

## **THE ART OF FLESH – EXPLORING POSTHUMAN AESTHETICS IN *DOOM ETERNAL***

Mikołaj Marks

*Centre of Doctoral Studies at the Philological Department of The University of Gdańsk  
Wita Stwosza 51, 80-312 Gdańsk  
markso8o8o@gmail.com*

### **Abstract**

This article examines the aesthetics of the inside of the human body as represented in the video game, *Doom Eternal* (2020), in the context of other prominent works of art that have the power to establish beauty standards. Through ages artists and spectators of their work have defined certain aesthetics. People agreed upon distinct beauty standards. Settled assumptions usually pointed to renaissance sculptures as a perfect example. Human fascination with beauty revolved around what is outside, visible and pleasant for the eye, neglecting a whole microworld – the inside of the body. It is understandable to perceive the insides as vile, as we are not used to looking directly at them. Nevertheless, the human is a gruesome flesh covered by what is superficial, the skin. Today technology adds another layer to conceal our bodies and, thus appears the need to explore it in detail. The mainstream game from 2020, *Doom Eternal*, uses the flesh as an artist's material combined with the New Aesthetics. This text, using the intermedial approach, discusses how the unique experience of posthuman aesthetics appeals to a larger audience, and how it reinvents aesthetic standards.

**Key words:** *Doom, Posthuman Aesthetics, Body, Video Games, Art, Baudrillard, Beauty*

**OBJECTIVES/METHODS**

Throughout its history humanity has explored the nature of beauty while defining and then redefining certain standards and aesthetics. An obvious tool of perception is the eye; therefore people focus on what is visible. The creation of art that was later established and encountered by human beings, who became critics, has resulted in settled beauty standards. People have trusted their senses, which have led them on a linear, yet curved aesthetic path through history, until today. We have been limited by our perception, which is understandable, because the senses are our only means of communication with the surrounding reality. It has been proven in neuroaesthetic research that “aesthetic appreciation results from the interaction between the object’s perceptual features and the perceiver’s sensory processing dynamics” [Sarasso, Ronga, Kobau, Bosso, Artusio, Neppi-Modona 2020: 184]. This statement confirms the rather obvious assumption that we assess aesthetic values with the help of our senses, mostly sight. It can be compared to the Aristotelian theory of truth, considering its simplicity. We see something beautiful therefore it is beautiful. Such assessment is only the beginning, a basic explanation. It implies further questions, like why exactly our senses consider one item as beautiful and the other as repulsive? Deeply embedded in the psyche, aesthetic order has formed a certain path as I have already mentioned. This path is marked by concrete examples of human features, surroundings and art being either labelled as aesthetic, beautiful or evil and repulsive. What implications does each label add to the particular object or the whole theme? How are these settled aesthetic traits nourished by every generation, and what consequences does such order have?

In this article I intend to scrutinise more prominent examples from the history of art in order to provide settled aesthetic examples of beauty. This should visualise the path that human beings have demarcated since the ancient times until today. This cultural baggage has a direct influence on our current perception of beauty. Moreover, during the last hundred years, powerful forces, which shift our needs and perception, appeared. The technological advance has taken over our lives and our reality, and it keeps changing it. Further, I want to explore what can be witnessed now, around us, on this aesthetic path. Moreover, I intend to investigate how humanity has perceived the insides of the body - aesthetic elements hidden from plain sight.

One of the largest contemporary media reinventing and shaping our contemporary concept of art are video games. Gilyard writes, that “the United States Supreme Court ruled in favor of the classification of video games as art in 2011, and even the French Minister of Culture, Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, supported the recognition of video games as an art form in 2006” [Gilyard 2017: 113]. Video games provide possibilities much broader than any other media that have existed before, because they combine multiple forms of art, to create one that is above all interactive. Moreover, the mainstream videogames represent the condensed phenomenon of intertextuality described by Julia Kristeva. They are literally made out of cultural references and notions that

can somehow resonate with the mass receiver. The example of such a game is *Doom Eternal* (2020). In this case the aesthetics of the body intestines, contemporary technology and artistic standards are combined in order to reach the consumer. The result turned out to be a huge success. As the webpage Screen Rant informs “a former employee of id Software reports that *Doom Eternal* earned \$450 million in revenue within only nine months of its release last March” [Nelson 2021]. Therefore I believe that analysing the aesthetics of this game in the context of the previously gathered information shall provide an important insight into the sphere of our own physicality, so much needed in the posthuman times of technological hegemony.

## RESULTS

It seems reasonable to begin by looking into the past, just like Foucault did in order to research the “aesthetics of the existence” [Besley, Peters 2007: 53]. Foucault studied this Nietzschean trope borrowed from ancient Greeks, who claimed that the man is able to use spiritual exercises to remake oneself [Besley, Peters 2007: 53]. The idea was that the visible human body is a reflection of the spirit. The choices people make have visible consequences in their appearance. It was true in the past, and it is true now, when bodies became commodities. Besley and Peters write that:

*From the Greek ideal of Venus de Milo to Rubens’ The Three Graces in the 17th century to the heroin-chic anorexia of the Milano cat-walk, female body fashions indicated in a plain manner the changing ideals of “beauty” and their enmeshment in the politics of desire and consumerism [Besley, Peters 2007: 58].*

This example refers only to the outside of the human body. Beauty has to be transparent, so it could be influenced by the external power. Here we can observe the scope of female beauty standards that have evolved across the ages. Beauty limits itself to the outside, because the inside is always hidden, unless the body is being opened during elaborate tortures or simply during autopsy. Foucault referred to the insides of the body with the example of “the torture of Damiens the regicide” [Besley, Peters 2007: 57]. The philosopher emphasised this scene in order to advocate the dynamics between the power, body and punishment. The inside of the body is rarely taken into consideration when it comes to beauty standards. And yet, underneath, male and female bodies are similar, as far as the visual aspect is concerned. The internal organs are all covered in blood and other body fluids. Besely and Peters continue with a statement, that:

*the history of the body and of body criticism indicates a profound shift in an understanding of ourselves, particularly in the West, from the religious and doctrinal visions that pictured human beings as enduring souls able to survive the rotting of the flesh, emphasizing the shift to a situated material and anatomical body that could be modified, healed, exercised and improved [Besley, Peters 2007: 61].*

This quote suggests that today we are closer to our material bodies than ever before. At the same time we have never been further from the physicality. Right now our bodies are shielded from the materiality by contemporary technology, constant consumption and concrete city landscapes. The Greeks did not have such obvious limitations, yet they chose to idealise the human body anyhow, providing humanity with the stereotypical depiction of what is beautiful. They were so close to the body that they chose to get away from it. In opposition to their times, now, when bodies became products, we lust after the physical, and we are unable to fully reach it.

The model representation of beauty created by an artist is classical sculpture – the study of an outside of human body. Greek artists conveyed values like “control, order, serenity” [Spivey 2013: 2] into their art, forming clean and well-shaped depictions of the human body. The physical aspect, what is perceivable and pleasant for the eye, was most valued, because it is simple to cherish what is obviously perfect and clean. The inspiration of the sculptors were human bodies, yet only their part covered by skin. They told stories by depicting muscle movement but seldom were they interested in what is underneath. The classical sculpture displayed certain characteristics that continue to define art and beauty standards even today. These characteristics provide a “psychological assurance which men constantly seek: balance, security, the organization out of the chaos of life of powerful form which have unity and coherence, which induce conviction of certainty and realizable perfection” [Agard 1954: 349]. This passage emphasises the human incapability to deal with the chaos of life as it is. Instead, humans have created a necessary illusion of beauty, which helped them deal with the surrounding reality. For Greeks beautiful equalled good, moral and pure. This assumption formed certain ideal to be followed, at the same time raising a very dangerous notion, that ugliness and chaos was evil. The search for balance, as noble as it might seem, also introduced inevitable limitations.

Ancient Greeks did not know much about human intestines. Ferngren provides an example of Aristotle and many other philosophers of that period, who believed that organ of thought and feeling was the heart [Ferngren 2017: 212]. Their point of view was idealistic, taking into consideration the standards of beauty they had decided to follow. Moreover Ferngren writes that:

*the Greeks had a deep-seated repugnance for the systematic dissection of human corpses, a repugnance that was based on religious and moral sensibilities. They believed that the human corpse polluted any person or object that came into contact with it. They had a dread of the cadaver and particularly of the skin, regarding the latter as inviolable and fearing to cut through it [Ferngren 2017: 212-213].*

The quote addresses the ancient Greeks’ relation towards the intestines. They considered the intestines as foul, despite having proofs that this foulness was spread under their precious skin. Only the illusion of beauty they had established and nourished in their art must have kept them from self-hatred. Therefore they started the everlasting,

aesthetic division, correlating the intestines with the wrong side.

Moving forward in time we encounter another period marked by artworks that have been regarded as beautiful. The Renaissance is associated with ideal forms, which were possible to flourish only in “an age productive in personalities, many-sided, centralized, complete” [Pater 2011: 35]. The longevity of perfect body aesthetics proved to be real also in renaissance sculpture. According to Stephan Bourgeois “with Michelangelo the sculptural language of Italy became round and sonorous” [Bourgeois 1935: 8]. The author also underlines that other artists of that period spoke “the language of perfection” [Bourgeois 1935: 8]. Even after centuries people tend to return to the settled beauty standards, which prove to be an elusive dream woven by the carefree artist. Such works of art support people’s view that only the clean and sonorous form is good.

These two examples refer only to European culture yet Mariagrazia Portera writes that “our species tends to agree on the attractiveness of certain basic features, which is largely a result of evolutionary constraints on our cognitive or perceptual systems” [Portera 2016: 41]. Humans in general strive for symmetry. Therefore such a need has been explored and exploited to its limits. Another human trait, necessary to push the evolution forward, is curiosity. When the well is empty or simply the taste of water becomes too mundane, a man is urged to venture for the new. The question that is raised is as follows: How can a human being create something new, while having such strong, symmetrical roots embedded in the psyche?

Another visual representation of the human body, paintings, also focused mainly on the outside. The physical blood and insides are often a distortion of a perfect image, and are predominantly reserved for the depiction of hell and demons. Notably, there are plenty of paintings that try to study and present what is under the skin. Artists like Rembrandt with *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632) gave people a glance into what is beneath the human skin. In this work of art we can notice a crowd of well-dressed scholars and only a small piece of the inner body of an examined corpse. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century numerous illustrated anatomy books were published so that the public could see openly for the first time what was concealed inside them [Lee 2010: 103]. Lee claims that “whimsical, surreal and often grotesque, the anatomical images included literary and religious allusions and artistic embellishments” [Lee 2010: 103]. Those pictures may have provided a visible inspiration for artists to expand beauty standards, by offering an insight into the physical inside of the human body. Anatomy is a vital part of an artist’s education [Lee 2010: 105]. The inner organs finally revealed to the spectator force a reflection. After all, every movement of the muscles depicted in still marble is only a cover for complicated muscle fibers. However, it does not matter how curious we get, the embedded aesthetic inheritance makes certain traits seem natural, therefore impossible to overcome [Portera 2016: 45]. When an artist is inspired by the inside of the human body, the clash between the familiar, often symmetrical, passed on from generation to generation aesthetics

and the complex, gruesome, hidden aesthetics of the flesh is inevitable.

Through this process of merging and mixing seemingly opposite characteristics the artist finds a niche in the specific theme, already mentioned, presented since the dawn of humanity – the way of depicting hell and demons. It is the answer to a perverted need to glorify the flesh - perverted, because of the pure beauty standards nourished carefully by each generation. Only in hell can the artist place the gory inside of a human body, as blood is identified with suffering. Hieronymus Bosch placed separated human organs in his depiction of hell, in *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1503 – 1515). The right panel of his triptych shows a pair of severed ears, a deformed, cut in half human body, and an unidentified organ placed above its head. Jacobs states that “Bosch’s art is profoundly dualistic: his paintings often juxtapose within a single work saints and sinners, heaven and hell, beauty and ugliness” [Jacobs 2000: 1009]. The artist decided to put the dispersed elements of the human body in the right panel, representing the inferno, in contrast to the coherent left panel, the domain of God. The flesh was useful to him in creating a fascinating and beautiful depiction of dread and suffering. Nevertheless, each panel of this triptych immerses the viewer by the density of symbolism and proves that blending hell and insides of human body results in specific aesthetics with its own cultural value.

In the Bible “the imagery of hell is based on the vision of the distorted, dissected, and oversized human body or body-parts” [Czachesz 2014: 21]. This repetitive association has set human perception. At best, the flesh serves as “the source of moral dilemmas” [Czachesz 2014: 48]. It is impossible to find a picture of heaven and angels, which consists of blood and organs. Even in *Doom Eternal* (2020), a contemporary gaming experience, the force working in opposition to demonic hordes is at first deprived of visible flesh.

The correlation between exposed intestines and hell has for centuries remained yet another well-established trait perceived as normal. The artist’s intention of depicting bloody insides was most often to shock and scare the audience. As I demonstrated in the last paragraph, the aesthetics evolve and merge with the new discoveries that serve as inspirations. The easier access to the new visual properties creates the possibility for the discussion. The introduction of the human anatomy to artists was a start. It did not shift the settled aesthetics, yet it was a huge change in body depiction, because it has made intestines more familiar. Nevertheless, the insides of the human body remained to be viewed as foul and repulsive. These aesthetics have waited for the next discovery which would again prompt a discussion. The latest influence which is bound to dramatically change the aesthetics is contemporary technology.

Another artistic use of human intestines can be observed in a postmodern work of art, J.G Ballard’s *Crash* (1973), about which Jean Baudrillard wrote an essay. In the novel, exploitation of the human body is used to express a clash with technology rather than to evoke hellish visions, although due to our aesthetic roots it often does exactly so. Also, for this reason it might be labelled “as a piece of atrocious exhibi-

tionism” [Ruddick 1992: 354]. The narrator in *Crash* (1973) vividly describes human intestines exposed in violent car collisions:

*Trying to exhaust himself, Vaughan devised an endless almanac of terrifying wounds and insane collisions: The lungs of elderly men punctured by door-handles; the chests of young women impaled on steering-columns; the cheek of handsome youths torn on the chromium latches of quarter-lights. To Vaughan, these wounds formed the key to a new sexuality, born from a perverse technology. The images of these wounds hung in the gallery of his mind, like exhibits in the museum of a slaughterhouse [Ballard 1973: 11].*

A literary work of art does not form direct, visual pictures, yet it has the power to stimulate imagination to evoke such. The characters of *Crash* (1973), like Vaughan, represent an era of technological advance, during which humans have become more and more disembodied. Ruddick quotes Baudrillard’s essay advocating that the French philosopher was wrong in saying that in the novel sexuality has been absorbed by the “universe of simulation” [Ruddick 1992: 357]. Following this, the author states that “the sexualization of the automobile for the narrator after his crash surely functions as a metaphor of revelation of the real object of his desire, namely death and reunification with the organic realm” [Ruddick 1992: 357]. This very desire, a drive for something material and therefore real, like disgusting wounds, and body parts covered in blood, has also emerged in our surrounding reality; it discloses as violent news outlets, high demand for post-truths, or more brutal fiction. Jean Baudrillard states in his essay on *Crash* (1973) that “there is no affectivity behind all this: no psychology, no ambivalence or desire, no libido or death-drive” [Baudrillard, Evans 1991: 314] and later he adds that “the nonsensicalness, the brutality, of this mixture of body and technology is totally immanent — it is the reversion of one into other” [Baudrillard, Evans 1991; 314]. While Nicholas Ruddick disagrees with the philosopher, taking the side of the novel’s author [Ruddick 1992: 359], I think that both points of view complete each other: caged inside concrete, glass or metal boxes, behind computer screens humans naturally develop real desire for the organic. However, there is neither a chance of fulfilling this desire, nor of escaping from technology and so it is only subdued for a while, by replacement measures, being exactly post-truths, brutal fiction etc. These measures are the touchstones of the hyperreality, our present reality which, as Baudrillard suggests is “a non-symbolic universe but one which, by a kind of reversal of its mass-mediated substance (neon, concrete, cars, mechanical eroticism), seems truly saturated with an intense initiatory power” [Baudrillard, Evans 1991: 319]. The initiatory power might just be suppressed, unfulfilled desires, which when faced with an inability to vent, form necessary substitutes, which become hyperreal.

We are living in the hyperreality and one of its signs is the appearance of the New Aesthetics. The desire for the organic has not been fulfilled, while technology has kept on its brutal development, resulting not only in visually pulling out human insides to daylight in a form of art, but also ripping open the technological skin and showing

off the cyber intestines of our world. Dennis Moser writes that “we are in the midst of an emerging aesthetics — the New Aesthetics — unfolding around us at appropriately enough, Internet speed” [Moser 2013: 188]. James Bridle describes the New Aesthetics as follows:

*One of the core themes of the New Aesthetics has been our collaboration with technology, whether that’s bots, digital cameras or satellites (and whether that collaboration is conscious or unconscious), and a useful visual shorthand for that collaboration has been glitchy and pixelated imagery, a way of seeing that seems to reveal a blurring between “the real” and “the digital”, the physical and the virtual, the human and the machine [Bridle 2020].*

Humanity ascribed intestines to infernal aesthetics. The works of art like Ballard’s *Crash* (1973) provided an alternative point of view, to picture them in a different light, yet people will never have enough time to process and get familiar with the images of body insides, because the flesh has started to be replaced, covered by machines and new, complex technologies. The technological development only reinforced the need for the organic, putting aesthetics of the flesh on the collision course with the New Aesthetics. This movement, one of main representants of which is James Bridle, is an answer to what Bruce Sterling describes in his article as follows:

*Our hardware is changing our lives far more profoundly than anything that we ever did to ourselves intentionally. We should heed the obvious there, and get used to that situation. We should befriend one another, under that reality. We should try to see what that means [Sterling 2012].*

The New Aesthetics is a form of art that feasts on technological glitches that are depicted against a physical, real background. It is the natural response to technological oppression. Humanity adapts to the new reality. Technology becomes a part of our existence, a next step in human evolution, therefore we transfer our settled beauty standards, our fears and desires onto the virtual canvas.

Although technology smothered the flesh, it also, paradoxically, created a platform to express the need for the organic: virtual realities. In *The Journal of Epsilon Pi Tau* Charles Styron states in the article entitled *Virtual Reality* that “in essence virtual reality calls on a suite of technologies to immerse the user in computer data, and allows him to use his senses to navigate through and interact with that data” [Styron 1992: 3]. That sounds like an ideal niche to explore the forbidden aesthetics of the flesh. The fact that it is “virtual” asserts that the user is always somewhat distanced from it, yet it is also “reality”, thus in many aspects real. Creators of videogames construct such seemingly real worlds, thus becoming artists such as Bosch, Rembrandt or Michelangelo.

As the great ones before them, contemporary artists are also shaped by the era they create in. The clash of settled standards of beauty, the aesthetics of the flesh and the New Aesthetics, results in the posthuman aesthetics. According to N. Katharine Hayles; “in posthuman there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations



between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals” [Hayles 1999: 3]. Human flesh and technology are becoming mixed beyond recognition. Posthuman aesthetics describes the upcoming stage of human evolution. Even today we are unable to exist without the supporting technology, which, on the other hand, has become a useful tool for the artists. The question that is raised in the context of my article is as follows: how does the artistic expression, the posthuman aesthetics, manifest itself in the eyes of a spectator/participator, in the contemporary mainstream videogame, *Doom Eternal* (2020)?

To find the answer we must look at the videogame series which had begun with *DOOM* in 1993. Dan Pinchbeck claims that in *DOOM* (1993) “the fusion of science fiction with supernatural horror was nothing new, of course, but it was certainly a novel applied in gaming” [Pinchbeck 2013: 66]. It is an action first person shooter, which puts the player in the shoes of Doom Marine, an individual stranded on a Mars’ moon infested with demonic hordes. The story, as Pinchbeck writes, “can be used to help us accept the world, or diegesis, that the game presents” [Pinchbeck 2013: 66]. Its aim is to immerse the player in the presented virtual reality, the aesthetics of which is simply frightening. The immersion in this case means getting into action-packed levels full of demons to slaughter. The models of the creatures in 1993 were basic, yet sufficient enough to sustain the immersion, and keep the game fun to play. The demons full of pixels fitted the tone of the game, and were the cutting-edge of possibilities for the times, as well as was the design of the hellish interiors: “the design of *DOOM* was creating level architectures the likes of which no one had ever seen, and these were resting on some groundbreaking technological foundations” [Pinchbeck 2013: 34]. The demons’ shape can be compared to human body parts. Moreover some of the creatures have mechanical devices attached to their limbs. These are the characteristics of the posthuman aesthetics, observed in the FPS game from 1993. Since then the *Doom* series has evolved and the most recent game entitled *Doom Eternal* (2020), a mainstream success, is much richer in details.

The embodiment of what I have written about so far is the Cyberdemon, called the Tyrant, featured in *Doom Eternal* from 2020:

This creature expresses human fear of intestines associated with the infernal aesthetics, adding posthuman, cyber traits. The contemporary technology, with the use of hyperreal textures, is able to take gruesome elements of Hieronymus Bosch’s inferno and place them upon the muscular renaissance sculpture-like body, overall to make it look as real as possible. Tyrant’s abdominal organs are on display; however its veins are similar to plastic tubes that can as well be placed inside a car engine. Cyberdemon first appeared in the classic *DOOM* from 1993, with the original model being similar to its contemporary version from 2020. The codex entry from the game says that the Tyrants are tasked with overseeing the collection and extraction of sin-branded souls from the mortal world, their role in Hell ordained by the unholy

sigil of the Elder Hell-gods. They are the lower-rank devils and therefore the base of their visuals is a stereotypical look of Satan. In the Christian tradition “lower demons have minds like those of animals” [Russell 1986: 42]. The ugliness of the mind transcribes itself upon the visual representation, resulting in demons with long, curvy horns and sharp fangs. As I have already mentioned Tyrant’s intestines are exposed, because the inside of the body is also associated with hell. The artist behind this demon’s model uses the opportunity to express the postmodern need for the organic and underlines every physical detail thanks to the hyperreal graphics. The monster’s ribs are standing out and the pink skin is wrinkled and sweaty. Moreover, the human body parts are enhanced by the cyber augmentations. Posthuman aesthetics seems to fit into the infernal-intestines artistic representation. People are afraid of the new therefore the mechanic prosthetics become part of what is vile and repulsive. Nonetheless, our mind is constantly influenced by both posthuman aesthetics and aesthetics of the body, from which raises the perverted need to exploit these two areas simultaneously, which is fulfilled in *Doom Eternal* (2020). It corresponds to the mainstream success of the game. In pair with the story, which is only there to provide the context, the heavy metal, industrial soundtrack and the fluent, dynamic gameplay, the visuals complete the journey into the alienated aesthetics of flesh, that the game becomes.

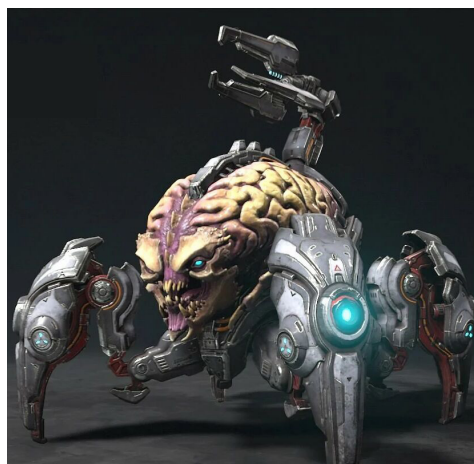
Another interesting example of a demon depicted by an artist with a resulting flesh-demonic-cybernetics mixture is Arachnotron:

**Fig.1. Tyrant**



Source: *Doom Wiki*, 2020

**Fig. 2. Arachnotron**



Source: *Doom Wiki*, 2020

The visuals of this hellish beast are more complex than these of the previous one. Here we can observe that the brain is exposed. Interestingly, humans tend to associate the mind with something pure, the spirit, yet it is precisely this wrinkled organ where the mind is contained. In-game description says that Arachnotrons are built

with genetic material recovered from the remains of the original Spider Mastermind, bio-engineered for cyber-augmentation. The Spider Mastermind is the final boss of the previous game, *Doom* from 2016. As its name suggests, it is an extremely smart spider. Lars Schmeink writes that “the animal has long been other to the construction of the human” [Schmeink 2016: 82] and later he adds that “life thus simply becomes a mechanical object to be manipulated and changed according to the needs of superior and exceptional man – with all its horrible consequences for an intrinsic ethical value of life” [Schmeink 2016: 82]. The Arachnotron is a hyperbolic expression of fear of such consequences – an animal, insect to be precise, spawn of the mastermind being, combined with a human brain, with a distorted, demonic human face and cyber enhancements. Additionally it also embodies other fears: the fear of the flesh, known for ages, multiplied by the need for the organic, and also the fear of the technology that grows over the physical body. *Doom Eternal* allows the player to confront all these fears in one visible creature shown in the hyperreal graphics of contemporary gaming, but what is more important it lets us literally crash with them. The glory kills that we can watch in the You Tube video [Skull Busters 2020] are different ways of executing the spider-like demon, therefore they serve as a cathartic experience for the mainstream player who dismembers his/her fears as a result of swift, fun gameplay.

**Fig. 3. Cyber Mancubus**



Source: *Doom Wiki*, 2020

The picture featured above shows an armoured version of the demon called Mancubus, which is an obese creature with fangs, and metal cannons for arms. Once again the creator of this model exploits posthuman aesthetics and combines them with infernal tropes. The demonic theme provides the creator with an opportunity to use

the uglier side of the human body as a work material. Here the inferior animal features like a monstrous jaw are mixed with what humans find repulsive – obesity and folds of fat hanging from every side. They become visible when what is under the skin, namely fat, grows out of proportion. It is another example of the human fear of intestines. *Doom Eternal* proposes different a version of Mancubus, which is Cyber Mancubus. The demon gets the futuristic armour, which partially covers its ugliness. The new technology serves its purpose yet it also becomes a symbiotic element of the demon's appearance. The cybernetic armour scares the player on another level because it is posthuman. However, when destroyed, the true body horror is revealed, and the player is able to rip the monstrosity apart, at the same time absorbing the bloody festival of carnage with awe. Hence appears the easy pleasure of dealing with obvious fear (gruesome glory kills) that turns out to be a hidden need for the organic – the long-feared and long-forgotten flesh covered not only by skin but also by contemporary technology.

Another powerful force, which is present in *Doom Eternal*, are Maykrs – “a highly advanced ancient race of alien beings” [Doom Wiki 2020]. They are led by the angel-like leader, named Khan Maykr:

**Fig.4: Khan Maykr**



Source: *Doom Wiki*, 2020

This creature comes as close to the possible description of a biblical angel because its true form is hidden under the heavy armour. Just like biblical angels', its characteristics remain invisible for most of the game. It is a mysterious being that flies and claims to be superior to the other forms of life. What is interesting is that it does not exist as a moral opposition to demonic hordes. Instead, it exploits the superior

position to use the powers of hell for its own purposes. Buda confirms that in Christianity angels are rather “*incorporeal and invisible*” [Jaritz 2011: 124]. Again the goodness, and so the direct connection with God, is represented by the spirit, therefore Khan Maykr’s body is covered by the advanced, cybernetic armor, in a posthuman manner. *Doom Eternal* however advocates the need for the organic, thus even angels must be judged, exposed, and stripped off their spirituality. In result, Khan Maykr becomes the antagonist of the game. During the final fight with the creature, the player denounces the angel’s mysticism, while the creature’s mask falls off and another demonic face with exposed brain tissue is revealed. Giving the angel, the higher being, demonic properties, and then letting it be destroyed by a mortal warrior, Doom Marine, is a direct statement of the contemporary artist, which expresses the need for the organic. The spirit is only an illusion that distances human beings from their flesh. The violent death of the spiritual that the player enacts exposes what have always been hidden behind beautiful words and faces depicted in marble – the bloody intestines.

The level design in *Doom Eternal* accompanies the design of the demons, although only some of the levels are literally made of flesh. This process of space being covered in meat is a mark of demonic infestation. Places taken over by demons are dripping with blood. The example is Super Gore Nest, one of the first levels in the game:

**Fig.5: Super Gore Nest**



Source: *Doom Wiki*, 2020

The organs erupt from the ground and rise into separate structures. The concrete and metal landscape of a city – the human construct which in the last hundred years has become a tight cocoon for the society, which wants to hide from the disappearing wilderness outside, is here brought to justice by the brutal forces of hell. All the skyscrapers are just facades for the ugliness underneath: “rapid urbanization has become responsible for the growth of various ‘fringe populations’ that undergo poverty and unhealthy living conditions” [Hurt 2019: 26]. To look upon such creations

getting well-deserved punishment is like reading about the biblical Sodom and Gomorrah. We get what we deserve. However, the city is our surrounding reality and punishment from hell is the last thing we want, especially from a mainstream videogame. Therefore the player becomes the posthuman protagonist – nameless Doom Marine, wearing cybernetic armor that covers his face. The technology helps him a great deal in dispersing the threat. In the end, when posthuman technology and primal flesh, the two unfamiliar motifs in question, clash, it is the former that comes out victorious, leading to the creation of the vicious circle.

## **CONCLUSION**

Videogames are artistic creations that have the power to form interactive worlds, and one of their crucial advantages is that they allow the player to experience these worlds from the safe position, from behind the screen. Therefore the mainstream player gets a much needed glance at the organic – lusted, feared, unfamiliar and forgotten elements of his/her own body, only to smash it to bits with a cybernetic arsenal. Paradoxically, only by means of body-smothering technology are we able to explore our intestines, interact with them on a larger, mainstream scale, deal with their existence by destruction.

To conclude, *Doom Eternal's* mainstream success is the result of deeply embedded aesthetic features that humanity has collected for centuries. The theme of the game gives the artists behind the demon models and level designs an opportunity to express the posthuman aesthetics of flesh, evoked by the need for the organic. The interactive effect of their work provides a cathartic experience for the mainstream player, who is smothered by the overwhelming technology. This process creates a paradox, where the only way to reach the organic is to use the virtual. Therefore human nature once again proves to be dualistic. Man desires the organic but never directly, never to actually touch it, always from safe distance. The awareness that it exists somewhere is perfectly sufficient. Then, perhaps, the posthuman aesthetics are an inevitable next step in how we perceive beauty and ugliness. After all, it has already found its representation in the form of a worldwide phenomenon, *Doom*, mainstream videogame series.

## **REFERENCES**

- Agard, W. R., (1954), What is Classical Sculpture?, in: *The Classical Journal*, 49 (8), pp. 127-143.
- Doom Wiki (2020). Arachnotron/Doom Eternal, [https://doom.fandon.com/wiki/Arachnotron/Doom\\_Eternal](https://doom.fandon.com/wiki/Arachnotron/Doom_Eternal), viewed 6 May 2021.
- Ballard, J. G., (1973), *Crash*, Jonathan Cape Ltd., London.
- Baudrillard, J., Evans, A. B., (1991), Ballard's Crash, in: *Science Fiction Studies*, 18 (3), pp. 313-320.
- Besley, T., Peters, M. A., (2007), The Body and the Aesthetics of Existence, in: *Counterpoints*, 303, pp. 45-70.
- Bourgeois, S., (1935), Italian Renaissance Sculpture, in: *Parnassus* 7, 3, pp. 7-8.

- Bridle, J., (2020), #shaesthetic Booktwo.Org, <https://booktwo.org/notebook/sxaesthetic>, viewed 6 May 2021.
- Czachesz, I., (2014), *The Grotesque Body in Early Christian Discourse : Hell, Scatology and Metamorphosis*, Routledge, Hoboken.
- Doom Wiki, (2020), Cyberdemon/Doom Eternal, [https://doom.fandom.com/wiki/Cyberdemon/Doom\\_Eternal](https://doom.fandom.com/wiki/Cyberdemon/Doom_Eternal), viewed 6 May, 2021.
- Doom Wiki, (2020), Cyber-Mancubus/Doom Eternal, [https://doom.fandom.com/wiki/Cyber-Mancubus/Doom\\_Eternal](https://doom.fandom.com/wiki/Cyber-Mancubus/Doom_Eternal), viewed, 6 May, 2021.
- Doom Wiki, (2020), Khan Maykr, [https://doom.fandom.com/wiki/Khan\\_Maykr](https://doom.fandom.com/wiki/Khan_Maykr), viewed 6 May 2021.
- Doom Wiki, (2020), Super Gore Nest, [https://doom.fandom.com/wiki/Super\\_Gore\\_Nest](https://doom.fandom.com/wiki/Super_Gore_Nest), viewed 6 May 2021.
- Ferngren, G., (2017) Vivisection Ancient and Modern, in: *History of Medicine*, 4 (3), pp. 211-221.
- Gilyard, A., (2017), A Dissection of Video Games as a Medium of Art: The Utilization of Aesthetics and the Effectiveness of Video Games as a Tool in Curriculum, in: *Lucerna*, 11, pp. 110-120.
- Hayles, N. K., (1999), *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Hurt, S., (2019), Urbanization & Mental Health: A Look at the Developing World, in: *Harvard International Review*, 40 (1), pp. 24-29.
- Jacobs, L. F., (2000), The Triptychs of Hieronymus Bosch, in: *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 31 (4), pp. 1009-1041.
- Jaritz, G., (2011), *Angels, Devils : The Supernatural and Its Visual Representation*, Central European University Press, Budapest.
- Lee, C., (2010), Observing the Body, in: *Irish Arts Review*, 27 (3), pp. 102-105.
- Moser, D., (2013), Understanding the Impact of the New Aesthetics and New Media Works On Future Curatorial Resource Responsibilities for research Collections, in: *Art Documentation: Bulletin of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, 32 (2), pp. 186-201.
- Nelson, E., (2021) Doom Eternal Reports Over \$450 Million In Profits Since Launch, <https://screenrant.com/doom-eternal-over-450-million-profit-since-launch>, viewed 6 May 2021.
- Pater, W., (2011), *The Renaissance*, Andrews UK, Luton.
- Pinchbeck, D., (2013), *The Legacy of DOOM*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Harbor.
- Portera, M., (2016), Why Do Human Perceptions of Beauty Change? The Construction of the Aesthetic Niche, in: *RCC Perspectives*, 5, pp. 41-48.
- Ruddick, N., (1992) Ballard/Crash/Baudrillard, in: *Science Fiction Studies*, 19 (3), pp. 354-360.
- Russell, J. B., (1986), *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- Sarasso, P., Ronga, I., Kobau, P., Bosso, T., Artusio, R., Neppi-Modona, M., (2020), Beauty in Mind: Aesthetic Appreciation Correlates with Perpetual Facilitation and Attentional Amplification, in: *Neuropsychologia*, 136, pp. 107-282.
- Schmeink, L., *The Anthropocene, the Posthuman and the Animal*, in: *Biopunk Dystopias: Genetic Engineering, Society and Science Fiction*, pp. 71-118, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool.
- Skull Busters. Doom Eternal – Arachnotron Mini Boss All Glory Kill Animation, (2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IrIMmVLxzQ>, viewed 6 May 2021.
- Spivey, N., (2013), *Greek Sculpture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Sterling, B., (2012), An Essay on the New Aesthetics, <https://www.wired.com/2012/04/an-essay-on-the-new-aesthetic/>, viewed 6 May 2021.