

Living in Rapture

Cultural perspectives and narrative
techniques in the *Bioshock* Saga

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Abstract

This paper will study the videogames pertaining to the *Bioshock* Saga that take place in the city of Rapture. The first objective is to identify and analyze the cultural and philosophical concepts included in the videogames. Secondly, the narrative techniques used in these videogames will be analyzed, as well as the consequences of the use of this media in the traditional dichotomy text-receptor. Finally, there will also be a section dealing with the moral and ethical issues the developers pose as topics of reflection, which will also identify, when possible, the opinion shown in the videogames. The third game in the saga, *Bioshock Infinite*, will not be included in this paper as the scenery and topics dealt with in the game are different from the rest of the saga.

Introduction

Since its very beginning¹, videogames have been a widely discussed topic among scholars, such as Grant Tavinor or Lars Schmeink. They have been discarded by a great part of the academic world as mere toys with no further interest, or at least, as the latest trends show, introduced in what is called “low culture” or “popular culture”, because they “are sending the wrong signals. To an educated person, literally alien signals of low culture, fun and insignificance” (Juul). However, more and more videogames are being studied as a respectable method of artistic and literary production as it can be seen from the increasing number of academic publications on the topic². Therefore, the aim of this paper is to contribute to this recent trend of study by analyzing a videogame not only from a cultural perspective, but also from the analysis of its narrative techniques and its aesthetic combinations, which make of this particular videogame saga a unique artistic medium.

The case studied in this paper, the *Bioshock*³ Saga, is a good example of how a videogame can comprehend philosophical, cultural, and artistic concepts as well as a bright new means of story-telling. *Bioshock* is a very popular game saga with an estimated 4 million copies sold of the first edition by 2010⁴, as for now composed by three different videogames (*Bioshock* (2007), *Bioshock 2* (2010) and *Bioshock*

¹ The origins of videogames are attributed to William Higinbotham (developer of *Tennis for Two* in 1958) and Steve Russell (creator of *Spacewar* in 1961). (Rabin)

² *Game Studies* (14 volumes published) or *Games and Culture* (since January 2006)

³ Sometimes referred to as *BioShock*

⁴ El33tonline.com., 'Original Bioshock Sells 4 Million Units, GTA IV Tops 15 Million - El33tonline.Com'. N.p., 2010. Web. 3 July 2015.

Infinite (2013)) and one special expansion (*Bioshock Infinite:Burial at Sea*, which has two episodes: *Episode One* was released on 2013 and *Episode Two* on 2014), all of them developed by Irrational Games, designed by Ken Levine and distributed by 2K Games.

The *Bioshock* games are first-person shooters, a type of videogames in which the player's view is from the perspective of one of the characters and its basic immediate objectives consist in fighting, usually by shooting, the way out through countless enemies. That is consistent, in general lines, with the plot of *Bioshock* in which, after a plane crash, the player is led to the city of Rapture, a submarine utopian city that has fallen to a dystopian situation, and struggles to escape.

In *Bioshock 2* the player-character is a Big Daddy (see Annex 1 Glossary for further information about these terms) who has been brought back to life and has to find and save the Little Sister to whom he was bonded originally. *Bioshock Infinite* presents a change of scenery, this time the action is set in the airborne city of Columbia where the player-character is a disgraced Pinkerton agent, Booker DeWitt, who has to find and save a woman, Elisabeth, confined by the city's leader Zachary Comstock.

The expansion of *Infinite* is intended to link the two different realities (Rapture and Columbia) described in the videogames by following Booker DeWitt in the first episode and Elisabeth in the second through Rapture. ⁵

⁵ A detailed chronological compilation of the different plots of the videogames will be provided in the next section of this paper.

The first videogame of the saga has attracted scholars because of its depiction of an alternative dystopian society (Schmeink), its steam punk appearance (Tavinor) and also because it involved the player in certain moral dilemmas (Schmeink) that were, and still are, uncommon in first person shooters. However, there is very little published on the narrative techniques used in this videogame and, in most of the publications, this topic is not studied in its full extent but only focusing on a specific characteristic, as does Gibbons in his article studying the use of music.

For the purposes of this paper not only the first videogame of the saga will be studied, *Bioshock 2* and *Bioshock Infinite: Burial at Sea* will also be included, because all of them not only follow the path designed in *Bioshock* but also add to it many interesting elements related to the scope of this paper, like a vision of the city in its utopic beginnings or the addition of new perspectives to previous topics. Unfortunately, due to the limited extension of this paper, the focus will be on the city of Rapture and therefore, *Bioshock Infinite* will not be analyzed, although it will be mentioned.

As it will be explained in depth later in this paper, the *Bioshock* saga in Rapture constantly alludes to both Ayn Rand's theory of objectivism and Michael Foucault's theories addressing the relationship between knowledge and power, and how they are used as means of social control together with the concept of hegemony. The interest of these theories is of particular relevance in this essay, because the relation created between the player as character and the character as a fictional *alter ego* of the player bring to a lively, even aggressive debate the legitimacy of the traditional hierarchical relation between the narratological entities involved in the narrative process, and mirrors the problematization of the power that is inherent to

that hierarchy by questioning the struggle for power—and knowledge—between players, characters, and the videogame developers.

Bioshock Infinite, as it represents a different reality, alludes to a different twentieth century theory. The leader of the city of Columbia, Zachary Comstock, is a character that explicitly refers to Anthony Comstock. Anthony Comstock was an American politician famous for achieving the approval of certain very restrictive regulations in the USA that led the country back to the Victorian Morality. Therefore, even with this change of scenery, the developers of the game kept their standard of producing culturally complex environments.

Living in Rapture: overview of the city's

history

Rapture's history is important to understand the constant references in this paper to several events that were essential in the transformation of the city, and also because the videogames take place in different moments in Rapture's history.

Around 1946, the millionaire Andrew Ryan started to build the submarine city of Rapture as a utopian society for artists, businessman and scientists to escape from the morally over restricted society existing after WWII. The idea behind the city is shown clearly at the beginning of the game *Bioshock* by Andrew Ryan's voice:

I am Andrew Ryan, and I'm here to ask you a question. Is a man not entitled to the sweat of his brow? 'No!' says the man in Washington, 'It belongs to the poor.' 'No!' says the man in the Vatican, 'It belongs to God.' 'No!' says the man in Moscow, 'It belongs to everyone.' I rejected those answers; instead, I chose something different. I chose the impossible. I chose... Rapture, a city where the artist would not fear the censor, where the scientist would not be bound by petty morality, where the great would not be constrained by the small! And with the sweat of your brow, Rapture can become your city as well. (Andrew Ryan, *Bioshock*)

As it can be seen in this quote, Ryan is rejecting every traditional kind of state and their power over the population. Instead, he claims to have created a city where there is no form of power controlling or oppressing the individual.

At some point, in this society with no ethic restrictions, scientists developed ADAM, a serum that allowed genetic modifications. This invention was soon commodified by Fontaine with the creation and commercialization of Gene Tonics and Plasmids. Scientists also created the Little Sisters, young girls whose sole purpose is to harvest the ADAM.

The general market of Plasmids and Gene Tonics, at a luxury price, led to a wider stratification of society and a bigger gap between its levels. Andrew Ryan, feeling threatened by Fontaine's increasing power disposes of him and takes control over his empire.

Then, on New Year's Eve, 1958, an attack on key locations of the city started Rapture Civil War over power and control of the ADAM. The events of *Burial at Sea* take place during the war. In *Episode One*, Elisabeth comes from Columbia and asks private investigator Booker DeWitt to help her find a little girl, Sally. Turns out Booker is also from Columbia and came to Rapture to escape from past deeds there whipping his memory in the process. After Booker's death begins *Episode Two*, in which Elisabeth is coerced by Atlas, who has taken Sally in the struggle, to find information for him. Elisabeth successfully finds the information that will lead to the creation of Jack, but Atlas kills her anyway.

This war confronted Andrew Ryan and his followers against Atlas and his group. Both groups employed soldiers that were genetically modified to the point that they became addicts to the substance and completely uncontrollable. Although Ryan wins the Civil War, the increased need of ADAM put him in a fragile situation. To ensure his power position, Ryan is forced to send Little Sisters into the city to

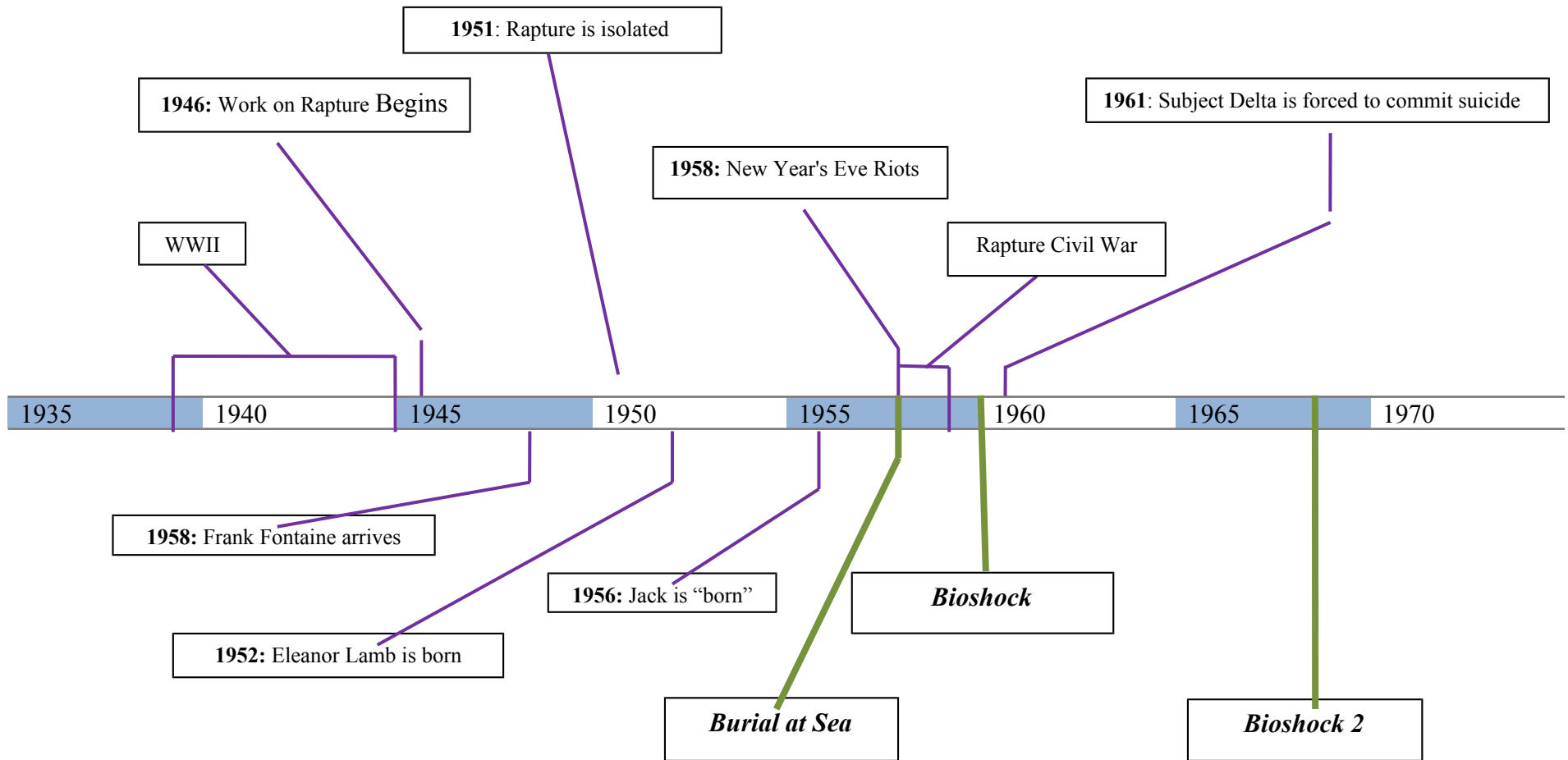
harvest it from dead bodies, and to create the Big Daddies, huge creatures in scuba-looking suits that fiercely protect the girls.

Bioshock, the first game of the saga, takes place around 1960. The city is structurally showing its decay as it has been dwelt only by the remains of the genetically modified citizens, now called Splicers, the Little Sisters and their Big Daddies. In this first game, the player-character is Jack, a man from the outer world that has to escape Rapture and fight against its creator, Andrew Ryan.

Many Splicers had adopted a religion created in the late 1950s and manipulated by Sophia Lamb, psychologist expert. The consequent confrontation between Lamb and Ryan ended with Lamb's exile and her daughter, Eleanor, turned into a Little Sister. After Ryan's death, Lamb returned to Rapture and took control of the city. She also wanted her daughter Eleanor back so she used a mind-controlling Plasmid to force her Big Daddy, Subject Delta, to commit suicide.

Lamb's reign on Rapture has proven no better than Ryan's. In fact, she has created yet another abomination: the Big Sisters, Litter Sisters who were allowed to grow only to kidnap girls from the outside to serve as new Little Sisters and also to act as guardians of the constant flow of ADAM in the city.

This is the scenario of *Bioshock 2*, which takes place in 1968. The player-character is Subject Delta revived after years in a coma by a grown-up Eleanor in need for help. He will have to find Eleanor in the city and save her from her mother Sophia Lamb.



Why Rapture?

According to the videogames' story, the city of Rapture was created around 1946, just after WWII, and has survived all these years concealed by the ocean. Therefore, the settling of the story at Rapture introduces in the game the concept of alternate or alternative history very well known to those affectionate to science fiction.

Although the usual use of alternate histories is to “revolve around the basic premise that some event in the past did not occur as we know it did, and thus the present has changed” (Hellekson 248), Rapture does not affect to the outside world, which has evolved apparently as history books tell, as there are several references to the surface world that do not say otherwise (Dr. Tenenbaum speaking about her time in a German prisoners camp, or Ryan warning about the dangers of contacting the Parasites living in the surface). Rather, it has evolved separately thanks to its placement in a secret location at the bottom of the ocean isolated from the rest of civilization. Notice that the name of the city refers to this fact⁶, especially through its Latin origin, *raptura*, which can be translated as abduction.

It is not casual the importance of WWII as a major historical event that gave birth to many alternate realities in literature, cinema, etc. Although the genre existed

⁶ “Rapture” contains several meanings that have a specific relevance within the story, namely an expression or manifestation of ecstasy or passion; a state or experience of being carried away by overwhelming emotion; a mystical experience in which the spirit is exalted to a knowledge of divine things; or even the final assumption of Christians into heaven during the end-time according to Christian theology (Merriam Webster Dictionary)

before the war, even before WWI (an historical event of similar importance), WWII has definitely been far more exiting to authors' imaginations. Perhaps, one of the reasons for this tendency to produce alternative rewritings of history is due to the trauma generated by a key figure such as Hitler, who has been repeatedly eliminated in different artistic media, as in some kind of aesthetic retaliation⁷. But there have also been those who explored the opposite outcome, revealing a hypothetical view of a world in which the Nazis have won the war and continue to terrify and annihilate their victims⁸, or at least a world where the Nazi regime has survived in secret bases waiting to regain power, sometimes even with a comical perspective⁹. Many scholars have paid attention to this narrative exploration and have supported a theoretical discussion of its motivations. Rosenfeld, for example, has claimed that "the shifting representation of Nazism in works of alternate history, as well as the popular reactions to them, highlights their subversive role in promoting the normalisation of the Nazi past in Western memory" (np)

For the immediate purposes of this paper, however, the focus is on the coexisting alternate reality seen in *Rapture* as a new and useful tool to visualize the narrative potential of videogames. The initial goal of the player-character in the first game is to return to his reality (and ours, as there is nothing in the game so far that indicates otherwise). In contrast to what usually happens, this quest just means to find a way back to the surface, a realistic and technologically possible escape. This apparent closeness to the player's reality represents a powerful motivation throughout the game.

⁷ Several movies were made on this topic, among the latest is Tarantino's film *Inglorious Basterds* (2009)

⁸ See, for example, *The Sound of His Horn* by John William Wall (1952)

⁹ As a humorous example see the movie *Iron Sky* (Timo Vuorensola, 2012)

Nonetheless, while dwelling in that submarine city, the player-character has to face and adapt to a reality much different to the one he knows. Therefore, the player-character enters the city in a powerless position attending to Foucault's assumption that knowledge is a means to power. This relation of power between the player-character and the game will evolve as the player learns how to interact with the virtual environment and the player-character acquires knowledge of the city and its situation.

Bioshock : Objectivism and Dystopia

Rapture's society has been many times described as dystopian by authors such as Gibbons¹⁰ or Schmeink¹¹. However, it was initially created as a utopia following the ideals of Objectivism, which evolved into an aggressive Capitalism before collapsing entirely into a dystopian version of itself.

Objectivism is a philosophy created by Ayn Rand that, in her own words through her book *Atlas Shrugged*, implies that humankind should place “happiness as the moral purpose of life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute” (1170). Ayn Rand, born and educated in Russia in the early twentieth century, developed her theory as an opposition to the oppressive Communism, in which individualism was unthinkable. According to this theory, by focusing in the importance of the individual the power or *potentia* (to use the term coined by Foucault) was spread among the population in contrast to the Communist State in which Rand grew where, by means of the application of Communist theories, the power was bestowed to one, or at least a small number of individuals and the rest of the population was equally displaced to a submissive position.

The correlations between this theory and the videogame were made obvious in *Bioshock* through the use of some names and references along the game. Just as an example notice the similarities of names listed below:

<i>Bioshock</i>	Objectivism
Andrew Ryan: Founder and leader of Rapture	Ayn Rand: Alias under which the Objectivist theory was published

¹⁰ Gibbons also defines Adrew Ryan as an ultra-capitalist personification of Ayn Rand

¹¹ He describes *Bioshock* as a posthuman dystopia emerged from an anarcho-capitalist utopia

Brigid Tenenbaum: A female doctor whose work is behind the mayor event in Rapture's history: the discovery and exploitation of ADAM	Alisa Zinóvievna Rosenbaum : Real name of the author who published the objectivist theory.
Frank Fontaine: Main character opposing Andrew Ryan	<i>The Fountainhead</i> (1943) is a novel by Ayn Rand that deals with the triumph of individualism over collectivism
Atlas: Fontaine's pseudonym in his second attempt to overcome Ryan	<i>Atlas Shrugged</i> (1957). Another novel by Ayn Rand, her <i>magnum opus</i> , the main exponent on Objectivism

Besides these references, from the very beginning of *Bioshock*, the player can observe how the city is based on Rand's objectivism. In the lighthouse where the game begins, there is a big statue of Andrew Ryan with the city's motto (see picture 1):



Picture 1

The city's motto summarizes Rand's objectivist theory, quite opposed to Communism, in which the stress is placed on personal achievement instead of common welfare.

Moreover, there is also the remains of a huge statue of the giant Atlas in Kashmir Restaurant (see picture 2).



Picture 2

The figure of the giant Atlas, the Greek myth of a giant who was forced to literally carry the world on his shoulders, is a powerful metaphor used both by Rand and by the videogames.

Besides the allusion to the Objectivism theory, there are several audio tapes the player-character finds throughout the game that directly represent a critical opinion to any other political system that places social welfare as its goal:

On the surface, the Parasite expects the doctor to heal them for free, the farmer to feed them out of charity. How little they differ from the pervert who prowls the streets, looking for a victim he can ravish for his grotesque amusement. (Andrew Ryan, Bioshock, Medical Pavillion)

The dystopian situation of the city is shown not only by its structural decay but also by the existence of Splicers. Rand's objectivist theory, as it has been said, places individual above all in the search of personal fulfillment; however, the Splicers that dwell the city are the living proof of the level of degradation of Rapture's citizens and therefore of the ideology behind the city.

There are also references to Ayn Rand's ideology in *Burial at Sea: Episode One*; more specifically to her reflections on art. Rand talks about art in her book *The Romantic Manifesto*, where she says that "Art brings man's concepts to the perceptual level of his consciousness and allows him to grasp them directly, as if they were percepts" (19). In this sense, Rand is referring to metaphysical art, the art that intends to show the fundamental nature of reality. A reflection on this topic is shown through Sander Cohen's paintings in *Burial at Sea*. When Booker and Elisabeth finally achieve the mask that would grant them entrance to Cohen's private party, he is painting a dancing couple (see picture 3) but the painting remains unfinished as Cohen kills them for their lack of authenticity.



Picture 3 Cohen's unfinished painting of the 'Sun and Moon' dancers.

Narrative Technique

Videogames are created in a multimedia platform that includes, besides sound and images, a characteristic that is as appealing as it is challenging: explicit interactivity. The latest trends in videogame designing are moving towards a more realistic game experience with the latest game engines that are able to render better and better image and sound qualities along with the 3D image technology. However, the inclusion of the interactivity variable has proven really challenging in the way for a realistic and exclusive experience. Therefore, the illusion of free-will when playing a videogame has become a key element when analyzing its quality.

There are several elements that influence the illusion of free-will when playing a videogame on-screen. One of the first ones developed, and is a key feature of first-person shooters, is the sense of immersion. In this type of videogames, the design of a character from which the player can only see the hands and feet, as if it were the player's own body, turned out to be a very helpful strategy to feed the illusion of belonging to the universe of the videogame as "the reflection of a player's actions is especially strong within subjective PoV [point of view] because it minimizes the distance between player and game, creates immediate agency and allows for 'actual' participation in the represented world" (Schmeink, n.p.). This first-person PoV has been a key element in the creation of the figure of the player-character. The term player-character is used to define an entity controlled by the player that, at the same time, has at least an important role -if not the main one- in the story developed in the game¹².

¹² For further references on the term and its effectiveness see Hefner, Dorothée, Christoph Klimmt, and Peter Vorderer. 'Identification With The Player Character As Determinant Of Video Game Enjoyment'. *Lecture Notes in Computer Science* (2007): 39-48. Web. 7 July 2015.

However, the most important element to obtain the illusion of free-will in a videogame is based on the action-reaction thesis: a videogame should be able to adjust and react specifically to each of the player's actions. It is no wonder how this element is as difficult to obtain as it is important; the complexity of such programming would be as near to an artificial intelligence as it could be. Instead, videogame developers have come to several strategies to fool the player into unconsciously doing as they want.

In order for these techniques to work effectively but unnoticed, the conditioning technique used on the player must be so subtle that it would go unperceived and therefore the player would think that a specific path was taken only because of personal choice. Tavinor uses the term "nudges", a term adopted from behavioral economics, to refer to these devices that act by "guiding rather than coercing the player through a game environment, so that their actions in the environment are given the illusion of being their own" (101). This term will be used along this paper for considering it quite appropriate for the matter at hand.

On the basis of these nudges, sounds play a very important role. To hear voices behind a closed door may indicate the player whether to cross it or not, depending on the game and the player's readiness for confrontation. The use of more complex sounds, such as music, has proven more difficult for videogames developers. This is because of the inclusion of the interactivity factor: one player may take longer than another to overcome the same challenge. Therefore, the music chosen for a videogame has to have a unique feature: to be prompt to be cut or extended without disrupting the game sequence or disturbing the player unless that is its aim.

Gibbons explores the influence of music on *Bioshock*, and chooses to exemplify this technique the very beginning of the game. On a brief cutscene (a non-interactive sequence within the game) the player sees how Jack's plane crashes into the ocean and suddenly the player is Jack struggling against the waves trying to reach a small lighthouse in a distant islet. There is only environmental sound until the player-character reaches the inside of the lighthouse. Once there, the doors closed behind, there is a sound of switches and the lights go on. At the same moment there starts a distant tune with an unknown origin. This is, according to Michael Chion, an "acousmatic sound" or "active onscreen sound" (85); music or sounds that the player can locate in an unseen space offscreen. The music is used to guide the player towards the basement of the lighthouse where a bathysphere awaits to take Jack to Rapture. However, players do not have the feeling of being guided; they have just instinctively followed the music to its origin as they would do in real life.

Had it not been difficult enough, *Bioshock* developers decided to incorporate popular licensed songs to its original soundtrack. In the scene described in the previous paragraph, the player would easily recognize the tune as "La Mer" by Django Reinhardt (see Anex 2 for a full list of *Bioshock* Saga licensed soundtrack), although it is popularly known for its chorus "Somewhere beyond the sea". As it can be seen, here the music serves two purposes: on the one hand it helps direct the player towards the next level of the game and on the other hand it provides information to the player invoking by the use of this song the promise of a peaceful dreamland.

There are other environmental elements, such as images, that can function as nudges or guidance for the player-character in this fictional world. Again, *Bioshock* saga makes an efficient use of this technique. See how, for example, in *Bioshock*,

after emerging from the bathysphere that has brought Jack to Rapture, the player looks around and sees mainly closed doors and a set of stairs. Being the doors closed one has to follow the stairs and finds himself in another room where he sees a big advertisement of something called “Plasmids” and a glowing sign pointing a new set of stairs. Once up the stairs, there is a glowing vial in the basket of a dispensing machine, which the player-character takes, initiating a tutorial (an explanatory video) on the functioning and use of Plasmids. This sequence of events is performed almost automatically by the player without realizing the subtle indicators that led to it.



Picture 4



Picture 5

As it can be seen in the upper left corner of Picture 1, there are two indicators in the image. The first and less subtle is a pink neon hand pointing up the set of stairs with the word “Plasmids” on it. This is a clear indicator of the path that should be taken next. There is also a big advertisement on the wall (see Picture 2) that is suggesting the player what is going to happen next. Both indicators, especially the advertisement, are not perceived consciously by the player at the moment. However, later events make the player sometimes realize how the conditioning of the game works when noticing that the consequences of taking the Plasmid vial were not a complete surprise, as they were unconsciously expected thanks to the inclusion of the clues mentioned.

The use of nudges as conditioning tools to give the player a false sense of free-will is similar to the use of propaganda seen in the videogame applied on the citizens of Rapture. It is a mirror of mechanics used for social control in power-oriented philosophies such as Communism or Capitalism.

Furthermore, the use of music, especially when it is popular licensed music, and images in videogames sometimes has as sole purpose to illustrate on the game's situations and influence the player's mood towards them. To elaborate on this statement, a song has been chosen that appears in key moments of both *Bioshock* and *Burial at Sea: Part 1*. The song is "It had to be you" by Django Reinhardt.

In *Bioshock* it is heard after Jack disposes of Dr. Steinman, a plastic surgeon transformed into a psychopath who earned the nickname "Picasso of surgery". This is the first real challenge the player-character encounters in the game and the starting of this romantic tune floods the otherwise desolated scene with optimism. Moreover, the lyrics of the song are again important in the context. Those who don't know the lyrics of the full song know at least the title and main sentence of the chorus ("It had to be you") that directly correlates what Atlas has just said on the intercom- "It's about time somebody took care of that bastard!"- giving the player-character the feeling of being unique, special, that only "you" could handle such difficult task. For those players who either knew the song before or pay attention to the lyrics, the song says "With all your faults / I love you still". These sentences could perfectly be applied as an ironical reference to the end of the mad surgeon's reign of terror.

In *Burial at Sea: Episode 1* the song is played after closing the vent at Fontaine's Bookstore. It is nearly the end of the game, as there is just only another vent left for closing before the ending. Again, the song gives encouragement to the player as in the first game but in this occasion it has a deeper meaning, as it will turn out that Booker and Sally, the little girl he was meant to rescue, were related in the alternate reality of Columbia. In this case it really "had to be you" who rescued the girl, but the player-character will not know it until the very ending sequence.

Another clear example of how this device is used is the song “The Lady is a Tramp” by Mel Torné in *Burial at Sea: Episode One*. It is played just as Booker accepts Elisabeth’s task and they walk into a bar in High Street. Again, developers seem to play with what is most popularly known about a song, in this case the title, to hint the player on the real nature of the computer-controlled character besides him.

In a more literary means of storytelling, *Bioshock Saga* includes as a secondary goal the objective of retrieving the history of the city by locating audio tapes dispersed in different locations. These audio tapes are of variable characteristics; sometimes they are fragments of a citizen’s diary, pieces of conversations recorded or voice messages for another citizen. Whichever the type of tape, together they conform a general picture of what Rapture was meant to be, what it finally was and how it became this way.

This is an example of complex fragmented narrative. It is not only fragmented for being little pieces of narrative but also because it may probably occur that a single player is not able to retrieve them all and, even in that case, the tapes have to be then related one to the other in the correct order to obtain the full story.

In order to make it easier for the player, the developers have chosen to locate the tapes with most important pieces of information in places where they are easily located (on a table or the floor, but at least at plain sight). Retrieving only these tapes allows the player an overview of the main historical facts but if one wants to retrieve them all to obtain the full story, and the trophy the game awards the player with, the difficulty increases as there are other tapes hidden under debris or located in small rooms of difficult access.

At the same time, the tapes do not only tell the history of the city but also information that directly interests the player and even both things at the same time. This is the case of a tape located on the desk of the emergency access to the Medical Pavillion in *Bioshock*:

Ryan and ADAM, ADAM and Ryan... All those years of study, and was I ever truly a surgeon before I met them? How we plinked away with our scalpels and toy morality. Yes, we could lop a boil here, and shave down a beak there, but... but could we really change anything? No. But ADAM gives us the means to do it. And Ryan frees us from the phony ethics that held us back. Change your look, change your sex, change your race. It's yours to change, nobody else's. (Dr. Steinman)

This little piece of Dr. Steinman's diary not only gives information on the ideology behind Rapture but also on the ADAM, a substance the player is constantly using during the game. For further information on the topic, however, the player has to find a tape located in Upper Wharf, in a crate below the Wharfmaster's Office:

This little Sea Slug has come along and glued together all the crazy ideas I've had since the war... it doesn't just heal damaged cells, it... resurrects them... I can bend the double helix... black can be reborn white, tall, short, weak, strong... But the slugs alone are not enough... I'll need money... and one other thing... (Dr. Tenenbaum)

Although the main information about the ADAM is the same in both tapes -- that it can alter at wish the genetic material in the cells of an individual- in the second and more hidden tape the player is told the origin of the drug.

Moreover, as the games are designed to be related to each other, the player will find in any of the games information related to another. As an example, see how in *Bioshock 2* there is information in the tapes about the events in *Bioshock* and between both games:

Rapture... the keenest minds in the world, united under the ocean... yet somehow expected to subscribe to the same model of self-interest? Ryan could be staggeringly naive. As individuals, no matter how brilliant -- each was a prisoner to his or her own ego; a sea of dreams in constant flux. But in ADAM, their genes remain, ready to be tested against a moral vessel. Utopia cannot precede the Utopian. It will exist the moment we are fit to occupy it. (Sophia Lamb, located on a cinder block under the stairwell in the southwestern corner of Plaza Hedone.)

As it is seen in this quote, tapes do not only give information on the events, present or past, and the ideology behind the creation of the city, but also give the player something to reflect on. The topics for reflection will be, however, discussed in a further section of this paper.

It has been already explained how the inclusion of the interactivity factor is an important element to have into account when analyzing a videogame's narrative, but it is also a key element when considering its application to the relationship between the writer and the reader (in written Literature). So far, the possibilities for interaction between receptor and text were limited to what Marie-Laure Ryan calls "predefined alternatives" which at most would be forms "in which the reader—more aptly called interactor—performs a role through verbal or physical actions" (17); participatory theatre would be one of these forms, for example. Videogames, however, go beyond this category as the player is "a fully empowered member of the

fictional world” (308), therefore providing material to the text. Therefore, the interactivity factor also alters the balance of power between text and receptor, as the volume of knowledge that flows from one to the other has changed significantly. In a videogame this balance of power is more equilibrated, for example, than in a book, where the power is held mostly by the text as the receptor cannot directly alter it. However, as we have seen, there are still limits to this interaction as it is conditioned to a certain number – although bigger than in other artistic forms—of variables.

On an exercise of irony, not only the developers have struggled to obtain the best illusion of free-will possible but they also made the *Bioshock* saga openly play with the concept of free-will in every one of its games.

In *Bioshock* Jack is constantly assisted by Atlas, an unseen character the player-character hears through a communicator device. Jack takes the intercom from the bathysphere in which he came to the city and soon enough the first Splicer appears and is killed by a turret. Then the player hears Atlas’ voice- “now would you kindly find a crowbar or something?”- in what seems both an obvious request and an excess of politeness. Atlas will repeat this sentence structure several times along the game until the player-character faces Andrew Ryan himself. There in a cutscene Ryan says:

The assassin has overcome my final defense, and now he’s come to murder me. In the end, what separates a man from a slave? Money? Power? No, a man chooses, a slave obeys. You think you have memories: a farm, a family, an airplane, a crash. Or was it hijacked, forced down, forced down by something less than a man? Something bred to sleepwalk through life, until they’re activated by a simple phrase spoken by their kindly master? Was a man sent to kill? Or a slave?

Come here, stop, would you kindly? “Would you kindly?” A powerful phrase, a familiar phrase. Sit, would you kindly? Run! Stop! Turn! A man chooses, a slave obeys. (Andrew Ryan)

The fact that this speech takes place in a cutscene is really important as, at this point so near to the end of the game, it is only the fourth cutscene the player has seen. The developers of *Bioshock* apparently chose to only introduce this narrative device in crucial moments of the game: besides the one at hand there are the first scene already described, the moment the player-character is introduced to Plasmids and Little Sisters, the first encounter face to face with an unprotected Little Sister and the ending scene—all of them will be described and discussed in due time-.

The importance of this cutscene lies in the fact that in the precise moment when the player-character discovers his lack of free-will, his lack of control over his actions, it is also players who are divested of their control over their characters.

In *Bioshock 2*, the irony on the free-will topic is seen from the very beginning as the player takes control of Subject Delta, a prototype of Big Daddy who was artificially bonded to a Little Sister, Eleanor. Although the player-character is told that the bond has been broken, as the goal of the game remains to protect and save Eleanor- objective that will be accomplished with more or less effectiveness depending on the player’s choices- it is clear that the character’s free-will is been questioned.

Bioshock Infinite: Burial at Sea, as it is an expansion made to link the storylines of Columbia and Rapture, is not as openly discussing free-will as the previous games. Instead, they introduce the idea of fate or predestination to add yet another variable to the complexity of concepts placed in front of the player. As both

episodes of the expansion were made to close the narrative circle linking the events in Columbia (*Bioshock Infinite*) with the story of Jack in *Bioshock*, the player's perspective of the previous games changes. It is probably after this last game that the player realizes to what extent Altas' power over Jack extended, as it not only used him but created him solely to fit his purposes.

Good or bad? Ethics and morality in the videogames

Authors such as Tavinor or Schmeink have approached in their works the topic of ethics and morality within *Bioshock*, and many others, such as Jannidis, have hinted on the topic and its rarity in this medium.

Ethics and morality is a topic that is also related to the interactivity within the videogame, as it is placed in a way that the player has certain choices to make that will alter the ending scene of the game. Therefore, it is not the morality of the character the one discussed in this essay, but the morality of players that consciously take those choices and have to face virtual consequences.

In *Bioshock* Jack discovers the existence of the Little Sisters and their function as ADAM harvesters and suppliers. In that cutscene he is addressed both by Atlas and Dr. Tenenbaum who try to convince him of the better choice to make:

Atlas: It's okay, lad. That's not a child, not anymore it ain't. Dr. Tenenbaum saw to that.

Tenenbaum: Bitte, do not hurt her! Have you no heart?

Atlas: Aye, that's a pretty sermon coming from the ghoul who cooked up them creatures in the first place. Took fine little girls and turned them into that, didn't you? Listen to me, boyo: you won't survive without the Adam those... things... are carrying. Are you prepared to trade your life, the lives of my wife and child for Tenenbaum's little Frankensteins?

Tenenbaum: Here! There is another way...use this, free them from their torment... I will make it to be worth your while...somehow.

Atlas appeals to the player's survival instinct and tries to dehumanize the little girls by referring to them as monsters, as "frankensteins". Meanwhile, Tenenbaum appeals to the player's humanity and empathy. However, whereas Atlas' way has an immediate reward –more ADAM to buy enhancements- Tenenbaum only makes vague promises of a future unknown reward.

From that moment on, the player-character will be reminded of the scene when facing a Little Sister with a message that states the options of either harvesting her – obtaining the maximum ADAM but killing the girl- or rescuing her – obtaining less ADAM but saving the girl. The choice is technically easy to make, pressing one bottom or another, and in terms of economics the more profitable option is to harvest the little girl. However, the very nature of the Little Sister is made to appeal to the player's empathy making this decision slip the rationalization process that being a videogame it is not real killing.

The game will display four different outcomes depending on the player's choices:

- If Jack has saved all the Little Sisters the ending scene presents an optimistic view of Jack's future where he lives a peaceful live and dies old surrounded by the girls he saved.
- If Jack has killed all the girls Jack returns to the surface as ruler of Rapture followed by an army of Splicers taking over the world.

- If most of the girls are killed the narrative voice will attack Jack for his cruelty and greediness of power.
- If most of the girls are saved the narrative voice will comment with a tone of disdain on Jack's weakness of spirit.

Even though the final consequences of player's actions are not displayed until the final scene of the videogame, the player can feel the results much sooner. The more Little Sisters are harvested the more ADAM is obtained to purchase Plasmids and other enhancements making the player-character become each time more similar to the Splicers. In that way, the monstrosity of the player's actions is shown progressively throughout the game.

It is noticeable also the choice of names. ADAM is the substance that allows the genetic enhancements, EVE is the substance that allows its use and Gatherer's Garden the name of the vending machine where the player can buy enhancements. The biblical reference to the Garden of Eden is obvious, being Rapture the Garden of Eden and both ADAM and EVE the causes for its fall. At first sight there are no gender implications regarding this topic, and both the ADAM and the EVE are equally responsible for Rapture's fall.

In *Bioshock 2* Subject Delta has a similar decision to make, but this time it is not the Little Sisters that ought to be spared or killed, but several different characters (Grace Holloway, Stanley Poole and Gilbert Alexander) that have opposed him in the game. Each of the characters has a different background story with Subject Delta; Grace had to stop her singing career because he broke her jaw, Stanley was a reporter who wrote an article that led to Ryan turning the main character into a Big Daddy

and Gilbert is heavily mutated by the overuse of ADAM and is now a horrifying deformed monster.

In this videogame the consequences of the player's choices are shown in two different moments: after Delta was captured by Lamb and, as in *Bioshock*, with variations in the final cutscene.

When Eleanor helps Subject Delta escape from Lamb, her personality varies depending on the choices made by the player; she can be either a spirited woman in search of freedom or a cynic who only thinks of her own survival at any cost. These two different Eleanor have also different appearances: the good Eleanor is brighter with pink eye shadow and brown hair and the bad Eleanor has black hair and dark eye shadow. The graphical representation of these changes in personality is using standard stereotypes that, however, prove to be effective.

The final cutscene of *Bioshock 2* has three different variables:

- If the player has chosen kindly, Eleanor will save Sophia Lamb and harvest Delta's ADAM and conscience so they can be always together. She watches a beautiful sunset surrounded by all the Little Sisters.
- If the player has killed all the enemies, Eleanor will kill Sophia Lamb and brutally harvest Delta's ADAM living behind a monster. The weather in the surface is stormy and when Eleanor watches her reflection in the sea water lots of corpses emerge from the city. She also has plans for world domination.
- If the player has killed only some of the enemies, Delta will be given the opportunity to sacrifice himself in order to give Eleanor the choice of redemption. If he sacrifices himself, the weather is cloudy and Eleanor will

drag him to the water to see the horizon together and talk about redemption and a new beginning. If Delta does not sacrifice himself, the ending will be as if the player had killed all the enemies.

The *Bioshock* Saga also explores ethics, more precisely bioethics in a rather explicit way. The inclusion in the games of bioengineered characters as Jack or genetically manipulated such as the Splicers, the Little Sisters, the Big Sisters and the Big Daddies introduces the player to a reflection on the ethics behind this new branches of science.

The character of Jack in *Bioshock* is created by artificially growing the embryo of Andrew Ryan and his mistress in a laboratory owned by Fontaine. The embryo was manipulated so that the subject's growth was faster and bigger than a normal human. It was also tempered so that the subject would comply with the mental conditioning. It is a similar situation to the existing technology of cloning or embryo selection. Further discussion on whether this technique is ethical is highly controversial and belongs to a different realm of knowledge than the one dealt with in this paper. Moreover, as the outcome of the character is determined by the player's actions it is extremely difficult to deduce, if any, the developer's position on the topic.

It is possible, however, to analyze the situation of Splicers, Little Sisters, Big Sisters and Big Daddies. All these characters are different sides of the same ethical conflict: whether it is ethical not only to create genetic treatments for cosmetic purposes but also to commodify these treatments for egoist purposes. However, not only does the game show the physical and psychological consequences of excessive ADAM consumption or, as it will be explained later on, it also shows how both the

ADAM and the need created for it were exploited to obtain a power position over the city and its citizens.

In this scheme, the Splicers represent those who have consented to the extensive propaganda that built the need for a previously inexistent good. Moreover, being this good an addictive process, the excessive use of ADAM and its consequences are made clear.

Little Sisters are representative of a consequence of the economical liberalism present in Rapture. In order to obtain the biggest profit rate in the commercialization of ADAM and its side products (EVE, Plasmids and Gene Tonics), there are two possible roads to be taken. The first one would be to raise the price of the final product, making it more profitable per unit but lowering the total number of units sold and therefore shrinking the target market. The other way to increase total profit would be to lower the production costs by improving the processes used or by lowering the cost of manpower in the process. Little Sisters are the extreme example of how this is done. They represent the utmost oppression on a helpless innocent being by the exploit of modifications included in their design that make the harvesting of ADAM their sole purpose.

Big Daddies and Big Sisters are a similar case, although their main task is to secure production and commerce of the ADAM. Although the ADAM is not qualified as a first-need good by itself, it has been turned into one by artificially creating that need through marketing techniques. Therefore, its production and distribution have to be secured. As in the case of Little Sisters, the more profitable way to do so is by artificially manipulating beings to accomplish this task free of cost as it is their sole purpose of living.

Together, Splicers, Little Sisters and Big Daddies represent the darkest side of Capitalism and Economic Liberalism taken to the extreme in this fantastic world of Rapture. Along with the inclusion of Capitalism in the city, the developers refer to a change in the power schemes that occurred. In the original utopian Objectivist Rapture, the power position was occupied by Andrew Ryan by means of Cultural Hegemony, following Gramsci's theory of a leader – although Gramsci developed his theory by studying the power balance between nations and their cultures--whose cultural ideals are predominant and adopted by the rest of the population. Nevertheless, as it is been shown, the inclusion of ADAM has shifted this power balance towards Frank Fontaine, who gained it through an Economical Hegemony by controlling all the production and commercializing chain.

Regarding these topics, the opinion shown by the developers is made clear as in *Bioshock* the player-character has to fight against these symbols to escape the city. In *Bioshock 2* the player-character is placed in the skin of a Big Daddy and the goal of the game is to free himself and his Little Sister of that oppressive situation they were made for. In both cases, if the player has chosen kindly, the outcome will help to destroy that corrupted system; if not, the outcome will show how the system can consume dissension if it is not strong enough.

Conclusions

As it has been clearly stated throughout this paper, videogames can be much more than a simple means for entertainment and the *Bioshock* Saga is a clear example of this.

The narrative techniques applied to these videogames imply a complex and well organized symbiosis between different means of artistic production which is, undoubtedly, the result of a great team effort. Their feature as multidisciplinary artistic means allows their audience to enjoy an intense experience of the fictional world depicted in the game that cannot be achieved in any other way.

Moreover, the complexity of the cultural topics presented in this videogames (philosophy, culture, ethics and pictorial production) are definitely valuable to an educated audience who would appreciate its complexity and valuable reflections. Moreover, the explicit interactivity that is exclusive to this medium allows an interested player to enjoy a pleasant and relaxed view of the richness of images and scenery depicted in the videogame, as well as the thrilling task of retrieving and pulling together the whole history and ideology of the city through the audiotapes, advertisements and graffiti that can be found in this virtual world. This interactivity variable also allows players to directly interact with the environment, altering the story and its outcome with their actions.

Videogames must, therefore, gain the consideration of valuable artistic production tools. Moreover, having into account the immense scope of this platform, it would be wise to impulse their use as a valuable means for spreading knowledge. Furthermore, its ability to

involve younger audiences in an enthusiastic and concentrated state of mind makes this means an invaluable tool for education if applied with the proper guidance and supervision.

Videogames have largely proven to be worth the effort of proper academic studies for its value as a multidisciplinary means of artistic and cultural production. Moreover, as videogames are a means that allows a great level of interactivity between receptor and text, it is not only a technological product, but also includes cultural and philosophical approaches that are worth studying.

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Annex 1 Glossary

- **ADAM.** - It is a substance obtained from a rare type of sea slug. Conveniently processed allows any type of genetic manipulation as it works by replacing natural cells with unstable stem cells. This mechanism of replacement is also believed to be the cause of the physical and psychological alterations as side-effect. ADAM can be exchanged for plasmids and gene tonics in the Gatherer's Garden.
- **Big Daddy.**- They are genetically enhanced human beings who have had their skin and organs grafted into an enormous diving suit. Big Daddies were originally created by Dr. Yi Suchong to serve as Rapture's maintenance workers and to help in later construction projects. However, after the discovery of ADAM, they were repurposed so that their primary purpose is to protect Little Sisters while they escort them around Rapture. Also referred to as Mister Bubbles, or Mister B, by Little Sisters. Their primary weapon is a drill implanted in their right arm.
- **Big Sister.**- The Big Sisters are post-pubescent Little Sisters who have become unstable and confrontational in Rapture's environment. They interact with, manage and protect Little Sisters. Their extreme level of powers go far beyond that of normal Plasmid users, and might be attributed to their growing bodies adapting to the ADAM created in their bodies as children. Thus, they have a much greater natural affinity for the powers that ADAM creates.
- **EVE.**- A blue substance also obtained from the processing of ADAM that allows the player to use plasmids.
- **Gatherer's Garden.**- Vending machine where the player can exchange ADAM for gene tonics or plasmids.

- **Gene Tonic.**- Gene Tonics are special serums made from processed ADAM that introduce modified stem cells into the body, allowing for genetic modification and mutation, giving the user what some might call "super powers. Tonics provide an effect merely by being equipped. Tonics are powerful, but excessive use of them leads to physical and mental addiction and instability. This was a major factor in the eventual downfall of Rapture society.
- **Little Sister.**- Little Sisters (originally named as Gatherers) are young girls who have been genetically altered and mentally conditioned to reclaim ADAM from the corpses around Rapture. They were created by **Dr. Tenenbaum** when she developed a way of harvesting ADAM that involved the implantation of a sea slug in a host's stomach; small girls proved to be the most suitable candidates for this procedure. Little Sisters are almost always accompanied by a Big Daddy. They generally are immune to damage, outside of being "harvested", and have no offensive abilities. Attacking them, however, will incur the wrath of their Big Daddy protectors.
- **Plasmid.**- Plasmids are special serums made from processed ADAM that introduce modified stem cells into the body, allowing for genetic modification and mutation, giving the user what some might call "super powers". Active Plasmids require EVE for use.
- **Splicer.**- They are the result of ADAM use during the violent conflict of the Rapture's Civil War. Due to abusive ADAM consumption, their bodies and minds have been deformed beyond repair (though some of their physical deformities can be attributed to Dr. J.S. Steinman's plastic surgery). They have become dependent on the substance, both mentally and physically. Many of them still wear Masquerade Ball

masks; perhaps, as Atlas suggested, out of shame at how ADAM has deformed their bodies.

Annex 2 Licensed Music in *Bioshock* Saga

Bioshock

The following are the songs and music played while exploring distinct locations in *BioShock*.

Song title	Artist	Year
"La Mer"	Django Reinhardt	1949
"If I Didn't Care"	The Ink Spots	1939
"The Party's Over Now"	Noël Coward	1959
"The Best Things in Life are Free"	The Ink Spots	1947
"Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams"	Bing Crosby	1931
"It Had to be You"	Django Reinhardt	1938
"God Bless the Child"	Billie Holiday	1941
"Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?"	Bing Crosby	1933
"Bei Mir Bist du Schön"	The Andrews Sisters	1937
"Jitterbug Waltz"	Django Reinhardt	1942
"Night and Day"	Billie Holiday	1939
"Liza (All the Clouds'll Roll Away)"	Django Reinhardt	1946
"Twentieth Century Blues"	Noël Coward	1959
"Beyond the Sea"	Bobby Darin	1959
"Waltz of the Flowers"	Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky	1892
"(How Much is) That Doggie in the Window?"	Patti Page	1966
"It's Bad for Me"	Rosemary Clooney	1955
"Please Be Kind"	Django Reinhardt	1938
"Papa Loves Mambo"	Perry Como	1954
"You're the Top"	Cole Porter with Vince Giordano & his	2004

	Nighthawks	
"Danny Boy"	Mario Lanza	1952

Bioshock 2

Song title	Artist	Year
"Here Comes the Boogie Man"	Todd Rollins & His Orchestra with Chick Bullock	1934
"(How Much is) That Doggie in the Window?"	Patti Page	1966
"Twentieth Century Blues"	Noël Coward	1959
"Nightmare"	Artie Shaw & His New Music	1938
"Daddy Won't You Please Come Home?"	Annette Hanshaw	1929
"Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition"	Kay Kyser & His Orchestra	1943
"Dawn of a New Day"	Horace Heidt & His Musical Knights	1939
"Night and Day"	Billie Holiday & Her Orchestra	1939
"My Heart Belongs to Daddy"	Eddy Duchin & His Orchestra, featuring Mary Martin	1938
"Chasing Shadows"	Django Reinhardt ; Stéphane Grappelli ; Quintette Du Hot Club de France	1935
"Jitterbug Waltz"	Fats Waller & His Rhythm	1942
"I Cover the Waterfront"	Connie Boswell	1933

Burial at Sea

The following are the music and songs appearing in the first episode of *Burial at Sea*.

Title	Artist	Year
"Wonderful, Wonderful"	Johnny Mathis	1957
"The Lady is a Tramp"	Mel Tormé	1937
"She's Got You"	Patsy Cline	1962
"Little Pal"	Lew White (organ)	1929
"La Mer"	Django Reinhardt (guitar) Stéphane Grappelli (violin)	1949
"Waltz of the Flowers" (accordion version)	Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (composer) Cory Pesaturo (accordion) Jim Bonney (arranger)	1892
"Cohen's Masterpiece" (accordion version)	Garry Schyman (composer) Cory Pesaturo (accordion) Jim Bonney (arranger)	2007
"Stranger in Paradise" (piano version) "Gliding Dance of the Maidens"(original melody)	Robert Wright George Forrest Alexander Borodin (composer) Duncan Watt (performer)	1953
"Tonight for Sure!"	Ruth Wallis	1953
"Good King Wenceslas"(bell and organ version)	Traditional Duncan Watt (performer)	1853
"Bridal Chorus"	Richard Wagner (composer) Duncan Watt (performer)	1850
"Wedding March"	Mendelssohn (composer)	1842

	Duncan Watt (performer)	
"It Had to be You"	Django Reinhardt	1938
"Midnight, the Stars and You"	Al Bowlly	1934
"Nocturne Op.9 No.2"	Frederick Chopin	1832

The following are the music and songs appearing in the second episode of *Burial at Sea*.

Title	Artist	Year
"La Vie En Rose"	Edith Piaf	1947
"Row, Row, Row Your Boat"	Jennifer Hale, Oliver Vaquer	-
"Nocturne Op.9 No.2"	Frederick Chopin	1832
"Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit-Bag"	George Henry Powell (lyrics), Felix Powell (music)	1915
"So Easy to Love"	Sammy Davis Jr.	1955
"Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree (With Anyone Else But Me)"	Glenn Miller and His Orchestra	1942
"You Belong to Me"	Pee Wee King, Chilton Price, and Redd Stewart (composers) Courtnee Draper (vocals)	1952 (original)
"Canon in D Major"	Johann Pachelbel (composer), Jim Bonney (piano)	1694
"Rise, Rapture, Rise"	Ken Levine (composer)	2007
"The Great Pretender"	The Platters	1955
"Back in Baby's Arms"	Patsy Cline	1963
"La Vie En Rose" (reprise)	Sally	-
"La Mer"	Django Reinhardt and Stéphane	1949

	Grappelli	
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