

Among pasta-loving Mafiosos, drug-selling Columbians and noodle-eating Triads – Race, humour and interactive ethics in Grand Theft Auto III

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the intersection of race, humour and interactivity in Grand Theft Auto 3. We argue that video games not only diffuse cultural and symbolic meanings, but also provide new loci for reflection and critique of issues of inter alia race.

Two different analytical perspectives are juxtaposed when studying racial issues of GTA3. The first perspective is Critical Race Theory (CRT). The second perspective derives from the phthonic and incongruity theory of humour (Morreall 1986). We will argue that the CRT perspective is consistent with the phthonic theory of humour, while the incongruity theory goes beyond CRT presenting a novel way of interpreting games. This theoretical framework is applied when analysing the controversial game GTA3. By presenting stereotypical images of race in GTA3 as humorous, the player is provided with cues for reflecting and evaluating his/her own perspectives on issues of race.

Keywords

Race, ethics, humour, Grand Theft Auto 3

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the intersection of race, humour and interactivity in Grand Theft Auto 3.

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Interactivity has been extensively researched, race issues in games have been scarcely studied (Leonard 2003), and hitherto no research has focused on humour aspects of games despite the popularity of this subject in non-academic discussions on the Internet (BBC News 2001; Perry 2001).

Previously, content analysis of games has been focused on narrative aspects (Aarseth 1997; Murray 1998) or psychological links between games and violence (Anderson and Dill 2000; Griffiths 1997; Grossman 1995; Irwin and Gross 1995; Kirsh 1998). It has been claimed that a substantial part of this research “*tend to view video games as toys for kids, rather than sophisticated vehicles inhabiting and disseminating racial, gender, or national meaning*” (Leonard 2003). This approach to video games as being frivolous might be traced to the moralizing dynamic of academic activity (Gustafsson 1994). This paper is based on assumptions challenging these perspectives, treating video games as a powerful medium for diffusing cultural and symbolic meanings. In this paper, we will expand and develop this stream of thought by arguing that video games provide, in addition to diffusing cultural and symbolic meanings, new loci of reflection and critique of issues of social concern, such as ethics, ideologies, stereotypical depictions of race, class and gender. In this paper the dimension of race will be developed.

This theoretical development will be elucidated by analysing GTA3, which is one of the most popular game titles during the last years and generally in the history of games. The game has become highly controversial and much-talked-about not only for its explicit depiction of violence, but also very much for the sarcastic and humoristic representation of society issues such as law enforcement, ethnicity, modern (American) urban life, crime, legal systems and class differences.

The analysis aims to discern and identify discourses of race present in GTA3. Issues of game interpretation often boil down to the debate of narrativist vs. ludologist approaches. To elaborate this polemic is beyond the scope of this study. However, this paper acknowledges the importance of these theoretical frameworks by focusing on two basic interpretational assumptions: GTA3 is a product of authors in a certain social context, and GTA3 is to a high degree governed by predefined fixed sequences of events, mediated by means of in-game “forced” events and linear video sequences (“cut scenes”).

We will juxtapose two drastically different analytical perspectives when studying racial issues of GTA3. The first perspective is Critical Race Theory (CRT). It posits that racism is a normal and *not* abnormal phenomenon in society (Delgado and Stefania 2000a). CRT writers assume that race is a social construction and consequently oppose any essentialist arguments. Various social constructions of race created for different races expose the different racialization of ethnic groups. Furthermore CRT calls for revisionist history that re-examines majoritarian interpretations of history and society by trying to replace these with explanations more in agreement with the knowledge of minorities.

The humour perspective derives from three competing paradigms for comprehending humour (Morreall 1986). The phthonic (from phthonos meaning ill-will or malice) paradigm views humour as an expression of feelings of superiority over another person (e.g. Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes). Another paradigm of humour perceives of humour as reaction to the perception of some incongruity (the incongruity theory). According to the third and latest theory, the relief

theory of e.g. Herbert Spencer and Freud, laughter is the venting of superfluous nervous energy. Our analysis will be grounded on the first two perspectives.

We will argue that the CRT perspective is consistent with the first theory of humour, the phonic theory, but that the other, the incongruity theory, enables us to move beyond CRT and presents a novel way of looking at games. By presenting stereotypical images of race in GTA3 as humorous, the player is provided with cues for reflecting and evaluating his/her own perspectives on issues of race. Through the unique properties of game interactivity players are allowed to explore different levels of incongruity in a way not possible with other linear forms of media. These perceptions of incongruity stem from the juxtaposition of images of race in GTA3 and the expectations of players, further exposing the characteristics of these expectations and providing impetus for personal reflection.

The disposition of the paper is as follows: first, the theoretical framework will be developed, followed by a description of the GTA3 game and its content. The game will be analysed using the theoretical framework. The paper ends with concluding discussion and reflections.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The aim of this analysis is to discern and identify discourses of race present in GTA3. When reading video games one inevitably faces the issue of game interpretation. This issue divides video game theorists – those who treat games as texts and extensions of drama and narrative, so-called narrativists (Laurel 1993; Murray 1998) and those who oppose this notion and believe that games require a totally new ludological approach (Aarseth 1997; Frasca 2003a) based on the intrinsically unique characteristics of play and simulation in video games. The ludological perspective aims “*not to replace the narratologic approach, but to complement it*” (Frasca 1999), but is nonetheless fundamentally opposed to the notion of studying an “interactive” medium (such as video games) without acknowledging its simulational dimensions, giving rise to an intensive debate between narrativists and ludologists as to the very foundations of game interpretation.

To elaborate this polemic by endorsing one perspective is beyond the scope of this study. However, a number of characteristics of this paper’s analytical aspects will be elucidated.

GTA3 could be seen as a text, supporting the arguments of narrativists, since it is a creation of authors in a contemporary social context, which is strongly reflected in the content of GTA3. The game GTA3 is not simply “just a game” but also a reflection of the authors, their beliefs, views and the discourses of their social context – or at least the ones they wish to project in this game. Similar to Truffaut’s *auteur* theory, the imprints of the creator/s (i.e. the game developer) can unquestionably be recognised in the final product (i.e. the game). Game developers are, to use David Hesmondhalgh’s (2002) concept, “symbol creators” that construct texts by creating new and/or combining different existing cultural symbols. Hence games are expressive cultural products just as much as literature, film or theatre.

The assumption of game authors is however not excluded by the ludological perspective, as proven by the following quote by ludology proponent Gonzalo Frasca (2003a)

“While I am a big supporter of the concept of the video game designer as an

auteur – and it is true that many of them do use the medium to express their thoughts – their main goal remains to entertain”.

This quote also stresses one of the primary points of objection as seen from the opposing narrativist perspective namely ludologists’ strong emphasis on play/game/entertainment as such, and not on (traditional) narrative elements such as video sequences and predefined sequences of events, which do form part of many popular video games such as the *Metal Gear Solid*-series and in particular GTA3. As will be shown later GTA3 is in high degree governed by an overarching and predefined fixed sequences of events, mediated by means of in-game “forced” events and linear video sequences.

Thus the assumption of game authors and the presence of traditional linear narrative components such as video sequences and fixed sequences of events would endorse a somewhat narrativist interpretation of the game. However, for the purpose of this study an equally rewarding perspective might be the ludological. Ludology does not ignore the importance of authors and video sequences *per se*, though it chooses to focus on how these are related to and components of simulations. Seeing discourses of race as being mediated through simulation and not narrative might consequently be equally productive for this study.

The narrative versus ludology debate is, however, a question of *how* games communicate – the aim of this study is though to focus on *what* is being communicated and primarily how this is later *reflected* upon. Stereotypes remain stereotypes regardless whether being presented using simulation or narrative representation. Hence, this paper does not advocate any particular perspective but acknowledges the importance of these theoretical frameworks when reading discourses in a game such as GTA3.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT is predominantly an American theoretical tradition mainly due to the racial structure of the US. The field is fairly young with roots in the post civil rights era of the 1970s, when several writers such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman and Richard Delgado (Delgado and Stefanic 2000a) noticed that the civil right advances of the 1960s had stalled and needed a new theoretical approach, which resulted in CRT. It aims to apply a broader perspective to issues of race than civil rights theory or ethnic studies, by incorporating economics, history, context, group- and self-interest and even feelings and the unconscious (Delgado and Stefanic 2000b). It is theoretically related to critical legal studies and radical feminism.

CRT has a number of fundamental assumptions. The first is that racism is a normal and *not* abnormal phenomenon in society. Another assumption is called “interest convergence” meaning that the rights of ethnic groups are only promoted and accepted when they converge with the interests of dominating (white) groups, creating a *status quo* which is hard to challenge. CRT believes this *status quo* can be opposed in the form of storytelling where the myths, presuppositions and other discourses of race oppression are questioned. CRT writers pay particular attention to legal storytelling and narrative analysis as a way of opposing discriminating discourses of race within the legal system. Basically CRT writers assume that race is a social construction and are consequently opposing any essentialist arguments. Various social constructions of race created for different races expose the different racialization of ethnic groups. Somewhat contradictory to the anti-essentialist notion CRT believes in the unique voice

of colour which means that each race has specific and unique knowledge that can only be communicated by that race. Furthermore CRT calls for revisionist history that re-examines majoritarian interpretations of history trying to replace these with explanation more in agreement with the knowledge of minorities. CRT also criticises liberalism due to its belief in colour blindness and neutral law principles.

These are the principal arguments of the CRT perspective. The framework has evolved and split into separate movements focusing on specific minorities, such as Latino (LatCrit) and Asian critical thought, critical race feminism (intersection of feminism, sexual orientation and CRT) and Queer-Crit theory (studies race and sexual attitudes).

Humour

Due to the discussion on humour in GTA3 taking place in the non-academic environments, it could possibly be rewarding to introduce philosophical theories of humour in the interpretation of the game. Philosophical theories of humour might resonate with a conflicting and contradictory tone. However, a primary attempt to compile and delve into what philosophers have understood by humour has been undertaken by Morreall (1986). Morreall identifies three major groups into which theories of humour could be classified. First, the phthonic theory, also called the superiority theory of humour posits laughter as an malicious expression of hate, contempt or condescension with regard to the one who is laughed about (Hobbes 1999; Plato 1992). The second perceives humour as a reaction to the perception of some incongruity, hence by Morreall denominated the incongruity theory (Aristotle 1926; Hutcheson 1971; Kant 1987; Schopenhauer 1969). Third, the relief theory focuses on the superfluous nervous energy that is relieved from the human body when laughing (Freud 2003; Santayana 1955; Spencer 1977).

Morreall's division could be clarified by understanding the reasons why we perceive something as being humoristic. It is clear from the short presentation of the three fundamental categories of humour theories that the relief theory does not pay heed to the phenomenological nature of the laughing matter *per se*, but rather focuses on the corporeal need for laughing matter as a means to vent and channel superfluous and hence, disposable, energy. Due to this limitation, the relief theory will not be incorporated into the conceptual framework of this paper. Thus, two main theories of laughter remain. However, it would be utterly misleading to consider the theories as complete and coherent unities. Almost by necessity, different scholars semantically frame concepts in sometimes compatible, but often contradictory ways. It is above all the incongruity theory that is multifaceted, plausibly as a consequence of the somewhat ambiguous concept of incongruity. Before getting too entangled into the jungle of philosophical concepts, the relation between the phthonic theory of laughter and CRT will be explicated.

The phthonic theory definitively comprises an ethical component. To laugh in somebody's face is generally considered to be socially inappropriate. By laughing, and thus proving one's superiority, one shows superior power and delineates the fine line between inclusion and exclusion. It is undemanding to perceive analogies with the critical stance taken by CRT. Combining CRT and the phthonic theory of laughter would lead to notions of the dominating race(s) laughing at the other subdued races. Laughter would in this sense reify the dominating power structure between different races. Hence, to make racial stereotypes a laughing matter would continue reinforcing the "we" as individually different personae and the "them" as unified, simplified, predictable and reducible others (NB: not Others). Is it possible to conclude

here that humour is doomed to befall the dominating races showing their superiority over the other races? Or, is there any way out of the totalizing fog of humour expanding and causing the ethical agency of races to dwindle out? At least there is a possibility to undertake a clarification of incongruity in order to establish whether there might remain a hope for laughter being ethical, in the sense of recognising others as Others (Bauman 1993; Lévinas 1996).

Although the incongruity theory of laughter in its rudimentary forms dates back at least to the Classical times in Greece – the prospering days of the phthonic theory – there has been a considerable debate, or rather, many disparate remarks on the nature of the incongruity giving rise to humoristic phenomenological features. Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* (book 3, section 2) claims that the incongruity in question regards setting up a certain expectation in the public and then jolting them with something they did not expect. The hutchesonian incongruities are rather concentrated around the play of inappropriate metaphors or ideas that clash with each other. Kant saw humour as the evaporation of an expectation, somewhat similar to Aristotle. It is rewarding to study Schopenhauer who in the same way as having his doubts about the Kantian metaphysical divisions, also had doubts about Kant’s account of humour. The pivot of Schopenhauer’s reasoning lies in humour as expressing a conflict or incongruity between abstract concepts and sense perception. In *The World as Will and Representation*, he summarizes his point as follows:

“The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity” (Schopenhauer 1969, book 1, section 13)

The abstract concepts could in the case of GTA3 represent the knowledge that we have of other races, while the sense perceptions originate from the game experience. A conflict between these two layers would, according to Schopenhauer’s theory, give rise to a humorous impression. The relation between the incongruity theory and CRT is a marriage of convenience rather than one of pure love. That is, the incongruity theory does not show a tight affiliation with the totalitarian phthonic humour. In the analysis of GTA3, it will be investigated whether the two perspectives of humour might be fruitfully applied to the racial discourses of GTA3.

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

Background

Launched in 2001, *Grand Theft Auto III* (GTA3) was the third sequel of the phenomenally successful *Grand Theft Auto* series developed by Scottish developer DMA Design (later renamed Rockstar North) and published by Take Two Interactive’s publishing label Rockstar Games. From its beginnings the GTA series have been immersed in highly public controversies due to its explicit depiction of violence and its sarcastic and humoristic representation of societal issues such as law enforcement, ethnicity, modern (American) urban life, crime, legal systems and class differences. US Senator Joe Lieberman denounced the first GTA game by calling it “*graphic, gruesome, and grotesque*”, the third game he described as troubling because it rewards “*perverse, antisocial behaviour*”, USA Today described the same game as “*a virtual apprenticeship in crime*”, Australia banned it until Rockstar Games removed some sequences (Hill 2002), NOW (National Organization of Women) in the US encouraged resellers to stop

selling it stating that GTA3 “*encourages violence toward and the degradation of women ... glorifies violence and degrades women*” (Reynolds 2002), and a Haitian civil rights group sued Rockstar North because the fourth sequel, *GTA: Vice City*, instructed people to “*kill the Haitians*” (USA Today 2004) – to mention only a few of the public outcries against the GTA series. Despite, or rather because of this, GTA3 has sold more than 7 million copies worldwide (Bramwell 2002) or maybe as much as 8 million copies. *GTA: Vice City* has since its launch sold approximately 11 million copies worldwide (USA Today 2004) generating revenues in the order of \$400 million. The fifth sequel, *GTA: San Andreas*, sold 12 million copies in just over four months (Fahey 2005). Game critics as well are lauding the game series as one of the best games ever – the game ranking accumulation web site Gamerankings.com which collects reviews from hundreds of game critics has for the latest three sequels calculated an average rating ratio ranging from 93.9 to 95.4 on a scale of 100.

Game description

In GTA3 you become a young white male, which is only referred to as “the kid”, who lives in Liberty City – a city flooded by violence, crime, drugs, prostitution, ethnic tensions, corruption, decadence and general anarchy. Liberty City is divided into three large neighbourhoods: Portland, a rough industrial zone with factories, warehouses, suspicious back alleys and a Red Light District; Staunton Island, a stereotypical American bustling commercial downtown area with big office buildings, shopping malls, sport stadium, casino, and university among other things; and finally Shoreside Vale, the suburban residential area with different housing areas and an airport.

Different forms of crime organisations and gangs – defined by the ethnicity of their members – rule the cities. The general aim of the game is to advance in this world of organised crime by successfully completing numerous assignments and missions of criminal nature given to the “kid” by different members of the crime organisations. These missions are often of extremely violent nature.

GTA3’s gameplay is generally designed around two scenarios: “out-of-car” mode, when “the kid” is on foot and has a limited set of controls for walking, running, jumping, shooting/using 12 different types of weapons; and “in-car” mode that allows to drive more than 50 different types of vehicles (Rockstar Games 2003) including a tank and a small airplane. These two game modes result in an innovative combination of the racing game genre with the “third person” action/adventure gaming genre (Dymek and Rehn 2003).

Despite being hailed for its “open-ended storyline” and “feeling of freedom” by both game journalists (Perry 2001) as well as researchers (Frasca 2003b), GTA3’s narrative is governed by a fairly rigid and linear storyline. GTA3 gamers are presented with a classical gangster story containing violence, betrayal, deceitful women, kidnapping and numerous colourful gangsters. The story centres on “the kid” being betrayed by his girlfriend during a bank robbery causing him to go to jail. He manages though to escape and continues his criminal life by joining the Italian Mafia. After a number of successful missions he is betrayed and forced to kill the boss of the Mafia when joining a competing Japanese Mafia. The gang war continues relentlessly with different opposing gangs in all of Liberty City’s three neighbourhoods. In the end, however, it turns out that the fiercest gang of them all, the Columbian Cartel, is masterminded by “the kid’s” former girlfriend who in a dramatic turn of events kidnaps his new girlfriend and requires a

ransom, leading to the bloodiest battle of the game where a helicopter must be shot down and a tremendous number of Colombians must be killed, before “the kid’s” new girlfriend can be rescued. A lucky ending perhaps but in the finale his new girlfriend complains too much and suddenly a gunshot is heard – probably “the kid” shooting his new girlfriend (Baker 2003).

This overarching storyline is mediated using numerous video sequences in the game triggered by different actions caused via “the kid” by the gamer. Primarily the video sequences are used for receiving missions, which the gamer is left to “interactively” resolve on his/her own, which upon successful completion prompts the next episode of the storyline. Consequently the overarching storyline is predefined, fairly linear and equally experienced by all gamers, except with regards to the sequence of some events that do not affect the direction of the overarching story.

ANALYSIS

The case in this paper is an empirical study of the GTA3 world. The case demonstrates how the game developer DMA/Rockstar North has chosen to portray modern (American) urban society. Regardless whether this depiction is sarcastic and “unrealistic” – it is still a valid perspective on contemporary society set in a reasonable frame of reference, be it humorous and exaggerated. In this analysis the focus will be turned to the controversial racial dimensions raised in this game.

Racial discourses in GTA3

Next to violence and gender controversies ethnic issues have been widely criticised in GTA3. The racial discourses identified in this analysis are based on previous grounded theory based research (Dymek 2004). All gangs and crime organisations in the game are based on ethnicity. There is a Columbian, Italian, Latino-American, African-American, Asian/Chinese, Caribbean/Jamaican and a Japanese gang. Every gang is depicted in a strongly stereotypical manner.

- The Columbians in the **Columbian Cartel** are presented as gang of extremely violent cowboy-like dressed men with bad English and big trucks. They are the main distributor of drugs in Liberty City and are portrayed as the most evil enemy of all gangs. “The kid” never co-operates with the Columbian Cartel.
- The **Leone Family Mafia** is a cliché version of an traditional Italian American Mafia family that likes opera music, sleek black limousines, obey their Mamas and is generally positively represented until they decide to hand you over to the Columbian Cartel.
- The **Diablos** are generally of Hispanic/Latino origins. They like low-rider cars and provide crazy missions like street racing or picking up porn magazines scattered all over town. They provide bonus mission not central to the main storyline.
- The **Red Jacks/South Side Hoods** is an African-American gang living in the projects (suburbs), listens to rap music and is locked in an in-house gang war. They are basically stereotypical black street gangsters.
- The **Triads** in China Town are poor Chinese people that drive fish vans and are “obsessive territorial maniacs” with noodle stands in China town. Throughout the storyline they are always enemies.

- The Caribbean/Jamaican gang, the **Yardies**, like reggae music, dreadlocks, drugs and voodoo.
- Finally the **Yakuza**, based in the commercial districts of Staunton Island, is a sleek centuries old Japanese mafia founded on strong loyalty, honour, efficiency and hierarchical structures.

Much effort has been put, by the game developer, into making the gang characters talk with an exaggerated accent supposedly typical for their ethnic group.

The only white non-Italian characters in the game are “the kid”, his former girlfriend Catalina and the media mogul Donald Love who is presented as a highly shrewd and the most powerful character in the game. You, as a white man, mainly fight and restrain non-white gangs further indicating the supposedly dominant position of the white race. All the police officers are also white.

CRT and humour on GTA3

It is obvious that CRT would consider GTA3 a clear case of classical racial discourse of stereotypification. By portraying white characters as being smart and powerful (the media mogul Donald Love), authoritative (the police) or as the main character “the kid” with whom players must identify – the discourse in GTA3 implies typical notions of white supremacy. “The kid” is the only character which players embody and control in GTA3. Hence the world of GTA3 is the world seen from the perspective of a white male that controls and shapes the world. Furthermore the Italians, which are the only white crime organisation in the game, are portrayed in a separate way. The Leone Family Mafia is your first crime organisation and the organisation providing most of the missions. It is more of a family organisation than a primitive and aggressive gang as in the case of the other organisations. The Yakuza is portrayed as being equally or even more sophisticated, but they are instead strict, impersonal, hierarchical and almost army-like. This stereotypical Japanese view stresses the fact that “they are different” from “us” i.e. the normal and natural white people.

It could be argued that GTA3 does not contain racial discourses and that the main character happens to be white, and that the crime gang characteristics are chosen to increase realism. Some real life Italian-Americans are known for their mafias, some Columbian cartels do produce a lot of cocaine, and blacks are often identified with “bling-bling” and “street culture”. However, CRT states that racism is a normal and *not* abnormal phenomenon in society. Some so-called racial realists such as Derrick Bell (Delgado and Stefanic 2000b) even claim that racism must exist because it is a means by which society allocates privilege and status. Racism is a way of organising society in an interracial world. Therefore it is hard to argue that GTA3 does not contain racial discourses.

Consequently according to CRT GTA3 deals with several racial discourses. Foremost it propagates racial stereotypes. GTA3 also reproduces discourses of different racialization – e.g. the “almost white” Sicilians in the Leone Family Mafia are generally more positive than the savage Columbians or stubborn Chinese. Hence these examples of different racialization show how the social construction of race differs from race to race, but is mainly seen from the perspective of the ruling white class, which leads to final GTA3 discourse of white supremacy. GTA3 is seen from the perspective of the white race as the archetype and ruling race.

In popular discussions on GTA3, it has been suggested that the stereotypes in GTA3 are comical and humoristic. By paying heed to that fact while recalling the two theoretical perspectives on humour described above, the following becomes clear. In the light of the phthonic theory of humour, it would be reasonable to assume that the depiction of race in GTA3 is comical due to the inferiority of the other races. That is, laughing at the Colombian Cartel, the Leone Family Mafia, the Diablos, the Red Jacks/South Side Hoods, the Triads, the Yardies and the Yakuza implies the superiority of the white race (“the kid”) over the other races. As has been stated above, this would evoke disgust in any scholar pertaining to CRT. The game would in their view be perceived not only as racist but also as a project of continuing the reiteration and reification of racial structures of dominance.

In the theoretical discussion of the perspectives on humour, a possibility was left open for humour based on perception of incongruence instead of perception of (racial) superiority. The question still remains whether that theoretical point could bring forth aspects of GTA3 that are obfuscated by CRT in combination with the phthonic theory of laughter. The incongruence that is suggested to be in question in GTA3, is that which Schopenhauer (1969) pointed out in *The World as Will and Representation* – the incongruence between a concept and the particulars subsumed under the concept. There are two ways of locating such an incongruence in GTA3. First, the incongruence could be located between the stereotypical images of race in GTA3 and the particular persons the player confronts outside the game, i.e. in “the real world”. This implies that the stereotypical image (the concept) is perceived as incongruent with those particular cases that allegedly ought to be subsumed under the concept. Hence, the portrayal of the stereotypes is rendered humoristic since the player perceives that all Colombians do not drive big trucks, all Latinos do not drive low riders and all Chinese do not drive fish vans. On the other hand, it might be possible that the humorous aspect of the stereotypes derive from the perceived incongruence between the stereotypical image that we expect and the stereotypical image that is perceived when playing GTA3. The racial image offered by GTA3 would in this case be incongruent with the player’s stereotypes due to the exaggerated character of the stereotypes in GTA3.

The incongruity perspective of humour shows that laughing at stereotypes does not necessarily entail that the player is placing herself above the races she is laughing at. No such connection logically follows from the laughing act. This will be the starting point for the final discussion. Not only is laughter not a sign of superiority. It will also be suggested that the feature of laughing at stereotypes might in fact be a means to gain impetus for the player to reflect on her own stereotypical images of race.

DISCUSSION

Two perspectives on humour, and their relation to CRT, have been presented. Can this study deduce an inclination towards one of these perspectives? That is, can any argument previously presented be proven more valid than the other? That will be the focal point of this concluding discussion.

From a CRT perspective GTA3 propagates white hegemony, racial stereotypes and different racialization. Is then the racial discourse in GTA3 totally despicable from a CRT perspective? As David Held quoting Horkheimer points out: “*critical theory [...] expresses an interest in the emancipation of men and women from the constraints of class society and domination in all*

forms” (Held 1980). CRT wishes to emancipate races from domination by other races. Consequently the CRT perspective is congruent with the phthonic theory of humour *ergo* GTA3 is propagating an ethically reprehensible discourse. However, it was suggested above that humour can provide impetus for ethical reflection, but the causal relation between humour and reflection was not sufficiently elucidated previously. To this we will turn our attention.

Recall the two types of incongruities presented in the preceding part. The second of these holds that the incongruity that is perceived to be humorous regards the discrepancy betwixt the stereotypes of the player and the stereotypical images of race presented in GTA3. If this indeed might be the causal predecessor of the perception of the laughing matter as such, it could possibly generate impetus for ethical reflection. When an incongruity arises between the player’s stereotypes and the stereotypical images of GTA3, not only are the stereotypes of the game at hand for the player, but also her own stereotypes. If not, there could not be any discrepancy or incongruence *between* the two sets of concepts. By bringing forth the stereotypes that are the player’s, the player is granted opportunity to reflect upon them.

Although a commonsensical as well as a critical race theorist view of GTA3 would support a phthonic, and hence ethically reprehensible, perspective of this game, this study has put forth arguments supporting the incongruity theory, which generates opportunities for reflection and renegotiation of player’s racial stereotypes.

However, the need for taking side should also be questioned. In the modernist wave of philosophy, questions are formulated in an “either-or” logic. In postmodern philosophy the *raison d’être* of such clear-cut separations is seriously put into question. Rather than seeing one of the perspectives as the truth, it is allowed to pay heed to both sides (a “both-and” logic). In this way the dialectical stammering of the racial discourses in GTA3 might be fully appreciated.

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