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The Seriality of Stephen King's Overlook Hotel – a Transmedial Maze

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This paper investigates three different medial instances of the Overlook Hotel, a space originally hailing from Stephen King's The Shining. *Based on close readings of King's novel, Stanley Kubrick's adaptation and a level in the action RPG* Vampire the Masquerade: Bloodlines *by Troika Games, the following text argues that the Overlook is a serial figure founded on the concept of malignant space in possession of a potent, and often overwhelming, story of violence that despite attempts at its repression cannot be silenced, as in the tradition of the Gothic ghost story. This basic formula is then traced through different media – the novel, film, and video game – where it is seen as gradually shifting its focus from the fictional characters to the recipient, which represents the intersection between the particular affordances of the respective media and the figure of a spatially-bound aggressive storyteller.*

Keywords
Transmediality; serial figure; Gothic; space; hotel; aggressive storyteller

The repressed is a hallmark of the Gothic; the psychoanalytical literature spawned around the genre is very indicative of this fact. While desire plays an essential role across the varied domain of the Gothic, a particular subgenre – the haunted house story – adds a peculiar item to the list of the repressed content: a narrative of violence. Spectres return from beyond the grave to testify of their violent death, delivering stories that refuse to be silenced, with the haunting being a spectacular formulation of that refusal. Haunted spaces are permeated with these stubborn narratives, and are prone to escalation into full-fledged autonomy on the lines of an alive, intelligent house we most famously find in Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (Bailey 22) but also in various incarnations of the Overlook Hotel.

Originally from Stephen King's novel *The Shining*, this particular haunted

space has gone through various adaptations in different media, making it a serial figure as defined by Shane Denson and Ruth Mayer: "a 'flat' and recurring figure, subject to one or more media changes over the course of its career" (108). The "flat", iconic part of the hotel is its very Gothic property: it is an isolated space marked by an excessive and violent past, which manifests itself as a captivating story. This particular property leads to various, media-specific assaults on the respective protagonists' identities, reevoking "the fear associated with the unstable boundaries of our subjectivity" (Kavka 211). The Gothic is all about liminality, as "it bears witness to the permeability of boundaries" (Kavka 228); in the case of the Overlook Hotel, it is the line demarcating the self that gets blurred, abusing the porousness of the story's recipient. This has already been pointed out to some extent by Dale Bailey in the section of his book on the haunted house trope that analyses the original Stephen King novel, where he finds several parallels between Jack Torrance, *pater familias* and one of the key protagonists, and the Overlook itself (99) or comments on his loss of integrity (104); but where I hope to contribute is in establishing a link between this process of identity merging and the hotel's storytelling that enthrals Jack and ties him to its supernatural will, with the latter carrying significant metamedial weight.

The comparative analysis that follows will trace the transmedial mutations of the means by which the narrative of (domestic) violence is being weaponised by the hotel, in a process in which it simultaneously unfolds itself and subdues its object. As I hope to show, these strategies are intrinsically related to the medium in which the overall story is transmitted, with a strong emphasis on the use of space which remains a constant. In order to demonstrate this, I will take three lives of the Overlook into consideration as executed in three different media: the original novel by Stephen King (1973), the Stanley Kubrick film (1980), and a video game level in *Vampire the Masquerade: Bloodlines*, developed by Troika Games (2004). I have chosen the aforementioned instances of the Overlook as I have found them exemplary in their use of their respective media – text, cinematic visuality and immersive interactivity – and convincing in their depiction of a space imbued by a malign, storytelling will essential to the trope of haunting.

A wilful story – the textual Overlook

Stephen King's Jack Torrance is a very passionate reader; aside from his

hereditary weaknesses of will, such as an inclination for alcohol (Bailey 93-94), his thirst for a good story makes him easy prey for the initial rendition of the Overlook Hotel, which he has been employed to maintain over a long winter, joined by his wife, Wendy, and son, Danny. The malignant will behind the establishment entraps Jack in a very specific textual maze: the pile of papers in the basement and especially the scrapbook[1] he finds there. This is flatly explicated by the spectral former caretaker Grady in the key moment at the "ghost" party when Jack completely surrenders:

> 'For instance, you show a great interest in learning more about the Overlook Hotel. *Very wise* of you sir. *Very noble*. A certain scrapbook was left in the basement for you to find –"
> 'By whom?' Jack asked eagerly.
> 'By the manager, of course. Certain other materials could be put at your disposal, if you wished them…'
> 'I do. Very much.' He tried to control the eagerness in his voice and failed miserably.
> 'You're *a true scholar*,' Grady said. 'Pursue the topic to the end. Exhaust all sources.' (King 355–356)

Jack's obsession with writing "a great book" (189) is what will enable Grady's flattery and completely bring back his fantasy of burning the hotel down (332), which surfaced right before the party. But this outcome is only the culmination of a very long process of infiltration into his mind, characterised by shifting loyalties; although the hotel clearly dominates Jack only after his conversation with Grady, his first fascination dates back to the "Prefatory Matters" and constitutes one of the many foreshadowing details which are emblematic of the initial tour through the hotel. The sight of the boxes is tied into the caretaker's first emotional reaction towards the object of his newly established care: "Jack stared around, fascinated. The Overlook's entire history might be here, buried in these rotting cartons" (21).

The sentiment of enchantment becomes overwhelming once he finds the scrapbook in a later chapter, when he looks into the boxes "on impulse" (154) – an eerie adverbial summoning of both Jack's dangerous temper and the subconscious *modus operandi* typical of the hotel. His inquiry starts rather innocently, with an ancient invoice for toilet paper and thoughts such as "[h]e supposed he was fascinated by that commonplace sense of history that anyone can feel glancing through the fresh news of ten or twenty years ago"

(155). On a genre-related note, fascination with the building itself is also very commonplace in the genre of haunted house stories; but a quick comparison illuminates the Overlook's specificity. As demonstrated by Dale Bailey, Robert Marasco's novel *Burnt Offerings* also has an enchanted protagonist, Marian Rolfe, the mother of the newly moved-in family, who seems to be fascinated by the household's furniture and decorative baubles (74). Her admiration for the house's materiality fuels a powerful irony, since the main plot twist of the story revolves around the fact that the estate drains her and her family of their vitality in some supernatural manner: the passionate consumer gets consumed. The same can be said for Jack, who in an ambition to dominate the Overlook's story through a writing project of his own has it instead go horribly wrong, tying him to the hotel's malignant will through the medium of text.

The innocence of Jack's curiosity is slightly questioned upon his discovery of the invitation to the same spectral party he will "shine" later in the book, but now only fantasises about, when he makes another curious supposition, that the Overlook "was the farthest cry from E. A. Poe imaginable" (157). Both his conscious evaluation of himself as "commonplacely" fascinated and the one concerning the hotel are entirely false; while his shining-like intuition that recalled "The Masque of the Red Death" might have been correct, Jack's reasoning about his role in the hotel is an ironic string of misinterpretations. His initial skim through of the papers was motivated by dissatisfaction with his employer's story, a feeling that the truth "was buried [...] where you couldn't quite see it" (156), which is essentially true about the Overlook but leads Jack to the demonic scrapbook. Likewise, his thought that "[i]t seemed that before today he had never really understood the breadth of his responsibility to the Overlook. It was almost like having a responsibility to history" (161) turns out to be ironically right as the events unfold, since he is picked out by the supernatural force to repeat the past violence.

Jack never stops being curious, not even after his first shining, when he sees the hedge animals move and feels that something is watching him. He continues to read about the hotel fanatically even after he experiences the first threatening sensations, hoping to retell its history in a book:

> He would write it because the Overlook has enchanted him – could any other explanation be so simple or so true? He would write for the reason he felt that all great literature, fiction and nonfiction, was written: truth comes out, in the end it always comes out. He would write it because he felt he had to. (224)

Truth indeed comes out, both the hotel's and Jack's own, in the form of violent acts. A textual thirst blurs the boundary between him and the hotel, always steering his reading deeper into the maze, until he can no longer discern himself from the Overlook. The story dominates him into a weakened state of mind in which the hotel can exploit his other faults; his first headache and the thirst for alcohol occur while he reads the newspaper clippings, and he compensates by "turning more pages" (161). What he finds, the true nature of the hotel, its intense and gruesome history, engulfs Jack into subhumanity: both the narrator and Danny refer to him respectively as "a mask" (429) and "it" (431) towards the novel's end. The story has swept away his identity and completely taken over his body in an attempt to recreate itself. Paradoxically, this wilful, active force of remembrance, strong enough to force itself on reality and try to be a full actor in the events, is too single-mindedly forceful to remember its own weakness: the boiler, which like the wasp nest was associated with Jack's foul temper in the earlier parts of the book. The memory of crimes and violence which occupies a wannabe writer turns out to be so intense that it tips over to self-destruction, pulling down Jack with it as the person who tried to make sense of it, to solve the "elusive, but fascinating" (216) fragments, to fit them like "pieces in a jigsaw" (ibid), while completely missing out on the hotel's true nature.

The curiosity that seeks to reveal the story is undoubtedly harmful. It leads Danny to room 217 – "[c]uriosity was like a constant fishhook in his brain" (217) – and the almost fatal encounter with its inhabitant. However, what makes his plight very different from Jack's is the shining itself: Danny, encouraged by the hotel chef, Halloran, and his mother, Wendy, believes his inexplicably, irrationally and *sensorially* gained insight into the true nature of what is going on. He still cannot read, as is mentioned a couple of times in the story, and it is the visual nature of the *shine* that he chooses to believe, unlike his father who succumbs to the textual maze of the scrapbook. Danny can sense the danger behind the story that escapes Jack, and although he fears for his sanity, he does not doubt the evilness of the hotel. He does not even try to fit his fragmented visions into a wider picture, nor to solve its textual maze, since to him the violence *shines* through just as the word "divorce" shines to him about his parent's relationship; unlike Jack's textual gift, his does not fail him in making out the truth about the Overlook Hotel's malignancy.

"A beautiful place" – the weight of visuality

One of the main specificities of Kubrick's rendition of the Overlook (1980) is the intention to captivate the viewer, which Thomas Allen Nelson notices about his films overall: "their cinematic corporeality represents an illusion of sorts, something to 'fascinate the beholder' while his awareness is being slightly altered" (19). While King has focused on minutely presenting Jack Torrance getting lost in the story-maze, Kubrick places this thread in the undercurrents of his film, choosing not to display the struggle but only its consequences. This motivational muting is used to enhance another overwhelming effect: the weight of the Overlook, which due to Kubrick's camera choices becomes not only Jack's plight, but the viewers' as well.

As in the book, the interview has a very straightforward introductory role, with both Jack and the hotel presenting themselves to us as recipients, but Kubrick's version cleverly uses its conciseness to emphasise isolation over the protagonist's anger management difficulties which are more overtly shown in the book, leaving Jack Nicholson's uneasy manner to speak for itself. This delegates the viewers' attention to the parallel nature of two forces: a place "chosen for its seclusion and beauty" as the hotel manager phrases it, and Jack's submerged explosive temperament upon which it will apply its pressure. The story about the Grady murders serves as an essential foreshadowing device, much like the boiler did in King's version – Jack's comment being "That is… quite a story" – and it is counterpointed by Wendy talking to the doctor about the incident with Danny's arm. This structural choice marks the narrative of domestic violence as the story which seeks to make itself known despite attempts at its suppression, both by a continued operation of the Overlook and Jack's own escape into the literal woods, highlighted by the long opening shots of his car traversing the winding mountain roads. This setup also fits into a scheme proposed by Nick Savoy: "Gothic images in America thereby suggest the attraction and repulsion of a monstrous history, the desire to 'know' the traumatic Real of American being and yet the flight from that unbearable and remote knowledge" (169). Domestic violence becomes the film's teleological core, slowly building up to the film's finale, propped up by alcoholism and an obsessive approach to work which are staged in the hotel's labyrinthian architecture, whose cage-like properties are strongly suggested by Kubrick's camera work.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Researchers like Thomas Allen Nelson or Rodney Ascher, director of the documentary *Room 237* (2012), have already explored the ways camera movement influences the viewer's perception of the hotel and mapped out its otherwise impossible layout, so I would prefer to focus on some purely two-dimensional properties of the Overlook's presentation in the film, namely how the interior is used as a restrictive frame. Kubrick develops a cage aesthetics

which highlights the characters' confinement and visually signifies the cabin fever, making us *see* the pressure of the surroundings. The side shots of Figures 1–4 represent the loosest type of framing and are very frequent in the "Closing Day" segment, where it is primarily utilised to introduce the viewers to the Overlook, but they also establish a sense of scale, and the hotel's long spatial shadow which falls on the Torrances. As the story develops, the trio breaks off and we increasingly see Danny and Wendy playing outside while Jack wanders the hotel on his own, which culminates in him shining the party in the Gold Room (Figure 4). While the content of the shots varies as the family falls apart, the hotel remains the constant frame fondling the tiny silhouettes, making the absences even more prominent.

Unlike the visually fluid tracking shots, a more formally restrictive approach can be seen in the stills where Jack is shown at the writing desk (Figures 5–7). While certain angles follow the logic of the side shot and choose to let the scale speak for itself, coupled with the totality of the Overlook dominating the screen (Figure 5), a reoccurring shot of Jack from behind (Figures 6–7) is based on a more restrictive geometry and Kubrick's famous symmetry, making the confinement more formally profound. The additional slow zoom-in invites the viewer to linger on the image of Jack sitting alone in the overwhelmingly empty, large and *organised* space; the latter might bring up associations of an intelligently designed construct and raise suspicion about whether all the shots from the back in the film are actually *something's* point of view.

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

A similar back-framing can be found in other segments of the film, such as in Figure 8 where we see Danny cycling through a hallway and becoming increasingly smaller as he moves away from the camera. Additionally, a couple of the shots of Jack writing are finely contrasted with images of Wendy and her son playing *outside* (Figure 9). But even in this scene of harmonious parenthood, the hotel remains visually dominant, following the side-shot logic of lurking in the background and encapsulating the protagonists. While early Hollywood Gothic cinema employed shadows to highlight the uncertain boundaries between the human and the inhuman (Kavka 217), Kubrick reverses this vagueness in order to emphasise the said border, and demonstrate its slow tightening around the characters, which can be clearly seen in two important scenes: Jack's encounter with the woman in room 237 and the final scene of the film.

Figure 8

Figure 9

Figure 10

Figure 11

Figure 12

The bathroom scene serves as an explicit confirmation to Jack and the viewers of the hotel's treacherous and malign nature. It is based on the demasking of the ghost inside room 237, revolving around a twist of sexual welcoming, with an attractive young woman turning out to be a decayed, threatening hag. The parallels to the hotel and Jack's perception of it are somewhat obvious, with a fantasy suddenly shifting to a nightmare once seen in the "truth" symbolised by the mirror, but what's telling about the scene is the way Kubrick decided to present it visually. The yellow frame above the bathtub serves as a starting point from which the woman emerges and which contains her and Jack as long as the dream goes on uninterrupted, but as soon as he sees through the illusion, she escapes the outline and starts chasing Torrance. What is remarkable here is the amount of wickedness attributed to the frame itself as a container of evil, a Pandora's Box just waiting to be awakened from dormancy and to seep out into the exterior, in this case Jack's life.

The cage/container logic of the hotel gets a confirmation, even a proliferation of sorts, in the final shots of the film, where the camera zooms in to an image of Jack in one of the hotel photos (Figures 13–15). The movement of the field of view penetrates three different planes: the architecture of the hotel, namely the pillars and the door frame (Figure 13), the neatly symmetrical photographic composition (Figure 14) and finally into the frame itself (Figure 15), showing Jack Torrance or *a* Jack Torrance among other hotel patrons, seemingly trapped for eternity in the stillness of the photo. This image nails down a point made with the previous shot of Jack frozen in the snow outside the hotel: the Overlook may not have managed to obtain Danny, but it has successfully caged Jack inside the story of itself. In a superbly Gothic nature, the viewers are confronted with what is missing, what has been cut-off from the frame (Kavka 226): Jack's life and his family remain outside the picture, leaving him eternally trapped in the visual representation of the hotel's history.

Figure 13

Figure 14

Figure 15

At the very beginning of the film, Jack fails to recognise the space's malignancy, which is rendered obvious with statements such as "It's a beautiful place". On the other hand, Wendy is slightly more perceptive, saying the hotel is "Just like a ghost ship", or "such an enormous maze" and that she will have to "leave a trail of breadcrumbs every time" she comes in. However, she fails to act on these observations by not taking them seriously enough, which converts them into foreshadowing meant for the viewer. The truth tries to come through but fails, which leads to it staying unresolved and unpacified, and eventually leads to an attempt at its repetition.

The unspeakable is only available to Danny's shining, who can *see* it in incomprehensible slices, which despite its confused nature is crucial for delivering the truth about the hotel to both his parents and the viewers. Jack is directly confronted with the hotel's deceitfulness in the bathroom, and although he chooses not to react upon his findings, the truth is no longer hidden from him, being revealed in a mirror. This type of interplay between the visible and the unseen appears again with regards to Wendy, who sees "redrum" in the mirror and fully realises what the hotel intends to do through the medium of Jack. On the other hand, the "murder" does not come as such a surprise to the audience which is equipped not only with a clear overview of Jack increasingly slipping away to the hotel's power, but also into the visions of violence which has permeated the hotel, be it the corpses of Grady's daughters

or the surge of blood in the elevator hallway. Aside from the introductory story about the previous caretaker's crime, little is explicated; unlike the book, the story behind the hotel's apparitions is never explained. Evil remains vague and visual in Kubrick's film, left untold in the same vain as Jack tries to write but fails to produce anything sensible. Telling/remembering the hotel's story through a type of rational reconstruction is doomed from the start, as is hinted in the awkwardness of the interview scenes, but it fully unravels in the film's ending.

Unlike the book, what saves Danny from death at his father's hands is an act of visual deceit. The required skill is *retracing* footsteps, both an act of recreating the narrative of getting in, in order to get out of the maze and a simple way to deceive Jack. Danny manages to break the pattern the hotel and his father impose upon him and escape the Gothic compulsion as described by Savoy: "The sins of the fathers – their excesses, their violence and abuses, their predispositions toward the irrational – are visited upon their children, who, despite their illusions of liberty, find themselves in the ironic situation of an intergenerational compulsion to repeat the past" (172). His solution is individual and escapist, just like the ending itself: both Jack and the hotel remain frozen in the snow, not burned down as in the novel, and there is no epilogue, no happily-ever-after for the Torrances. The story of the Overlook is defeated in a sense that it is stopped in its repetition and neutralised, but the hotel is not permanently destroyed, as the violence at the hotel's foundations remains unspoken of and therefore unresolved.

Experiencing the maze – inside the Ocean House

Owing both to the popularity of the book and the iconicity of the Stanley Kubrick film, *The Shining* has gained the status of a frequent intertextual object across pop culture, making cameos in media ranging from sitcoms such as *The Office* to Pixar animated films and Slipknot music videos. While these instances usually work as mere Easter eggs designed for comedic effect, from time to time they grow into full-fledged homages as in the case of a quest called *The Ghost Haunts at Midnight*, one of the episodes making up the main storyline of *Vampire the Masquerade: Bloodlines* (2004). In this action RPG developed by Troika Games and based on Whitewolf's tabletop system of the same name, the player takes on the role of a vampire fledgling who tries to come to terms with life among the 21st century Los Angeles undead, which in the early game

consists mainly of proving oneself to the local vampire elite in Santa Monica, only to branch out into other areas as the player's good standing opens up the city both socially and physically.

The Ghost Haunts at Midnight is one of the missions trusted to the player by Therese Voerman, one of the senior vampires of the town and a businesswoman running the local night club with her sister Jeanette. She asks the player character to visit the Ocean House, a local, presumably haunted hotel and to retrieve the ghost's personal item, so she can perform an exorcism and continue with renovating the place as a piece of valuable real estate. In return, she promises to call off a feud with another character whom the player needs in order to start fulfilling an obligation to the ruling vampire of the town, and in short, to progress the main plotline further. The player is given the keys to a tunnel in the sewers leading to the hotel and sent on their merry way with no additional information on what particular item to look for and only the meta-game awareness that if vampires are real in this fictional universe, ghosts probably ought to be too.

Upon reaching the hotel courtyard from the underground, the player sees the hotel for the first time behind a pile of construction material (Figure 16). While this view does not yield any significant information and could be even seen as deliberately obstructive, it can focus the player's attention to a slight change in the interface, the gun icon which indicates that the current area is not a "Masquerade" space, where social norms of the human world must be upheld and the vampiric powers hidden, but a combat area. Since this is not the first quest in the game with this status change, the player's expectations of the mission are tweaked to an aggressive mindset and an alertness to possible danger.

Figure 16 (screenshot); my highlighting.

Figure 17 (screenshot)

Once the player approaches the hotel, it turns out that the front door is locked, forcing them to explore the courtyard. This preliminary task is important for two distinct purposes: it introduces the first reference to *The Shining*, the Hellcat

(Figure 17)[2], which starts humming as the player arrives; and mechanically it foreshadows the entire level, which will, despite all of the red herrings, be more about unlocking doors than proper arcade action. As a video game space, the hotel is functionally multicursal (Nitsche 178) since player movement is not restricted; however, it has a very specific path that leads to its completion, converting it into a puzzle to be solved. As I will demonstrate, the gist of the level operates on an interplay of de- and reterritorialisation of space; these Deleuzian concepts have already been briefly implemented in game studies by David Martin Jones (11–26) to describe the way levels are completed in the *Pac-Man* franchise. What the yellow puck-shaped arcade protagonist and the vampire fledgling of *VtMB* have in common is an ambivalent relationship towards the space they act in, as can be seen through a closer look at the sequence of events that the player character triggers and responds to.

The Ocean House utilises most of the traditional devices of a carnival horror show, following in the footsteps of the King novel (Bailey 98): scarce and defunct lighting, eerie music, jumpscares, and most importantly, the malignancy of the space itself as a medium of storytelling. The first event of this type the player triggers is on the very doorstep of the hotel, when a lightbulb explodes in front of the character model; inside, the chandelier falls as soon as the player enters, and the lobby is filled with a couple of aggressive vases. These instances of the environment's hostility can lower the player's health, although not significantly, but the very fact builds upon the already mentioned attentiveness of possible threats. As the player keeps on exploring the ground floor, these effects intensify and culminate in a sound trigger of a female voice whispering, "He's near"; if the player turns around at this point, they can see a character model of an axe-wielding man (Figure 18). If the Hellcat reference was a bit too subtle, at this point it can be expected of a careful recipient to connect the dots: grand old hotel with an art deco stylistic leaning[3], ghosts, an axe-wielding man. A pop-culturally literate player can clearly see where the narrative is headed, giving them an interesting shine-like ability of their own, a shortcut to the truth about the place not unlike Danny's visions. The story about domestic violence is yet to be confirmed, but already at this point it begins to shine through the gamespace.

Figure 18 (screenshot)

Figure 19 (screenshot)

The Ocean House does not inherit only the motifs of the Overlook, but its labyrinthian properties; as soon as the player tries to proceed to the first floor, the stairs collapse underneath them, landing them somewhere in the hotel's basement. From this point onwards, the players main task will become spatial navigation and exploration, which partially fits into the description of Pac-Man as a reterritorialising coloniser (Jones 14). However, with the female voice as an apparent ally, an alternative interpretation emerges: the player might be deterritorialising the hotel from the murderer, as the quest's end goal of exorcising the space also suggests. Additionally, as will be shown soon, a more important re/deterritorialisation is taking place: that of the player's identity, which is common in the social playgrounds of online multiplayer games (Jones 16), but is here utilised as a media-specific addition to the Overlook's serial figure.

Over time, the ghost voice becomes the player's main companion, delivering various vague warnings as the hotel continues with aggressive jumpscares. Although this may seem as standard theme-park haunted house procedure, in the context of the Overlook as a serial entity it represents a significant shift in the reception of the hotel: the recipients themselves become directly persecuted by a malign space. The players are forced into the story, more precisely into victimhood, presumably the ghost's, as they constantly anticipate the threat of the axe murderer while navigating a confusing and unfriendly space, experiencing an identity merge with the distressed woman. Room after room the tension builds up and further hints are dropped, mainly in the form of items, until the player finally picks up a diary which explicitly tells the story of the murder-suicide: a father who had violently killed his family and then set the hotel aflame. His primary motive was jealousy, as he fixated on a new piece of his wife's jewellery that the player will recover as the ghost's personal item, but an important section of the diary mentions him talking to the groundskeeper just before suffering "a breakdown" which led to the killing (Figure 20).

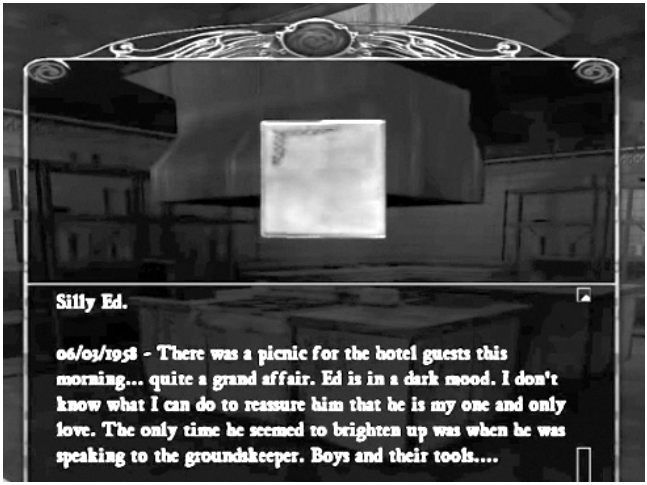

Figure 20 (screenshot)

At this point it becomes clear that the player has been living out a dramatisation of the wife's increasing unease with her unstable husband; the ghost's whispers such as "Be careful" or "He's watching" can now even be reinterpreted as verbalisations of her own state while she watched her husband slip into insanity. In a sense, the recipient has been forced into being *a* Wendy, wandering alone around an old hotel and just waiting for the killer to arise from any corner. This conforms to what Fred Botting has written about the Gothic in video gaming; in his view, games "play with patterns of anticipation, expectation, and uncertainty drawn from the basic Gothic plot set out in *The Castle of Otranto*" (278). However, what makes the Ocean House a masterful rendition of the principle and a valuable entry in the list of Overlook incarnations is the fact that the player never actually encounters any real danger. You cannot possibly die on this level[4], and there is no big showdown with the axe murderer. While the ghost whispers "Help me" when the player picks up the diary, the only "help" needed is finding the locket, that is, getting to the centre of the maze. Solving it means experiencing the story of domestic violence firsthand, reliving the sense of danger in as much detail as possible as a stranger to the killer. This is symbolically enhanced by the end of the quest and its aftermath.

Figure 21 (screenshot)

Figure 22 (screenshot)

Firstly, upon reaching the family's badly damaged hotel room (Figure 21), the player is suddenly engulfed in a vision of sorts (Figure 22). The interior

is suddenly new and warm, and remains that way until the player picks up the pendant on a table at the opposite end of the room; but what carries the greatest symbolical weight is the fact that this is the only moment of daylight in a game which phrases vampiric livelihood explicitly from the angle of a loss of humanity. Like the Whitewolf tabletop game, the video game has a Humanity mechanic which essentially threatens players with a loss of control over the character if they indulge in the beastly side of their in-game characters too much, and numerous non-player characters either speak of or are affected by different personality disorders stemming from a vampire's severed connection with the human world. The player's main reward for enduring the Ocean House is this vision of the daylight-world, which only highlights the empathic dimension of the quest. This is further underlined by the outcome of the whole adventure, since the player mechanically gains the bare minimum when it comes to quest rewards: experience points needed for leveling-up and the further progression of the main storyline. No currency or flashy items are given, only the knowledge that "[b]y delivering the pendant to Therese, you have given her the means to free the spirits from the Ocean House, thereby delivering the unfortunate wife to her eternal reward and her murderous husband to his eternal damnation" (Quest Log, upon completion).[5] It should be added that this outcome has an ironic twist to it since Therese plans to appropriate the estate for further commercial exploitation, maybe even a new hotel, and if the Overlook logic of both versions of *The Shining* is at play, the exorcism might not be enough to stop the violence from pouring out again. Nonetheless, the player is meant to be content with a "Spiritual Release"[6], the catharsis of directly experiencing the Ocean House: an overwhelming, spatially configured story of violence intent on retelling itself.

Conclusion

The Jack Torrance of the Stephen King novel lives and dies by text. Unlike his son's shining, which is phrased mostly in visual, almost illiterate terms, the reading capabilities that he can exercise on the hotel completely flop. Instead of helping him to decipher the Overlook and expose its secrets through a book, the textual interpretation of its story only pulls him deeper in; this outcome follows the tradition of many previous literary figures enchanted by storytelling such as Don Quixote or Madame Bovary. The narrative of violence in King's *The Shining* manifests itself as a textual maze which consumes the identity of

its reader – curiously fitting for a notoriously captivating genre of the novel, whose other fictional victims fell prey to the same logic.[7]

Textuality is the authorially assigned weapon of choice in the verbal rendition of the Overlook; as we have seen, the cinematic incarnation of the hotel has emphasised its cage-like properties through the manipulation of camera framing and shots. However, it has also offered redemption for visuality: Danny both realises what his father is up to, communicates it to his mother, and manages to escape Jack through a clever implementation of mostly visual cues. In the finest tradition of Gothic cinema, Kubrick's film is about the liminal, the seen and the unseen, mirrors, reflections and camera angles, all realised mainly through "the manipulations that are possible in [...] composition of space" (Kavka 226).

If the cinematic Overlook Hotel relies on the experience of borders, the gaming rendition of the Ocean House topples the recipient right across them. The fright of being touched by a ghost has been interpreted as a fear of annulling identity boundaries (Bloom 228), and this is precisely what happens in *Vampire the Masquerade: Bloodlines*, as the player is forced to become one with a victim of a murderous spatiality, captured in one of its stories of violence. The immersion of such a powerfully constructed in-game presence (Nitsche 204) is only possible through a careful craftsmanship of the gamespace: as Dale Bailey puts it, "[i]n gothic fiction, setting is destiny" (4). What makes the Overlook Hotel so iconic is exactly this intensity, which elevates its formula to a transmedially successful concept: a space-negotiated story whose malignancy shines through in spite of every repression.

Notes

1. While commenting on Kubrick's film, Thomas Allen Nelson makes this very valuable observation which also extends to the book: "The large brown scrapbook not only looks ancient but contains pasted newspaper clippings that assume the shape of a maze's internal design" (205). It could also be added that the pile of other papers we do not get to see in the film is also of a similar nature, and even more so due to its spatial three-dimensionality.
2. The name and the visuals allude to the Snowcat from the Kubrick film.
3. While the architectural style of the hotel may not be that obvious or convincing today, it is after all a 3D game from 2004; not to mention the complications which arose during the development of the game's engine, with Troika and Valve working on it in parallel but with close to no coordination between the two. A newspaper front page about the "Grand opening!" and the vintage-looking pictures at the reception are further clues which do not directly quote the Overlook but point in its general direction when

taken together. The very name of the place is also a tiny nod: Ocean House – Overlook Hotel.

4. The furniture deals so little damage that you can only die if you are intentionally keen on it and start the mission with extremely low health, which is what few players would opt for, especially given the action-heavy nature of the previous quest in the main storyline.
5. An alternate ending is possible if the player decides to give the pendant to Therese's sister Jeanette, who carelessly throws it into the ocean to thwart her sister's plan, but even the game describes this as "Jeanette threw the Ocean House pendant – the one you stupidly gave her – into the ocean" (Quest Log, upon completion), which clearly states what the preferred course of action is.
6. Picking up the dairy is meant to be additionally rewarded, which is mechanically solved by making it a separate quest with its own title – "Spiritual Release" – and consequently its own experience points.
7. The obvious difference is, of course, the presumed nonfictional status of the Overlook's history inside of the storyworld and the emphasis on trust in fictionality as the key point of mockery, the mentioned works of Cervantes and Flaubert. However, I would argue that the textual craze still remains the same in modality: while it might be more obviously tragic to be enchanted with fiction, the stakes are proportionally raised in the King novel to deliver an equal emphasis on the graveness of the situation, even though the text in question might be "true history" on the level of the fictional world.

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