality, and can be understood as being among its peers. Because of this, because it is necessarily intersubjective, action is manifested through discourse. Therefore, action is, in synthesis, the human activity par excellence, without the need of intermediate objects (differently from the other concepts), of creation of the genuinely new, among our peers, through discourse.

Another relevant aspect to the understanding of the phenomenon of violence in Arendt is her notion of modernity. For the author, we live in an age when tradition has completely eroded its solid foundations. Being tradition, an intergenerational bond of understanding and world experience, its tormentors were Marx, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard (Arendt, 2016).

First, Marx asserts that not reason, but labor creates man. In saying this, Marx challenges God, the overvaluation of reason and contempt for work. He breaks with tradition even more radically in his suggestion of a philosophy that gives up the already exhausted *theoria* and proceeds to *praxis* (Arendt, 2016).

Similarly, Nietzsche is notorious for his breakdown of paradigms. Through his idea of transvaluation, he puts Platonic idealism upside down by emphasizing the sensitive world at the expense of ideas. What matters, then, is our set of sensitive experiences, not ideas in their purity (Arendt, 2016).

On the other hand, Kierkegaard contributes to the erosion of tradition as he leaps from doubt to faith, breaking with Descartes' skepticism

(Arendt, 2016). That is, through existentialism, considering there are no immanent values, only those we create ourselves, he understands that the ideal individual is the one who, in the face of uncertainty, exercises faith in the transcendental.

Another aspect of modernity, for Arendt, is the emptiness of authority. This is, along with violence and power, a means by which one individual can impose his will on others (Arendt, 1970). It can be exercised by a single individual, as is the case of a teacher to the students, and needs respect, both to the individual who exercises the authority and to the concerted action that gave rise to that institution. With this, it is perceived that authority needs firm feet in the past, having as a bridge tradition itself. Once tradition is destroyed, authority is in crisis (Arendt, 2016). It is at that moment that revolutions emerge, which rely predominantly on power, and dictatorial governments, which rely predominantly on violence.

Power, for Arendt, is precisely that human action in concert. Although it seems redundant, since to be action it necessarily needs to be made in groups of people, the idea is that it is made effective by a group that converges onto a common goal. On the other hand, violence is understood as obedience through coercion, which will only be exercised where there is no longer authority. Consequently, violence appears in a much more systematic way in modernity, being used by the state as a means of imposing its will over that of its subjects, a role formerly exercised by authority (Arendt, 1970).

In this way, politics was seduced by terror. Since limited by its intrinsic boundaries, politics sees in terror the means by which it can promise what it alone cannot provide. In the case of the communist left, class equality is the object of this promise (Berkowitz, 2010).

Since the transition from the use of violence as *ultima ratio* in Antiquity to the main means of obedience, with Modernity, Arendt tries to rescue its past character. Violence in Arendt's work is so discouraged that Benhabib says:

In her rejection of violence as a form of political activity, and in substituting phronesis in speech for valor in war, which after all was the existential experience of the Homeric warrior-hero (think here of Achilles and his *mute* rage), Arendt appears to have undertaken a quiet feminist transformation of the Homeric warrior ideal into

the *tamer* and *more reasonable* Aristotelian deliberative citizen (1993, p. 103).

### 3 BETWEEN THE LAW AND OTHER ARTISTIC-LITERARY FORMS

It is worth noting that the analyzed videogame is dedicated to narrative itself, even to the point that the player's choices, an intrinsic element to the media, are irrelevant to the unfolding of the story. With this in view, as an epistemological choice, we intended to emphasize not the gameplay or the audiovisual aspect, but rather the narrative that is woven in the plot intertwined by the writer of the game. Moreover, given the lack of a specific theoretical contribution to videogames, it is no more appropriate to use Law in Literature – as the oldest and most profound form of Law and Art – in analogy to the understanding of the object of study chosen in the present work. In this sense, we use this intersection as it is the one mostly used to analyze both law and other artistic-literary forms.

The Law in Literature consists, in the words of the late Professor Luiz Carlos Cancellier de Olivo (2012, p. 14), in a field that:

[...] studies the forms under which law is represented in literature. It is not only a question of seeking juridical representations in literary texts, but above all, it uses the multiple perspectives that literature can offer, so as to make this material a possibility of multiplying the possibilities of thinking, interpreting, criticizing and debating the Law.

Thus, law does not manifest itself as mere narration, but rather as an exemplification of the legal imaginary, directly influencing the social imaginary of the political community, as Ost argues (2009). The author also asserts that literature provides answers, with very few exceptions, in an indirect and unpredictable way, bringing the two sciences together, regarding both their imaginary aspects and their practices (Ost, 2017).

With regard to the importance of understanding the legal phenomenon, literature is capable of providing us with a basis for an accurate perception of society – from where and to where law springs (Godoy, 2002). According to Godoy (2002), it also tells us what social groups think of the law.

Moreover, there are connections between art and law far beyond the mere utility of one another. According to Ferraz Júnior (2002), justice and

art are ideals that are difficult to achieve, but that give meaning to life. So too is utopia, an intangible ideal, but which, like the horizon, gives us a bearing as a society. The word utopia derives from the agglutination of the Greek words *ou* and *topos*, meaning, in its etymological origin, a non-place. Its first historical use was with Thomas More's fictional work, written in 1516, about a city of just life, where people work only 6 hours a day, with 2 resting hours, and 9 hours of sleep (More, 2004). It portrays a system of democratic government whose elected prince will rule until the end of his life, unless he aspires to tyranny (More, 2004). However, the concept of utopia long precedes More's work, such as Plato's Republic (2012), which was written in the fourth century BC and discusses political notions of justice through the Socratic dialogues. It culminates in the description of the ideal city for Plato, the Kallipolis, ruled by the philosopher king and, above him, by reason itself, being marked by the harmony between social classes.

On the other hand, the optimistic idealisms that anticipated the revolutions were replaced by disillusionment when facing the new reality, as unfairly as with the one that preceded it. In this sense, says Locchi (2016, p. 35):

If, until the end of the nineteenth century, literary productions were tending toward utopian speculation, for the example of confidence in the progress of man; the dystopian imaginary, anticipated in the eighteenth century, was consolidated in the twentieth century, when the explosion of the genre took place, driven by historical and political events.

In this way, dystopia would be a denial of utopia, a poisoned society, often of tyrannical tendencies, often with a tenuous difference separating utopia from dystopia, and may be only a matter of perspective. Law, then, serves as a pillar for the authoritarian and oppressive regime that often forms in this type of narrative (Matos, 2012).

For us, dystopia assists law in so far as it functions as a fable, not as a mere tragedy in its cathartic end, but as a real warning of how not to proceed in the construction of a society. If catharsis purges the emotions of

fear and piety through tragedy, in the Aristotelian ideology (Aristotle, 2008), what one sees in dystopia is a social tragedy and a cautionary tale.

Concerning Hannah Arendt's view on fictional narratives, Lafer claims that she used to tell her students at Cornell University that they needed to read "[...] a lot of fiction in order to get the experience not in the raw but without theoretical overtones" (Lafer, 2007, p. 295).

Moreover, the narrative for Arendt, by counting unspeakable sufferings, is capable both of giving us hope and of enabling us to reconcile with our own destiny. Likewise, the narrative has the power to concretize the so recurrent Kafkaesque parable in Arendt's work, to catapult us beyond the past and the future, allowing us to be impartial in the judgment. This timelessness is marked by the ability to make present to the mind the remembrance of the past, or even the prediction of the future (Assy, 2008).

#### **4 A BLIND LAW BEFORE THE IMAGINARY IN GILBERT DURAND**

In the advent of positivism, myth was relegated to the role of mere provisional explanation easily replaced by the definiteness and infallibility of science (Durand, 1985). Durand (2004, p. 10) understands that science, in its pursuit of the unfounded beliefs of religion, "[...] does not see that this positivism establishes itself as a myth – that all positive... events in history prove wrong – and as a progressive myth that paradoxically puts itself as a destroyer of the myth!"

However, with the advent of quantum physics, many of these paradigms have been broken down into the natural sciences. Like Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty, which says that because of the quantum properties of light, the precisions for measuring the position and speed of a particle are inversely proportional to each other, or precisely one or the other is measured, never two. Modern quantum physics is then based on an ontological, non-epistemic probability, so the use of probabilities is not merely a methodological choice – it is an inseparable property of subatomic matter (Hawking, 1988).

With the weakening of the myth of the objectivity and infallibility of science, the advent of theories of the unconscious in Freud, culminating



with the 20th century audiovisual explosion, the imaginary resurges in a central position (Durand, 2004). It is precisely in this context that Durand's theory of the imaginary emerges, which defines the imaginary as "the set of images and relations of images that constitute the thought capital of the *homo sapiens*" (Durand, 1989, p. 14, *apud* Pitta, 2017, p. 2).

According to Marques (2014), it is necessary to understand three fundamental concepts that compose Durand's theory of the imaginary: *schème*, archetype and symbol. The first corresponds to the instinctive inclinations of the animal-man, as is the case of the *schème* of the ascent that results from our bipedal verticality. The second one corresponds to primordial images common to all societies, as is the case of the archetype of the man who defies the gods, which derives (among others) from the *schème* of the ascent. As for the concept of symbols, it can be verified in the concrete manifestations of the imaginary – the myths – and represent the subjective messages they carry, like the symbol within the Greek myth of Icarus, in which a man enchanted by the flight defies the gods by getting closer to them than he should, being too ambitious for his own good.

All images have in common the purpose of dealing with human anguish in the face of the inevitability of death and time. These images converge to form constellations, gravitating around two nuclei: the diurnal regime and the nocturnal regime. The diurnal regime is marked by the division of opposites, and there is a conflict with evident sides. It corresponds to the heroic structure of the imaginary, reaching to its end the much sought victory over destiny and death. In contrast, the nocturnal regime is characterized by the union of opposites and the consequent difficulty of distinguishing them. It is realized through two structures: the mystical and the synthetic. The first brings its religious aspect of euphemism and harmonization, accepting death as an old friend or the desired rest. In turn, the synthetic structure reaffirms the cyclical movement of destiny, in which there is a dialectical relation of the opposites. He regards fate as a consequence of human actions, and death is not an end, but a restart (Pitta, 2017).

As for its utility, it is the functions of the symbolic imagination to achieve the vital equilibrium, in which it is created to overcome mortality; the psychosocial balance, by which personal impulses and their

surroundings are put in the work; the anthropological balance, in which, according to the work, the individual adapts to their historical context, and, finally, the transcendental balance, allowing to go beyond the physical world (Marques, 2014).

The law itself ends up being constructed as a myth (Anaz, Ceretta, 2016), composing the imaginary as it makes it seem that justice is attainable, that the figure of the judge represents the apex of human knowledge and that legal decisions are based on reason. Whether it is the dress code or the grandiose architecture that puts the figure of the judge higher than all, or due to the complicated words used there, fact is that however one analyzes the law, there is a symbol that communicates a single thing: “citizen, bow down before your gods”. In turn, the lawsuit unfolds as a narrative, which although non-fictional, is far from representing reality faithfully. Thus, law is undoubtedly a reaction to fear in the face of uncertainty, of heroic elevation of the applicator of law, and of simplification of reality by the separation of opposites.

Durand’s analytical framework was used, regarding the mythocritique, in the game *BioShock Infinite*. In addition to what is self-evident in the Law in Literature movement, we tried to open the curtains of the stage, blow away the smoke and break the mirrors for the magic of art to reveal itself.

## 5 DISCUSSIONS

Firstly, the aim is to clarify the plot of *BioShock Infinite* for those who did not have the opportunity to play it. Next, the structure of the fictional regime of Columbia, inserted in the work in question, was analyzed from the perspective of the work by the political scientist Hannah Arendt. Finally, we deal, still based on Arendt’s thoughts, with the behavior of the individuals that make up that society in the face of its peculiarities.

### 5.1 Plot summary of *BioShock Infinite*

*BioShock Infinite* is a videogame developed by Irrational Games, written and directed by Ken Levine and released in March 2013. It is set in 1912 and deals with the city of Columbia, designed by Zachary Hale Comstock, a Protestant religious who prophesied to his followers this new

Eden, in the sight of an angel. The angel also said that the founding fathers were saints and that they placed America on a plateau above any other nation. As a result, the cult following the prophet was renamed the Founders.

To realize his vision of a floating city, Comstock relies on the technology of Rosalind Lutece and with Congressional funding, using his influence as a war hero. Already built, in the advent of the War of the Boxers<sup>5</sup>, the United States breaks relations with Columbia, since this one used of extreme cruelty to obtain the victory. In turn, the floating city recognizes itself as the true America and declares its hatred for the United States, which it refers to as “Sodom below”.

Still, that same technology discovered by Lutece allows the creation of interdimensional ruptures, which assured Comstock the ability to see in the future, reinforcing his prophet persona. With such crevices, extremely advanced technologies were also discovered, capitalized on by the city’s unscrupulous businessman, Jeremiah Fink.

However, prolonged exposure to the cleft causes side effects on Comstock, causing him to age prematurely and become sterile. The prophet, in one of his visions for the ruptures, realizes that the city will only prosper if he has a daughter. So he goes to another dimension where he is already a father and kidnaps the child. Later, through this same cleft, he sees that the real father is going to try to rescue her, so Comstock takes every precaution to prevent this from happening.

Coming from nowhere with the baby, Comstock ends up scaring his wife, who thinks the child is the result of an affair between the prophet and Rosalind Lutece. But the dictator convinces the population that the baby, which he calls Elizabeth, was the result of a miraculous gestation of 2 months. But whether through Lady Comstock’s intolerance of the child or to avoid her rescue, the prophet places her in an isolated house, inside the gigantic statue of an angel guarded by a flying creature called Songbird.

Two years later, no longer enduring that lie, Lady Comstock intends to reveal the truth about Elizabeth to the people of Columbia. However, the

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<sup>5</sup> Revolt initiated by the secret society Yihequan, against the western and Christian influence in China, in year of 1899.

prophet cannot allow his secret to be revealed and kills his wife, blaming a servant, Daisy Fitzroy. Once hunted, Fitzroy becomes an anarchist movement of resistance to the Comstock regime, Vox Populi.

On the other hand, Rosalind Lutece uncovers the intentions of Comstock for Elizabeth, to lead Columbia and to rain down fire in Sodom below. In this way, the scientist joins a version of her from another reality and seeks to stop the dictator. Together, they bring the real father of Elizabeth – Booker DeWitt, who is the protagonist of the game – from another dimension to rescue her. After rescuing the girl, Booker joins Elizabeth to try to end the reign of oppression and terror of Father Comstock. They try everything, eventually agreeing to kill him in his cradle, through interdimensional travel. Little did the protagonist know that the moment when Booker is determined to convert after the traumas of the war, is the turning point in which in his reality he gives up to baptize and remains embittered. But in Columbia's reality, through baptism, he is reborn as Zachary Hale Comstock. So, hero and villain is the same person.

## **5.2 Hannah Arendt and the regime in the fictional society of Columbia**

First of all, it is necessary to understand the reason for the name of the dystopian place. “Columbia” was a name often used by Europeans to refer to the United States because of the discovery by Christopher Columbus (Steele, 1981). Its use dates back to 1740, as seen in the reproduction of the debates of the British Parliament by *Gentlemen's Magazine*, where they refer to America as “Columbia” (Johnson; Guthrie; Stockdale, 2012)<sup>6</sup>.

Later in history, the figure of Columbia becomes an anthropomorphic representation of America, portrayed in the game by the angel. Thus, the first representation that personifies the figure of Columbia is the poem of Phillis Wheatley, of 1761, named “To His Excellency George Washington”. In this poem dedicated to the then president, the poet creates the

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<sup>6</sup> The magazine was obliged to change the names of the important figures in the debates, since the reproduction of what was said in the parliament was forbidden.

personification of America as a deity, a fusion of Apollo and Athena. In Apollo, the golden light of the heavens, the celestial choir of the muses, the gold of the hair and poetry itself. In Athena, the strong arms, the olive tree and the impetus that moves the warrior into battle (Steele, 1981). It is worth noting that Phillis was the first African American person and the second American woman to have his work published (Shields, 1980).

Thus, the name was not used by chance, since it symbolically refers to the ancestral values of a newly founded America. In the same way, the name symbolizes its personified and deified character. Columbia in the game is both a character, in so far as it presents itself alive and recurrently relevant, as it translates the image of the goddess of the sun and of war into its mix of mysticism, beauty and blood. This reveals the diurnal regime that covers the surface of *BioShock Infinite*, marked by light and sun, by the angelical aspect of the statue and by the grandeur of purpose and architecture.

Let's look at Columbia through the eyes of Hannah Arendt. Firstly, in the exercise of its oppressive violence, the city is structured as a tyranny. This is because the figure of the tyrant (in this case, Comstock) remains far above anyone, without there being a clear hierarchical structure in addition. In this way, it differs from authoritarianism, which consists of a pyramid where such a hierarchy exists, where all levels converge at its top and whose legitimacy derives from an external element and above the pyramid itself. In other words, tyranny is a pyramid without means, with only top and bottom, in which the great leader is a quasi-god and who exerts his empire uniformly against his subjects (Arendt, 2014). Thus, although there is a difference of prestige between the layers of the population in the game, in terms of political administration no layer matters but the top – and that top is Zachary Comstock.

On the other hand, the use of the founding fathers as saints to construct the myth of *BioShock Infinite* is not devoid of meaning. Figures such as Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and Benjamin Franklin called themselves as founding fathers at the advent of American independence, which reveals their intentions to become ancestors for that new nation (Arendt, 1990). They reproduce the Roman model, in which the ancestors were used to foment the tradition, allowing a spirit of continuity.

The rescue of the American ancestors means for Columbia society the continuity of the values that underpinned the American revolution, so much so that they declare themselves independent of the United States. Values like freedom, equality and happiness for all... those who matter.

In view of this, it is interesting how the work develops the concept of freedom. As an example of this perspective, each of the statues of the founding fathers carries an object, symbolizing something. George Washington carries the sword, which for the society of the game symbolizes military force. Thomas Jefferson carries the parchment, which for the society of the game symbolizes law and order. They are symbols that do not differ from their usual use in other mythologies, or even in everyday use, and which reinforce the Columbia announced by Phillis in his poem. The curious thing is that Benjamin Franklin holds the key, which for the society of the game means superior intelligence to all other nations<sup>7</sup>. You see, it does not represent freedom that is typically associated with the key in its archetype, which manifests itself as a symbol in the Bluebeard's tale, for example. This communicates just how insignificant freedom for New Eden society is.

Another aspect of freedom is Elizabeth's guarding creature. The creature in question is Songbird, an android created in experiments with humans made by Jeremiah Fink, the city's entrepreneur, who discovered the technology through the breaches. It is interesting to note that the creature was created like a bird, which is an unmistakable symbol of freedom. At the same time that the creature itself does not have freedom, because its existence is conditioned to guarding Elizabeth and protecting the prison in which the girl lives. Thus, it is one of the indications of the nocturnal regime of mystical structure that resides within the work, in its harmonization of opposites.

As for the propaganda used to foment violence by the Columbia regime, it should be noted that Arendt (2014) argues that truth and politics have always had a complicated relationship. In politics, as in the game's society, factual truth is ultimately brought to the level of opinion (Arendt,

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<sup>7</sup> The key was used by Franklin in his famous lightning experiment to discover its electromagnetic properties.

2014). The myth of a deity ruling Columbia is constructed, as a figure who speaks directly to the heavens, and who won alone the Battle of Wounded Knee and the Boxer War, removing the threat of the inferior races. Whose rival, Daisy Fitzroy, has killed his wife and is the devil incarnate. On the other hand, scientific truth has a coercive character in itself and ends up being a threat to the centralizing power of politics, according to Arendt (2014). Maybe that's why Comstock tries to kill his ally, Lutece, stealing the scientist's technology and handing it over to Jeremiah Fink. Then one realizes that while factual truth is completely disguised by the regime, scientific truth only changes hands. Relating to what Arendt (2015) advocates, this occurs because the facts depend on testimony and are never beyond doubt, such as scientific truths.

As for the exercise of violence, Weber (1967) states that the government cannot be identified by its end, after all, few are the goals that political entities did not try to achieve, but by their means. Thus, "[...] force is certainly not the normal nor the only means of the State [...] but a specific means of the State" (Weber, 1967, p. 55). For the sociologist, the state holds "a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" (Weber, 1967, p. 56), a concept that directly influences law. However, to be legitimate, the use of force must be backed by the fact that the state is always prior to the individual, as well as by the charisma and individual authority of the one who exercises power and by the belief in the rationality of laws (Weber, 2004). Specifically as regards the analysis of Columbia society, there is a central charismatic figure in a society that rescues ancestral values and has laws based on the logic of American exceptionalism and racism. Therefore, it meets Weber's requirements for legitimacy.

On the other hand, with the gigantic oppression of the non-white population, the prophet loses his authority before them, and therefore, revolutionary movements emerge. Bearing in mind that violence is unlikely to be legitimate and will only occur in the absence of authority, in Arendt's (1970) view, it can be understood that Comstock is using illegitimate violence as a means of imposing his will.

### **5.3 Hannah Arendt and the individuals from the city of Columbia**

To better understand the extreme tolerance behavior to the oppression over the other, we should analyze the Nazi party. The Nazis were not monsters, and the scariest thing about them is just that. After all, as men, what sets us apart from them? What brought them to that point? It is precisely these questions that drive Hannah Arendt (1999) when dealing with the Eichmann trial, which is responsible for transporting the Jews to the concentration camps. To better understand Nazi behavior, we draw on both Arendt's perspective and the psychological notion of dehumanization.

Firstly, in the perspective of Hannah Arendt, there was a process of bureaucratization of German society, which made the Final Solution a true death production line. As a cog in the complex German machine of death, the Nazi soldier lost the notion of what his actions, in the end, generated. In this perspective, he abdicated his ability to think, to make decisions, in order to follow his directives.

On the other hand, the concept of dehumanization, which allowed the anti-Semitic practices of German Nationalism (Kelman, 1973), elucidates the way in which the master mentally deprives the victim of all the characteristics that make him a person, either by reasoning or by approaching animals. Such a mentality causes aggressive impulses to be exercised without guilt in consciousness. Several studies in the field of sociopsychology allow us to infer the direct link between harmful behavior and dehumanization. It is through this psychic process that the Nazi soldier allowed himself to live in plenty, with feasts and celebrations, while men, women, and children were tortured and murdered by them, or even starved to death near their feasts.

The same is true of the citizen of Columbia, who continues to live in his own private paradise, despite the suffering of others, precisely because he gives up his ability to think critically, simply by following the commands that come from above. Such an abdication is evidenced by the scene in which DeWitt is in an airship and a priestess, at the request of Comstock, puts fire on herself, causing the airship to fall. Dehumanization, on the other hand, is perceptible in the imaging



retraction of the “inferior races”, extremely stereotyped and often animalistic.

On the other hand, the lower class of the population lives the labor empire, exploited by the monopoly of Jeremiah Fink, working 12 hours a day and being extremely poorly paid, is composed of men living in ghettos where they often starve to death. They have no time or spirit for the exercise of action and fabrication, and thus are dehumanized. Moreover, in Arendt’s perspective (2007) the need is analogous to torture itself, so subjecting an entire non-white population to extreme need is one of the worst forms of violence.

As for the insurgent group known as Vox Populi, it fits the concept of civil disobedience brought by Arendt (2015), a direct consequence of the inefficiency of the State in fulfilling its side of the social contract: to provide minimum conditions for a decent life for a population. Although the philosopher manifests repeatedly against violence, she perceives it as a tool of those who would never be heard otherwise (Arendt, 2016). For this is how the individuals who compose the Vox Populi see themselves: without time and without voice. It is through activity together and because of the limiting situation in which disobedience is legitimized and can break the shackles of oppression (Lafer, 1997). This is the only true form of legitimate violence in Arendt, the one that guarantees freedom, not the one that stops it.

As for the dictator, the supreme leader of the city of Columbia and self-appointed prophet was partially inspired by biblical figures such as Moses (Vazquez, 2015). On the one hand, Moses represents the archetype of the prophet-king who will take his people to the Promised Land, where they will thrive, which is precisely the motto propelled by Zachary Hale Comstock. However, the dictator sees himself as God himself, referring to his daughter as the lamb, with the intention to bring down fire from the heavens onto Sodom below, and to replicate the last words of Christ at the time of his death. Although Comstock had behaviors incompatible with Christ<sup>8</sup>, the dictator saw himself as the messiah himself. In addition to the

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<sup>8</sup> In Meeks’s (2017) position, John attempts to portray Christ as a prophet-king, like Moses, but Jesus claimed to be only the commander of the realm of truth. His reaction in trying

archetype of Moses, Comstock presents the archetype of Icarus, for having megalomaniacal goals, and for aiming to be closer to the gods and to endure the inevitable fall, such as Lucifer. This duality of being God and the devil, of being villainous and good at the same time, corroborates the mystical structure of *BioShock*.

Comstock is also marked by the ideology of American exceptionalism that stems from the phrase “the situation of Americans is entirely exceptional, so it is reasonable to believe that no democratic people will ever be put into it” (Tocqueville, 2005, p. 43). By exceptionalism, it is argued that the American people have innate characteristics that make it superior to all others. It is a derivation of the ideology of manifest destiny, according to which to civilize the American continent, with all the consequences that follow, was a mission given by God.

As for Elizabeth, she initially represents the archetype of the princess in the tower, guarded by the dragon. It is evident that, as the narrative goes from the early diurnal regime to the mystical nocturnal regime, Elizabeth changes her archetype, revealing her active and very different role from the initial one. At the end of the plot, her actions represent the archetype of the patricide, which symbolizes typically the surpassing of the old values and the effective arrival of a new generation. The message that resonates with those who reflect on the end of *BioShock Infinite* is ironically optimistic: that old values of racism and religious extremism will be abandoned.

Thus, the baptism present in one of the earliest moments of the game represents a trend that completely permeates it: a diurnal epidermis and a nocturnal and mystical flesh. To the inattentive, baptism is an act of purification in which one acquires the spiritual weapons of the hero. However, what is given in the narrative is a baptism of almost drowning, a euphemism of death, which is inevitable and ever-waiting, promoted by a blind priest, in denial to the isomorphism of vision, a death upon which choices have no influence. And after all the agonizing time, which represents the conflicts in the course of the plot, it ends in the death delivered by Elizabeth. A death in the / by the baptism, at the moment of

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to crown him in Galilee was to flee to the hills, which demonstrates his lack of interest in the earthly reign.

transformation of Booker into Comstock. In this way, the hero / villain is drowned, accepting his destiny as well-deserved rest.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

The question “to what extent can analyzing the game *BioShock Infinite* through Hannah Arendt’s philosophy contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon of legitimate violence?” leads us to some conclusions. But before reflecting on the question it was necessary to show that the analysis of a society that does not exist is important to understand contemporaneity. To do so, law was used in literature as an analogy, investigating how Columbia’s tyranny uses law as the tool for its oppression. Thus, it was deduced from the researched authors that law in the fictional works is a manifestation of the legal imaginary.

Returning to the initial inquiry, the use of the name “Columbia” to describe the city serves as a symbol of its dichotomy, dichotomy that permeates the whole work, the golden beauty of the sky of Apollo and the inexorable warlike power of Athena. In addition, the city structures itself into a true tyranny, with the figure of Zachary Comstock remaining at the top and shaping like clay the fate of the nation.

On the other hand, the dictatorship uses both the figures of the founding fathers and the very name of the city to retake the values of American independence, reinforcing tradition in the mold of Rome. The American eagle does not deny its kinship with the eagle of the Roman empire, or even of the third German *Reich*.

In turn, although it is one of the values of American independence, freedom does not exist in *BioShock Infinite*. When one evokes the symbol of the key, in the game, it never refers to freedom. Such silence shouts to the ears that oppression in the floating city would never leave room for freedom to be even idealized. This corroborates the tormented creature of Songbird, who is both bird and bird cage. The bird, unmistakable symbol of the most beautiful freedom, is imprisoned in itself and is imprisoned by poor Elizabeth.

The power of Comstock, however, weaves a narrative of history itself through Columbia’s propaganda machine. And, weaving its web of lies,

imprisons everyone in their social positions. But the lie that rewrites phatic history does not reach scientific truth, which is now used as a tool for the ideology of the Founders.

Since these have been mentioned, on one side there are the Founders in their luxurious lives, while on the other there are the nonwhite citizens of the fictional city. Thus, the less favored live the empire of necessity, imprisoned in a torturous cycle of exhaustive work and hunger, which is one of the worst forms of violence. On the other hand, the Founders, despite their Christian values, do not seem to bother at all with the suffering of those poor souls. This is because they close their eyes to what happens, refuse to think critically, and accept the commands of their prophet-king as if it were God's own command. Moreover, those who suffer are not even men in their eyes.

Moreover, in the context of the story, the city was only concretized by the megalomaniac vision of Comstock, which is the incarnate manifestation of the archetypes of Icarus and Moses. In the condition of Icarus, he seeks to be ever closer to the heavens, the gods, in a profoundly grand vision of the future, but fails disastrously and falls. In that of Moses, because he behaves like a prophet-king who guides his people to the promised land. He brings the dichotomy of seeing himself as God and being a fallen angel. His domination is guided by ideologies such as racism and American exceptionalism, in which the United States is believed to have been destined to dominate all other nations because they are inherently superior to all.

Finally, it must be emphasized that the only legitimate form of violence, in view of the whole work by Arendt, is that which frees man from the fetters of oppression: civil disobedience. In *BioShock Infinite*, Vox Populi is made to be heard at all costs, exercising civil disobedience until its last consequences: where only tears and sweat rolled, they started to roll heads.

With all of this, it is expected that legitimate violence, as a central theme of law, is always discussed and avoided as a closed concept. It is hoped that the discussion of videogames is resumed in the understanding of

the juridical phenomena of our society, since they are human expressions with great reach and influence amongst the young.

We conclude with the words of Hannah Arendt on the oppressive society we have seen (and we are not referring to Columbia):

Racism can destroy not only the Western world, but all human civilization. When the Russians became Slavs, when the French assumed the role of black labor commanders, when the English became “white men” just as, for a certain period, all Germans became Aryans, then these changes meant the end of the western man. For, no matter what scientists say, race is, from the political point of view, not the beginning of humanity, but its end, not the origin of peoples, but its decline, not the natural birth of man but the his unnatural death (Arendt, 2012, p. 187).

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