

Freedom of Destruction and Carnavalesque in Video Games

1.

The goal of this work is to present the interaction between the liberating potential of destruction, present on the gameplay level of some video games, and the practices of organising them via a conventionalised narrative, present on the diegetic level. The main inspiration for this are the notes on carnivalesque freedom proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and his World* (Bakhtin, 1984) and the material for my analysis is provided by two games rooted in the aesthetic of modern crime film, that is *Sleeping Dogs* (Square Enix, 2012) and *Saints Row: The Third* (Volition, 2011), in the second part of the article. These titles were chosen due to the statements of realism offered by the story backgrounds, which demand a different kind of problematisation than games set in fantastical realms and offering arbitrary ethical judgements. That of course does not mean that the issues I would like to discuss are not present in the latter type of games. Both chosen productions however represent a genre especially stressing the fact of providing the player with a significant degree of freedom (the so called sandbox). Not without meaning is also the fact that both games are clearly inspired by the *Grand Theft Auto* series, one that has already been analysed in light of Bakhtinian ideas: David Annandale analysed *GTA: San Andreas* in terms of presence of aesthetic themes concurrent with the description of the Russian scholar (Annandale, 2006), and Mark Butler interpreted the central protagonist of *GTA IV* as a carnivalesque king, a theme analysed by Bakhtin especially in *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (Butler, 2010).

The analyses I mentioned are oriented towards a description of the specificity of particular titles from this significant series. My aim is a little different: despite the chosen examples I wish to argue that relations between the carnival of violence and the ambiguous mechanics of curtailing it via narrative tricks are an important and continuous element of video games as a cultural form, significantly determining their historical evolution. I realise that proving such a wide hypothesis goes beyond the scope of this article, and so the abovementioned self-limitation. I wish to note however, that themes analysed here are present in numerous video games, especially in the mainstream high-budget productions – but are not always similarly intensified. Therefore the conclusions of the first, general part can be applied to some easily observed aesthetic tendencies in many games.

The analysis of the role violence plays in video games that I want to propose requires two assumptions I will briefly describe here (I hope to present them more fully elsewhere). First is that video games belong to the folk (that is, popular) culture of laughter (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 5-6). It goes without saying that, just as other kinds of games, they are usually played for pleasure, situating themselves outside, or even contrary, to the world of “seriousness” (this observation has been accompanying studies of games and play since the time of Huizinga) (Huizinga, 1985). Furthermore, they are a product of a cultural formation opposed to the cultural mainstream – that is, they come from the American campus culture of the 1960s and 70s (Rockwell, 2002). The very mechanism of the successful construction of a video game stems from parody: it relies on isolating from the chaos of reality some clear and easily distinguished rules and forging them into a coherent system governed by stated, larger-than-life rules. Their small number leads to significant repetition of the narrative possibilities in games, spotlighting the parody and revealing the arbitrary character of the adopted rules. If the game then decides to present a narrative where the main way of interaction

with other beings is combat, the frequency of violent encounters and the number of enemies the player disposes of would put the bloodiest of cinema offerings to shame.

Parody is of course present also on other levels of video games, in their simplified worlds of grotesque narrative solutions, exposing the rules by which popular cinema and novel narratives are governed. This is again necessary from the utilitarian viewpoint: to successfully navigate the game, the player needs to identify the situation they are in and, moreover, predict the possible narrative or mechanic solutions. This ostentatious clarity additionally increases the tension between game and its references, thematising its own object, that is the ways of constructing and carrying out the storylines. I understand parody here as a kind of self-awareness of storytelling, similarly to Bakhtin's proposal in *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (Bakhtin, 1993, pp. 127-128) and, most importantly, in the *Discourse in the Novel* (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 308-312).

It has to be noted that this aspect is not usually the effect of the creators' efforts, who frequently try to smoothen the ridiculousness of this type of sequences, which I will look at in the latter part of my considerations. Often parody does not have a satirical aim, it is rather an aspect of the necessity of exposing and operationalising an unambiguous rule, be it mechanic or narrative.

The last element characteristic of the products of laughter culture I want to stress here, is the video games' ability to integrate (and as I've shown above, to parody) different kinds of previously existing narrative conventions: they use the language of cinema or the language of a novel (in case of the text games), the language of rules characteristic of different kinds of games, the language of a user manual, the language of an interface characteristic of digital aesthetic, and many others. This leads me to the second assumption: video games are characterised by an impossible to eradicate heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 263), which leads to a particular to them way of presenting the narrative that I call the narrative of experience. In the realm of one game there are present different languages which I understand here as singular ways of describing reality phenomena Bakhtin calls "objects" (p. 276). Unlike the verbal languages of the novel, they represent different orders, each one however, from the methods of simulating physics to the visual presentation, is tied to a particular logic of an object presented by the game. It then takes part not only in the dialogue of other aspects of the same object in a similar language (for example competing with other visual styles) but also enters into dialogic relations with other languages present in the same game, often proposing a contrary conceptualisation of the object. And so despite the usually conventional character of singularly analysed languages, they all create an intriguing, sensemaking tension.

The specificity of video games lies in combining the languages received through different stimuli and coming from different orders, to create the experience of wholeness. Combining the visual presentation and the convention of using the interface results in the sense of synchronicity of the players' actions and the action's progress (Juil, 2004). Those two aspects create a sense of players' experience of the situation the game offers (that they are the one firing at enemies, climbing the buildings, devouring the golden spinning coins hanging in the air), even though they only really observe the progression of the narrative presented by the language of text or image and perform simple, conventionalised moves required by the controller. The emerging narrative of experience is specific to video games, who developed a wide array of stylistic devices allowing for an interesting use of it, like presenting the narrative turns as the effects of players' actions or recontextualisation of the previous actions in order to change the players' approach to whatever they've done up to a given point.

The experience of participation in the events portrayed by the game, tied to the narrative of experience, connects video games to the oldest, not yet textually-presented forms of laughter

culture – that is to the carnival. Of course, I do not argue that games are carnivalesque in the strictest sense: they are not after all events of social nature (the matter is complicated by multiplayer games, but they remain, for now, beyond the scope of this analysis), and they are not tied to times of celebration but remain in the domain of regular free time. At the same time they do possess an aspect characteristic of the carnival but not present in other carnivalesque forms (like the novel): the absence of footlights. Video game demands to be experienced and not just observed, in that way realising one of the most important elements of Bakhtin's carnivalesque: its ubiquity (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 7-8). It is simulated in the same measure the experience offered by the game, but it clearly differentiates the situation of the player from the role of a reader or a viewer and it allows to explain the interest in immersion both in the scholarly discourse and in the professional and fan critiques (Murray, 1998). It describes as desirable the situation in which the player feels they have found themselves in a different world, with different laws and social structures, and in which they themselves have a different position and capabilities (Aarseth, 2004). In this way, for the duration of the game, the player is freed from conventional rules governing the everyday and placed in a space in which they can act in a manner usually forbidden: above all they can murder and destroy and devote themselves to limitless, positively-valued devouring. The latter is imagined as either consuming visually presented "points" or, in the aesthetics paying more attention to realism, as accruing items and money. Especially telling this becomes in *Fable II* (Lionhead Studios, 2008), where the killed enemies turn into multi-coloured spheres (experience points) that the character then consumes.

This of course recalls various forms of carnival analysed by Bakhtin and other scholars, especially the saturated with simulated violence Roman carnival described by Goethe (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 249-255). The analogy is however interesting in its incompleteness: games are abundant in themes of destruction and devouring, but they lack the other side of carnivalistic excesses: fornication and defecation and in general any concentration on the images of the material bodily lower stratum. That however comes from the aesthetic functions, usually censoring those kind of images in commercial products. On the level of gameplay it is easy to notice the similarity, or even the sameness of the act of killing with the act of copulation: dead body of a killed enemy becomes impregnated and falls apart, bringing forth (birthing) items not previously present in the world, like experience points or loot. In some games this kind of death is even temporary and the mechanics allow the enemies to be reborn, the same is granted to the player character when they have been killed. Functions of the material bodily lower stratum are a little more troublesome matter, as the ingrained in the majority of games model of constant growth, competing with the carnivalistic pleasures, makes introducing defecation metaphors rather difficult. Without a doubt however we can look at three models of degradation: first, some games pay significant attention to mutilating bodies, offering vivid sequences ending fights with fountains of blood and heads flying in every direction. Second, the acquisition of skills and capabilities by the player results in social degradation of previously demanding enemies. And finally, which I see as particularly significant, the existence of both the protagonist and all the other characters in the game world (especially the enemies) orients itself towards being reduced to the physical: the emotional and psychological lives of characters are very rarely presented on the level of gameplay I am looking at here: to get to know them one has to concentrate on the storyline, often related in the language of film, in dialogue with the language of the gameplay.

At the centre of the gameplay there is therefore a body: of the hero, sometimes present on the screen in its entirety, perceived from the outside, and sometimes cut into pieces and fragmentary (and so degraded), in a perspective suggesting a bodily sameness of the player and the hero. Sometimes, though not always, the body is not ready, and it can be variously modified – to the

power of the possibilities of the appearance change testifies the fact that many of the high-budgeted games offer additional, paid packages changing the look of the hero. The player enters a relation with the body that is in part physical: the interaction requires certain movements, not only an intellectual and emotional participation. In the most intensified versions, the movement is the same as the character's actions, as is the case of games using motion controllers. But even the conventional methods of action are not bodily neutral and cause the player and their character to merge into a double-bodied being, which is a popular theme of the carnivalesque aesthetic (pp. 310-319).

The so treated body of the protagonist allows for an experience of the game world where – as stated before – two significant rules limiting the player in their real life do not exist. Firstly, the social hierarchies are eradicated and exchanged for the power of causation: even if the hero answers to someone in the game, he is in fact the highest power to which the whole world is subjected, duly waiting with its course for the hero-player's actions. The player almost always completely rules over the time of the narrative, activating its elements as they please. Secondly, removed are all lasting consequences of the player's actions: except for a very few particular cases, each decision is reversible and actions (especially those not igniting next narrative fragments) – repetitive to the point of exhaustion, or to the point of devouring of everything in the game world one could interact with.

On the level of interface and gameplay, the hero-player enters a free, non-mediated by social rules interaction with the game world, one they experience mostly in its physical aspect – though of course there can be dialogue sequences or attempts at simulating the internal life, but they are usually marginalised in favour of sequences of destroying obstacles and scenery, eliminating the enemies and collecting various items. Within those processes the player constantly experiences the closeness of destruction and creation, especially when due to their intervention objects in the game turn into other objects, or by dying bring into the world previously inaccessible places and sequences, or when the hero themselves is destroyed and subsequently rebirthed. This closeness of life and death and the constant multiplication (the appearance of new objects, more powerful enemies, the wider area for player action), and the concentration of portraying the body in its time dimension, and so as an unready, susceptible to reshaping and degradation, in action, all contribute to the basic aesthetic of the language of gameplay, which is the grotesque realism (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 18-). This statement finds its basis on the level of popular aesthetics of the high-budget video games, which on one hand offer a painstakingly realistic, photographic aesthetic of the action background, and on the other do not avoid images of deformed, disproportionate bodies, especially ones testifying to sexual attractiveness (in the case of women we can talk about obscenely large breasts and wide hips, when it comes to men we talk rather about unrealistic musculature, as the censorship does not allow for exposed penises of priapic proportions).

So conceptualised language of gameplay brings then a free play, one that bypasses the social rules and offers in their place a complete subjugation of the world to the triumphant power of the player. This freedom however is twice limited: first, its physical borders are curtailed by game mechanics – as I have mentioned above, naturally parodying and working in tandem with the gameplay conventions described here. On the other hand, the freedom of action lacks the meaning available via the languages of the narrative. And in this very point exist the most interesting tensions, since while gameplay lends itself to the freeing of the hero-player's body and to the revolutionary forces of the carnival, describing destruction as the beginning of the new life and pointing out the dynamic aspect of reality, in the space outside the carnival, opposed to the indestructibility and the durability of social laws and conventions (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 9-12), the aesthetic and narrative perspectives answer to the mechanisms of censorship, whose task is to curtail the obscene potential of the whole

game. From this stem various ways of reducing the level of gameplay with the use of the language of narrative, which introduces differentiations between kinds of destruction (that is ascribes positive value only to the ideologically justified forms of violence), or attempts to portray it as negative and destructive to human personality. In other words, it is prompt – though not always – to assume the tone of educational, sanctimonious seriousness, or social satire, that is forces antithetical to the grotesque realism of the carnivalesque.

2.

Both analysed games take place in the modern metropolis, meticulously reproduced, at least in terms of the architectural presentation and the simulation of traffic movement. Their language of gameplay uses two basic models of action: moving around the city, usually by vehicle (walking is slow and not effective) and fighting numerous enemies. Beyond that, the games offer various other tasks, requiring dexterity. *Sleeping Dogs* has more varied mechanics in this regard, while *Saints Row: The Third* offers a bigger variety of aesthetics and more serious narrative consequences of engaging in additional activities. Despite this difference and other minor details, on the level of gameplay these games are extremely similar in everything but one aspect: the first offers a melee combat with many enemies, the second one prefers combat at distances with the use of firearms.

In both cases gameplay is observed from the third person perspective – that is in the middle of the screen there is an image of the main character's body, or the car standing in for it. In both cases the body can be modified, though the protagonist of *Sleeping Dogs* is more fully formed and the reshaping is limited to costumes he can be attired with, while the general appearance of the character remains unchanged. The player in *Saints Row: The Third* has many more possibilities, as they start the game from designing the character's appearance (they choose gender, race, body shape, musculature, costume, tattoos, and even the array of available obscene gestures), but in any given moment they can change the appearance of their character without any consequence. Protagonists of both games have a similar manner of acquiring vehicles, and here again *Saints Row* offers a wide variety of modifications that *Sleeping Dogs* does not.

The practice of gameplay looks quite similar. The player decides which challenge they wish to tackle and marks it on the city map. Then they need to move from their current hideout to the place where the events are taking place, navigating between other cars and pedestrians and using clues projected directly onto the road. Driving physics are simplified and the game's dynamic encourages more risky and dangerous driving. Traffic is haltingly slow when compared to the vehicle capabilities and the consequences of an accident are minimal, almost without any harm to the hero. They do however offer impressive graphic effects of the gradual destruction of the car, which – when it stops serving its purpose – can be always exchanged for another, stolen straight from the street (the protagonist of *Saints Row* can even jump into a speeding car through the windshield, toss out the owner and drive away). Similar destruction happens to the scenery elements the player drives through.

Combat models are, as I mentioned, the most important difference between the games. The protagonist of *Saints Row* disposes of the enemies using various, sometimes very elaborate, firearms and explosives. Melee combat is possible, but much more tasking. Meanwhile though the hero of *Sleeping Dogs* can use a pistol, he usually fights using his fists, eliminating the enemies in elaborate fisticuffs, knocking them out with the use of scenery elements, throwing the defeated enemies into trashcans, hitting them with doors, locking them in phone booths, etc. From this emerges a different combat dynamic and its proportions: in *Saints Row* one fights with much more numerous enemy groups, whose resources are practically inexhaustible, as when the fight drags on, the enemies receive backup. The dynamics of engagement change as well: melee combat requires contact and

control over many enemies at the same time, while shooting is about targeting enemies one after another.

Additional missions vary widely, though they do share a few common elements. In *Sleeping Dogs* they connect to the narrative and simulate the ethnic experience – that is, they are to mimic entertainment offered by the game's location, Hong Kong, such as karaoke, martial arts tournaments, or cock fights. Additional missions in *Saints Row* play out outside the narrative, offering a grotesquely multiplied orgy of violence: eliminating dozens of enemies, destroying scenery with explosives and tanks, or a sequence in which the hero throws himself under the wheels of incoming traffic and, bouncing off the bumpers, gets himself up into the air – from the length of the flight and the number of accidents depends the value of scammed insurance. Despite the clearly parodying character and lack of the connection to the narrative, additional missions have impact on the course of the game, as with them the protagonist's gang regains control over parts of the city, which results in changing the encounters with enemies into meeting allies. This thread is not present in *Sleeping Dogs*.

As this short account indicates, destruction lies at the centre of both games: eliminating the enemies and destroying the scenery, including the car which the hero uses. The latter takes place even during a free exploration of the city, as it is enforced by the mechanics of controlling the vehicle. In both games it is easy to escalate destruction: an accident-ridden drive results in a police intervention, and in *Saints Row* it is easy to randomly encounter enemies. Staying in one place is then a road to grotesque multiplication and spawning of enemies. A way to restore order is to successfully escape, that is turn around the relation dominating gameplay during most of the narrative, when the hero is usually (though not always) the attacker, and the enemies his prey.

Despite similarities on the level of gameplay, both games use polar narrative strategies, whose aim is to manage the scandal that is the carnival of destruction and to put it in understandable frames. It is a different approach than their model series, *Grand Theft Auto*, with its strong social satire. *Sleeping Dogs* chooses then the aesthetic of realism and the themes of Asian gangster cinema, combining the imagery of violence, the spectacle of martial arts sequences, and the atmosphere of moral ambiguity of hero's actions. *Saints Row* in turn seems to use the conventions of gang narrative to amplify the grotesque and clearly highlights the carnivalesque aspects of the whole set-up. This does not mean that the first game completely foregoes carnival themes, when in fact the whole narrative frame allowing for the start of the destruction is similar in both games: in both cases the hero takes part in a similar sequence of events: he hides his identity, is found out, confronts a person in power and due to this is thrown into a carnivalesque world upside down, governed by antagonists, and where he himself is low on the totem pole. In this he begins a grotesque spectacle of dismantling this world's structures to return it to its idyllic former state – to renew his own relation to it, which in general agrees with the ideology of the carnival (1984, pp. 9-17). In the middle of the game events pile up leading to the dethroning of the carnival king (1993, pp. 124-126): a former leader of the crime community is brutally eliminated, ritually quartered, and exchanged for a grotesque version of himself, embodied by a particularly deformed character (in *Saints Row* it is a luchador characterised by an overblown musculature, in *Sleeping Dogs* a gangster with a mutilated face). Both games repeat this theme once more, exposing the heir of the crime leader as a fake enemy in the final parts of the game. With the progression of the narrative it leads to further multiplications, the hero acquires additional tools of destruction, with the use of which he more successfully defeats more and more numerous and dangerous enemies.

This, carnivalesque in its essence, narrative sequence is however presented in a completely different aesthetic and narrative convention. The hero of *Sleeping Dogs* is a policeman working undercover,

and the first reveal is the moment when the player is informed that the protagonist is not a criminal (after a scene of escaping the police). Next the hero infiltrates the gang, starting low in the hierarchy, and starts a job which is to lead to the elimination of a dangerous triad. The king of the world upside down, Uncle Po, is an old-fashioned mobster, a noble criminal with rules that are not respected by his heir. The increase in the hero's capabilities is connected to his skill in kung-fu, but is presented here as a certain kind of degradation: with the increase in physical abilities goes a decrease in moral competencies, as the hero more and more identifies with the triad. From this arises a tension which is only resolved with the final reveal, when the central antagonist turns out to be the police commissioner who gave the hero the task to infiltrate the gang.

All of that is presented in a very serious manner, accompanied by images with claims to realism. In this way an atmosphere of moral seriousness is introduced, not exactly in accord with the destructive potential of gameplay. This dissonance is creatively utilised and articulated in two languages of gameplay. First, on the level of mechanics, the hero acquires two kinds of experience – one connected to the triad, earned for morally wrong actions (but those which are in accord with the carnivalesque, like an impressive way of eliminating the enemies with the use of various means) and one connected to the police work, which is closely tied to self-limiting, like driving without accidents. The most effective for the player then is working out a compromise between those polar opposites, creating frames of a new harmony, whose founding is one of the aspects of carnival (1984, p. *ibid.*). On the level of the narrative the dissonance is used to show the differences between the triad ethics and the police ethics, which are in agreement with the rules of social life outside the game. And so, on one hand the hero undergoes moral erosion, slowly getting infected with the triad's brutality (and he becomes more efficient but also more violent in combat). On the other hand, he initially possesses something impermissible in the world of organised crime, that is disloyalty. Stepping away from the rule of avoiding cruelty is tied to the internalisation of an honour code and increasing resentment of having to report his actions. The final reveal of the police commissioner as disloyal allows on one hand – again – to put the world together and solve this seemingly unsolvable dilemma, on the other it is a suggestion of if not a triumph, then at least an equal value of the triad's ethics.

These kinds of dilemmas are not present in the *Saints Row: The Third*, whose narrative is carried out from the perspective of the criminals and the ethic is clear cut: loyalty to your friends and vengeance against enemies. The hero starts off with a mockery of a bank robbery, wearing a mask representing a member of his own gang. After the events of the previous series instalment he is, after all, a celebrity in its own right, an owner of a clothes line and a brand of energy drinks. Policemen he shoots ask for autographs before they die. This parodist idyll is disturbed by the leader of the criminal syndicate, unhappy with the independent actions of the hero – in effect he finds himself in a new city, where he has to build his position up from scratch. The criminal leader is eliminated around the half mark of the game by the hero himself, but he is replaced by a psychotic masked wrestler significantly called Killbane, who in turn is removed from the main antagonist role by the merciless leader of the anti-terrorist squad, attempting to put an end to the gang war. He is not however at all different, in ethics or methods, from his predecessor, he is simply an improved version of him: armed in more powerful weapons and commanding more dangerous lackeys. Presence of gangs and government figures follows the same logic: they all are embodiments of the rule of oppressive power, opposed by the mocking and generously destructive protagonist.

The game's aesthetic still falls into the grotesque: the city in which it takes place is a parody of an American metropolis, especially cutting where the Statue of Liberty becomes replaced by a gigantic statue of a worker, evoking both *socrealism* and the elimination of the working class from the circle of interest of American pop culture. Bodies of the appearing characters are always deformed,

grotesquely bloated, and the hero, his allies and antagonists are almost always in costumes – the most prominent are the members of the Luchador gang, dressed like Mexican wrestlers. Capabilities of the protagonist are just as wide on the level of the grotesque firefights as in the narrative parts: he is for example able to carry out a singlehanded attack on a skyscraper filled with enemies, resulting in its partial collapse. Violence and destruction are sources of pleasure for the hero – in this aspect the narrative and the gameplay languages are tied close together. The only moment of dramatic tension is expressed in the language of the narrative, when the protagonist has to decide whether he would exact vengeance on Killbane or rescue two members of his gang. In this way he chooses one of the ethical sides of his earlier actions. In effect the world cannot become a whole and the last constant is destroyed. The grotesque finale moves the action to Mars, where costumed in retro aesthetic heroes chase Killbane to finally discover that the whole thing has been arranged to make a movie with them, leading to the final erosion of the game world: even the rule of narrative and aesthetic coherence becomes obsolete.

It is well worth noting both games' approach to sexuality. *Sleeping Dogs* is a game that might offer a few scantily clad female characters, but does not particularly embrace this aesthetic, and next to eroticised women there appear female professionals with agency. There is prominent sexualisation of the main character and the gang members, with their readily exposed naked chests – this is however a clearly permissible male nudity due to martial arts cinema conventions. At the same time the protagonist meets a number of women, starting with an adventurous American tourist and ending with a female celebrity. With each of them he can go on one date, which ends with a suggestion (but not an image) or a sexual experience and results in an increase of hero's capabilities. *Saints Row* chooses an exact opposite strategy: the game is saturated with images of vulgar sexuality, heroes and enemies dress in ways accentuating their grotesquely large breasts and muscles, the storyline often relates to prostitution and the fetish of dominance, and among various weapons there is a sword-sized sex toy. Furthermore, a narratively significant character is voiced by a famous porn star, Sasha Grey. At the same time the game does not permit sexual encounters: the prominent sexualisation turns out to be another grotesque incoherence.

Strategies of neutralisation of the freedom of destruction and impregnation in terms of aesthetic and narrative are then completely different in the analysed games, though they seem equally interesting. Self-limitation is the way to reduce the freedom of destruction in *Sleeping Dogs*: restraint results in a more effective game and an experience more in line with the oriental aesthetic and the narrative character. The game perfectly realises the lack of effectiveness of this solution, and it gradually promotes more violent actions, ascribing them to the dilemmas of the hero. Under the pretence of carrying out a realistic crime narrative (grotesquely exaggerated in ways characteristic to the language of entertainment), where the finale should condemn violence and let the police triumph, it introduces a polyphonic interplay of two systems of values, letting it play without a moralistic conclusion. A seemingly moral sanction the protagonist is initially armed with is just as false as his intentions when infiltrating the gang – assumed narrative strategy seems then to utilise the carnival motive of deception (1981, p. 401), which makes it possible to carry ambiguous themes into a seemingly ideologically coherent space.

Saints Row: The Third assumes in turn an obviously carnivalesque fool strategy (p. 402), spotlighting on each level a non-satirical parody of social relations and affirming the freedom of destruction up to the point of destroying the narrative itself, down to its ideological bones. With this it erodes moral and social authorities and in the atmosphere of a merry but cruel carnivalesque laughter (1984, pp. 17-18) it opens up a space of free destructive action, whose aim seems to be a temporary, but significant empowerment of the player, who in the world of seriousness answers to social rules. The

obscene laughter has healing qualities, and an openly parodist, non-compromising game seems to be a substitute for holy days, loosening the corset of rules and allowing for their self-restoration in the atmosphere of merry play. In this way, I believe, both games use the carnivalesque potential of their language of gameplay to refer to the problem of freedom from ideological rules: one by thematising them through polyphony, the other – allowing the player to temporarily experience it.

The author expresses his most sincere gratitude to Joanna Kucharska, for her invaluable help with the translation his twisted sentences into English.

Tomasz Z. Majkowski

Bibliography

- Aarseth, E. (2004). *Playing Research: Methodological Approaches to Game Analysis*. In P. Harrigan, & N. Wardrip-Fruin (Eds.), *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Annandale, D. (2006). The Subversive Carnival of Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. In N. Garrelts (Ed.), *The Meaning and Culture of Grand Theft Auto* (pp. 88-103). North Carolina: McFarland.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). Discourse in the Novel. In M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (M. Holquist, & C. Emerson, Trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1984). *Rableais and His World*. (H. Iswolsky, Trans.) Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1993). *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. (C. Emerson, Trans.) Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press.
- Butler, M. (2010). On Reality and Simulation in an Extra-Moral Sense. In S. Günzel, M. Liebe, & D. Mersch (Eds.), *Logic and Structure of the Computer Game* (pp. 212-231). Postdam: Postdam University Press.
- Huizinga, J. (1985). *Homo Ludens*. (M. Kurecka, & W. Wirpsza, Trans.) Warszawa: Czytelnik.
- Juul, J. (2004). Introduction to Game Time. In N. Wardrip-Fruin, & P. Harrigan (Eds.), *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game* (pp. 131-142). Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Lionhead Studios. (2008). *Fable II*.
- Murray, J. H. (1998). *Hamlet on the Holodeck*. Boston: MIT Press.
- Rockwell, G. (2002). Gore Galore: Literary Theory and Computer Games. *Computers and the Humanities*, 345-358.
- Square Enix. (2012). *Sleeping Dogs*.
- Volition. (2011). *Saints Row: the Third*.