the satirical message of grand theft auto V

a critique on contemporary american society.

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Abstract

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to answer the question what kind of persuasive message about America is being expressed in the video game *Grand Theft Auto V*. The video game *Grand Theft Auto V* contains many controversial characters and features that criticize American society. To analyze the way in which *Grand Theft Auto V* enables this critique on American society, I have used the theory of Jesse Schell on game mechanisms and the theory of Ian Bogost on the procedural rhetoric of video games. In order to analyze specifically the critique, I have used the theory of Test on satire.

The research is divided into two parts; a first chapter on the game mechanisms and procedural rhetoric of *Grand Theft Auto V* and a second chapter on the satirical messages of the video game. The game mechanisms of *Grand Theft Auto V* play a crucial role in creating its rhetorical messages. The interactions between game mechanisms create procedural rhetoric that enables the use of satire in a video game. The results suggest that through the use of satire, *Grand Theft Auto V* creates a critique on not only the American government, but also on the American media industry, the cliché LA lifestyle, and American race issues.

Keywords

Video games, game mechanisms, procedural rhetoric, satire, critique, Grand Theft Auto, Michael De Santa, Trevor Philips, Franklin Clinton, American culture and society.

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Introduction

Video games are well-known in western society. Even if one has not played any video games, the character of Mario or Zelda is engraved in our memories. It seems as though these video games only tend to function as an informal medium in contemporary society, but this idea is changing. In 2013 a new sequel of *Grand Theft Auto* was launched. I could not help but notice that in every game store this new video game was top rated and I could not resist buying it. The realization that this video game is such a hype among so many game players, made me think about why people are obsessed with *Grand Theft Auto* and how it has infiltrated popular culture. At first glance video games are seen as part of popular studies and the entertainment business, though another striking aspect, which will be the focus of this thesis, is that many contemporary video games also have deeper meaning incorporated in them.

Different research fields become more and more interested in analyzing video games such as scholars from psychology, anthropology, economy, education, and sociology. These new generations of scholars, who consider video games as their primary research, have struggled for academic credibility. However, nowadays video games are accepted as a field of study. Universities, such as Loyola University in New Orleans, offer programs in the field of game studies. These programs provide courses that deal with digital media and their growing influence on contemporary society. This confirms the idea of game studies being an acknowledged research field.

Espen Aarseth is one of the first scholars in the field of game studies that saw it as a valid academic discipline. He belongs to the school of ludologists and is therefore an important figure in the field of game studies. Ludologists believe that video games do not only constitute true narratives, but also create, with play and interaction being the most

fundamental parts of the game, a form unique to games. Also Henry Jenkins, a professor of comparative media studies, agrees with him and states that video games "shape our culture" and that video games deserve to be critically reflected on in the same way as traditional art forms such as photographs and films (Jenkins 177). Jenkins is an important researcher in the field of game studies, being actively involved with the Convergence Culture Consortium, which is a faculty network that seeks to build bridges between academic researchers and the media industry. Jenkins also wrote a paper on learning in a participatory culture that focus on preparing students to engage with the new media landscape (Jenkins 2). In his works, Jenkins argues that video games are an art form that is still at the beginning of its development. According to Jenkins, however, some video games do have such advanced aesthetics that the video game can provoke strong feelings while playing it. This proves that video games have a lot of potential to become an academic field that will be researched as much as for example the field of film studies.

This potential lies mainly in the fact that as mentioned before video games are incorporated with deeper meaning. According to Jenkins, meaning arises because game players actively interpret the video game. New meanings are formed on the basis of game players' frame of reference, giving each game player a different experience and interpretation while playing the same video game (Jenkins 20). This means that a video game contains certain features that cause game players to create meaning. This research will therefore focus on such techniques in video games that stimulate game players to accept the satirical meaning that a video game can contain. The importance of this research is due to the fact that video games can create representations of reality that can give game players a new perspective on the world. A video game can present an aspect of reality from, for example, a particular ideological viewpoint, giving the game player a new way of thinking about his aspect. The use of satire is one way to do this (Bogost 122 and 123).

Previous research concerning satire in video games has mainly focused on video games in which satire is dominant. The video game *Grand Theft Auto V* is not a video game solely about satire and therefore it is interesting to study how satire works in such a complicated commercial game.

Grand Theft Auto V takes place in a virtual city called Los Santos, a representation of Los Angeles, located in the virtual American state San Andreas (based on Southern California). *Grand Theft Auto V* is a video game involving role-play, in which the player inhabits multiple characters. The portrayed city in *Grand Theft Auto V* is an example of an open world video game environment. The game player is granted a large amount of freedom and can determine the missions he wants to start, which will influence his relationships with other characters. *Grand Theft Auto V* deals with contemporary issues within American society such as the representation of men, women, ethnicity, violence and the alienation from mainstream society. I have researched *Grand Theft Auto V* to clarify the representation and simulation in this video game in order to help readers understand the satirical message of this video game. This will prove that video games are definitely worth researching and that those video games deserve a place in the field of research next to visual images and film. The research question that is the central to my bachelor thesis is: how does *Grand Theft Auto V* convey its message through the concepts of game mechanisms, procedural rhetoric and satire and which message is conveyed exactly?

In the first chapter of my bachelor thesis I will use Ian Bogost's work *The Rhetoric of Video Game* to explain the concept of "procedural rhetoric." This concept will clarify the processes within the video game *Grand Theft Auto V*. I will combine this concept with Jesse Schell's elements of game mechanisms. By using Schell's theory I will be able to give an analysis of the formal elements in *Grand Theft Auto V*. The interaction between those formal elements and the game players create the processes, called procedural rhetoric by Bogost and

these are necessary in order to generate meaning or messages.

In the second chapter I have focused on an example of procedural rhetoric that has been presented in *Grand Theft Auto V*. This video game used satire as a rhetorical form to communicate a message about American society. I have chosen the theory of George Test to deal with the concept of satire. Test describes a combination of four elements: aggression, play, laughter, and judgment. These elements provide the most complete definition of satire available, due to the fact that he extends his examples beyond literature to film and political cartoons, and uses material from popular studies to expand on previous theories. By using this theory, I will be able to give the most comprehensive analysis of the use of satire in *Grand Theft Auto V*.

In both chapters I have done research in the field of game studies by using one of the most unconventional sources: YouTube videos. I will refer to various YouTube videos about the video game *Grand Theft Auto V* to support my arguments. My contribution will therefore be a research conducted by making use of new sources such as YouTube. Those YouTube videos will help me to clarify processes in video games more easily, because of the use of moving footage.

Theoretical Framework

"Video games are the quintessential social texts of our present cultural moment"

(Steven E. Jones 37)

The field of video game studies has developed tremendously in the past years. One of

the most interesting parts of video game theory is the concept of procedural rhetoric by Ian

Bogost. I will discuss what procedural rhetoric is and how this concept can help to analyze the

game mechanisms of video games. In order to make an adequate judgment about video

games, procedural rhetoric is needed. It creates a way to make allegations about how video

games work (Bogost 125). In addition, I will use Jesse Schell's book about game mechanisms,

which will provide multiple lenses and give me a better understanding of game mechanisms.

When game mechanisms are well-understood, the processes created by these game

mechanisms can be analyzed more thoroughly. Bogost's theory on procedural rhetoric and

Schell's theory on game mechanisms will be combined to provide a structure for the

theoretical framework that will be used further on in this thesis. This combination will clarify

the role of game mechanisms in terms of persuasive communication of video games. An

example of procedural rhetoric that has been researched frequently is the concept satire. The

theory of George Test will provide an overview of the characteristics of satire. Attention will

be paid to these characteristics of satire to enable recognition of satire while playing the video

game *Grand Theft Auto V.*

Ian Bogost argues, in his book *The Rhetoric of Video Games*, that video games can

make presumptions about reality by showing it from a certain angle to the game players.

When discussing presumptions or taking a certain position or angle, it can be regarded as

rhetoric (Bogost 123). Traditionally rhetoric is understood as the art of convincing, though

nowadays rhetoric is looked upon as more than solely convincing. It is about creating an

opportunity in which an idea or position is presented and where the reader can interpret this idea or position. As a result of this development in understanding rhetoric, Bogost has formulated the concept procedural rhetoric. "Procedural rhetoric is the practice of effective persuasion and expression using processes" (Bogost 125). It describes more specifically how rhetoric works in video games. Bogost regards a video game as a sequence of processes that the player experiences while playing the video game. Therefore, procedural rhetoric is the construction of an idea or position through a process. Procedural rhetoric in a videogame is, for example, an explanation of how something works or does not work. So the player gets the message by playing the process (Bogost 125 and 129).

The procedural rhetoric of a video game can be analyzed by looking at the mechanisms of a video game. It is the interaction between game players and the game mechanisms that causes the processes that is the very concept of procedural rhetoric. Game mechanisms are one of the basic elements of a video game and are the tools that connect the game player's actions with the purpose and the main challenges of the video game. They define the goal of the video game and the way the player can or cannot achieve their goal. In other words, game mechanisms are the layer between the video game and the game player, allowing interaction and communication between them. A video game can communicate a persuasive message through game mechanisms.

The persuasive message in a video game can communicate critique on contemporary society. Communicating a persuasive message is a consistent element in *Grand Theft Auto V*. This suggests that it is not by accident, but game designers created the video game with a purpose. Due to this, it is interesting to consider the perspective of game designers. In order to find this insight from the perspective of game designers, I used the book *The Art of Game Design*, which was written by Jesse Schell. Jesse Schell is an American game designer, who works at the Pittsburgh Carnegie Mellon University. In my bachelor thesis I will be able to

use the chapters in which Schell devotes to the analysis and definitions of game mechanisms, which he calls "the core of what a game truly is" (Schell 130). The six categories he devised are: (1) space, (2) objects, attributes, and states, (3) actions, (4) rules, (5) skills, and (6) chance. I will use these six categories in this chapter to come up with an analysis about *Grand Theft Auto V* game mechanisms and what kind of persuasive message is created through these game mechanisms.

The first game mechanic Schell talks about is the game space; this is what is left when all the other visuals in a video game are taken away. Schell goes on to argue that all game spaces are "either discrete or continuous, have some number or dimensions, and have bounded areas which may or may nor be connected" (Schell 131). According to Schell, discrete spaces have a limited number of positions that can be filled or moved into. On the other hand within continuous spaces there is unlimited movement though a limited space. Schell further states that spaces have dimensions, by which he means when a game has a 2D or 3D space mechanically, not aesthetically (Schell 134). The different perspectives in *Grand Theft Auto V* present the game space to the game players. These perspectives will be discussed, because they determine how convincing the video game's message is by letting game players experience a feeling of immersion.

A video game does not only need a game space, but it also needs objects to fill those spaces. These objects, attributes, and states are the second element of Schell's game mechanisms. Those objects can be, for example, characters, props, buildings, it can be "anything that can be seen or manipulated in your game (Schell 136). The objects in a video game contain attributes, for example colors, positioning etc., and states, which are for example speed limits. Attributes and states help to explain objects and their interaction with other game elements. Nevertheless, video games that force game players to be aware of too many states can be confusing and overwhelming (Schell 139). Objects, attributes, and states

of a video game are the core of the game mechanisms that can function as persuasive messengers.

A video game does not only need "nouns" and "adjectives," but it also needs "verbs," which are the actions of a video game (Schell 140). In his book Schell describes two sorts of actions: operative and resultant actions (Schell 140). Operative actions are the actions the game player can make at the most basic level of the video game. Resultant actions are a level above the operative actions. For example, moving a piece in checkers would be an operative action, whereas protecting pieces by moving other pieces in front of them is a resultant action. Actions try to create "emergent gameplay" (Schell 144) and cause social interaction between objects, attributes, and states that can contain persuasive messages. This social interaction can contain persuasive messages that will be received by the game players.

The fourth game mechanic Schell describes is rules. Schell argues that rules are the most essential mechanic because "they define the space, the objects, the actions, the consequences of the actions, the constraints of the actions, and the goals" (Schell 144). According to Schell, goals are the most significant type of rules. In his opinion goals must be achievable, concrete, and eventually fulfilling in order to be effective (Schell 148-149). A good balance of rules and goals in a video game make the game players feel confident and comfortable playing the video game. If a video game meets the expectations of its game players, it is more likely that game players will play the video game again and accept its persuasive message.

Another element that determines if a game player feels confident playing a video game are skills. Skills are needed to complete the tasks video games present to the game players. Game designers need to create an effective, stimulating experience by balancing the game players' skills with the difficulty of the game in order to keep game players interested in the video game. Schell goes on to say that there are three types of skills within a video game:

physical, mental, and social skills (Schell 151). Physical skills involve strength, dexterity, coordination, and physical endurance. Mental skills include memory, observation, and puzzle solving. Social skills contain reading an opponent, predicting their movements, and coordinating actions with teammates (Schell 151). However, video games also show contradiction between real and virtual skills. The real skills refer to the game players' skills, whereas virtual skills refer to the skills of the characters of the video games (Schell 151). Skills determine the nature of the game player's experience (Schell 152), so it is of great significance to create a video game that is not too easy or too difficult. In this way, similar to the game mechanic of rules, game players will enjoy playing the video game and are open to comments or critiques addressed in the video game.

The last mechanic Schell discusses is the level of chance in a video game. Chance is a necessary part for a video game to become attractive, since chance creates uncertainty, which has a surprising effect on game players. It is useful because chance adds unpredictability to a video game experience, which increases the chance that game players replay the video game and it leads to the fact that playing the video game is different every single time (Schell 153).

Schell's game mechanisms define the core of the video game and can tell its players what the video game is truly about. The game mechanisms are the layer between the video game and the game player. In this way a video game can communicate a persuasive message, either critique or other comments, through its game mechanisms.

In the case of *Grand Theft Auto V* perhaps the most recurrent message is the satirical elements. In the third chapter I will focus on this example of procedural rhetoric that has been expressed through the game mechanisms in *Grand Theft Auto V*. Satire is rhetorical in form, because it can communicate a social point of view and therefore saying something about reality (Griffin 71). Taking this into consideration, it is relevant to pay attention to satire and how it specifically works in video games. Furthermore, satire is about the relationship

between people and their attitude towards society (Griffin 159). The goal of satire in video games is to lead the game player through processes that contain a critical view on society. Previous works on satire focus on certain media, primarily film and literature (Nilsson 6). However, video games also make use of satire and this element is often discussed in articles, newspapers or classrooms. The striking aspect of satire in video games is that a lot has been written about it, however, there is no actual theory. Most academic articles on *Grand Theft Auto V* mention satire. In the collection of critical essays by Nate Garrelts *The Meaning and Culture of Grand Theft Auto: Critical Essays* many of the essays mention satire as an important aspect of this video game series, although, none of them make use of a theory regarding satire. The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to expose the shortcomings of the scholars, and to fill the gap in the field of satire in video games.

Therefore, in order to fill this gap I have chosen the theory of George Test to approach the concept of satire. George Test describes in his book *Satire: Spirit and Art* four elements that always appear in a satire and in my opinion the most comprehensive definition of satire offered. So far, the combination of these four elements creates a satire (Test 14 and 15). The first element is aggression. Aggression is given to the object of satire by means of verbal or visual attacks in a satire. The satirist can create characters that symbolize what is being attacked in numerous ways (Test 16 and 17). The verbal aggression in satire can be direct, as in, for example, name-calling, or it can be indirect, which is often the case in a play. Nevertheless, the main objective remains the same, which is to make the target group look foolish or less important. The greater the level of using fictional elements in a satire, the less direct the verbal aggression will be perceived.

The second element is play. This element adds certain playfulness to the satire so that the aggression of the satire does not come across to the reader as an attack without any context. Play makes a satire socially acceptable and appealing for the audience by using tools

such as metaphors and puns (Test 22). Play not only takes a concrete form in satire, but it also has an imaginary form, when for example fantasies are constructed. Play helps to indirectly render the verbal aggression of the satirical expression. Nevertheless, the central role of satire remains to allow satire without offending the target to the point that it wants to take revenge.

The third element is laughter, which similar to play makes it possible for the truth to be accepted by the reader. Laughter is seen as a positive way of convincing people, because people realize how ridiculous something is when they laugh about it themselves. However, laughter is also something very personal, not everyone likes the same things. Apart from personal preference, this also depends on people's social and cultural background. Yet, every satire contains recognizable techniques that should make it humorous, so it is accepted more easily by the game players. This includes techniques such as anticlimax, parodies and black humor (Test 26).

The last element of Test's theory about satire is judgment. The element of judgment gives the three other elements direction. There are several techniques that can be used to present judgment. The most direct way is to tell the audience straightforwardly what is wrong with society without a fictional character that stands between the audience and the satirist. Another technique is to portray the object of satire as extremely ridiculous (Test 27 and 28). Satire in video games is difficult to accept by its game players without the element of judgment, because satire would otherwise lack meaning.

The approach of Test's theory about satire is a suitable way to analyze satire in video games. The combination of the four elements causes satire to be separated from other forms of expression that resemble it, because only satire contains the unique combination of Test's four elements. It is whether something is a satire or not. It is not relevant to what extent the different elements are used and how efficiently they are used. Satire should not be approached by the intention of the satirist, but the focus needs to be on the satire itself (Test 31).

I will play the video game *Grand Theft Auto V* to be able to carry out a useful analysis. Both Aarseth and Bogost state that this is the best way to gain knowledge about a video game, because in this way the researcher takes the position of the audience (in this case the position of game player) (Aarseth 3 and Bogost 128).

The focus of my bachelor thesis will be on how the video game *Grand Theft Auto V* stimulates its game players to experience the satirical processes constructed within this video game. I will do this by looking at *Grand Theft Auto V* from a procedural approach. This will help me to address different complexities present in video games. On the one hand video games are about game players enjoying themselves, but on the other hand video games can contain serious critique. The concept of satire mediates between this enjoyment and critique. In this thesis I would like to address the following questions: How do game mechanisms of a video game contribute to the procedural rhetoric of a video game? Taking the game mechanisms and procedural rhetoric of *Grand Theft Auto V* into account, how does the concept of satire contribute to the critique *Grand Theft Auto V* has on American society? Additionally, how does it contribute to the persuasive message the video game has on its game players? In what way does the concept of satire deal with the tension between playing video games for enjoyment and the critique video games have on society? By discussing these elements I hope to outline what establishes the persuasive message of *Grand Theft Auto V*.

1. Procedural Rhetoric

Video games have become pervasive in contemporary society, similar to photography, films, and illustrations. They are not simply for entertainment, but video games, such as *Grand Theft Auto V,* are even critical towards society. However, they do not only express its meaning through oral speech, but video games also create meaning through processes. Video games that use procedural rhetoric can create arguments about things that do work, but also about things that do not work in a video game. They tell us something about how social and cultural systems work in society (Bogost 136).

This chapter links Bogost's concept of procedural rhetoric with Schell's categorization of game mechanisms. This relationship will help to describe the way game mechanisms create processes that can contain a persuasive message or critique. I will apply Schell's definition of game mechanisms on the video game *Grand Theft Auto V*. This chapter will include multiple examples of persuasive messages, which also confirms the presence of Bogost's concept of procedural rhetoric. The goal of this chapter is to create a substantiated interpretation of the video game *Grand Theft Auto V*. This interpretation will be that formal elements will enable the possibilities for satirical effects.

1.1 Space: perspectives

Grand Theft Auto V is a three dimensional video game consisting of the fictional state of San Andreas. Game players can move freely within the limits of the game rules, both inside and outside. The space of the game is designed to be realistic and the mechanisms of the game objects are presented to the player in a credible perspective. *Grand Theft Auto V* can be played from two different perspectives. The first one, which is the most typical one of the *Grand Theft Auto* series, is the third person perspective (Figure 1). The player sees an open space behind the game characters and sees the world in front of him. This concept shows a sense of

overview and allows the game player to feel in control of the situation. The second

perspective, used in *Grand Theft Auto V* for the first time, is the first person perspective

(Figure 2). This perspective provides the game player with the experience as if he is looking

through the eyes of the character. It contains a different and much more intense experience of

the game content. The overall tone of the game becomes more accurate and the game player

can identify more easily with the game characters. This perspective can provide more

convincing communication as players can easily experience the feeling of immersion. The

ability to switch from perspective gives the game player the opportunity to interact within a

scene. Therefore, giving game players will feel the freedom to decide to dive into the role of

active manipulator (third person) or in de the role of the character itself (first person).

Figure 1: Third person perspective (GTA Series Videos Mission #17).

Figure 2: First person perspective (GTA Series Videos Mission #69).

1.2 Objects, attributes, and states

Grand Theft Auto V's open world consists of a surface covered with mountains, forests, deserts, seas, rural districts and a fictional metropolis, which is a representation of Los Angeles. The districts are filled with pedestrians and a variety of transport possibilities can be seen on the roads. The video game offers game players an opportunity to visit various shops, such as clothing stores, army shops and fast food chains. After getting to know the main characters in the first introductory scene and missions, the game player gets a huge amount of freedom in terms of movement and the activities that can be performed. The characters can easily move by foot or with a wide range of vehicles, such as a bicycle, scooter, car, airplane, helicopter, boat etc. Game players can also give their characters a new haircut, a tattoo, or pimp up their car in the garage. Each character in the game has its own smartphone, which has direct access to an imitation of the Internet as well as a fictional stock market. These activities give game players the opportunity to spend time playing the game without progressing.

These common, everyday activities are incorporated in video games because of a trend within the industry. This trend towards immersion through life imitation has meant that video games have become more immersive and true to life (Welsh 127). Also *Grand Theft Auto V* has gone along with this trend and not only incorporated everyday activities, but also granted game players freedom to choose which options they want to play. The 'everydayness' of these practices is significant to create a sense of freedom. According to Welsh: "referencing the cycles of daily life without holding players to their regularity, generates the illusion that one has escaped everyday life and all the responsibilities and monotony it entails" (Welsh 128). Thus, these practices give the game player a sense of reality and a promise of freedom, because game players are able to make their own choices and experience the consequences of these choices in the gameplay.

1.3 Actions

     Grand Theft Auto V is the first game of the series in which the player has the ability to switch between the main characters. This switch between characters creates an unusual dynamic within the atmosphere, especially during missions, and offers the game players a preview of the game story from different perspectives. When a game player performs a switch of character at a random moment within the storyline, this can be seen as an operative action. When a game player needs to switch characters to progress in a mission in order to complete this mission, it can be seen as a resultant action (Schell 140). The opportunity to switch between characters does not only provide a better approach during missions and a versatile display of characters, but it also raises a sense of superiority and power.

     In terms of game mechanisms, each character has its unique ability in *Grand Theft Auto V*. For example, Michael has the ability to slow down the playing time, while the screen turns into a blue color. The game player has now a significantly better control over the situation and has the time to focus more precisely with Michael and make him easier to maneuver. Trevor has the ability to be temporarily immune to enemy fire and his special ability increases the efficiency of his own weapons. The screen turns to a red tint during this special skill. Franklin's special ability has to do with driving his car. Also during his special ability, the time slows down and controlling the car becomes easier (Dingo Special Abilities). Game players will in this way perform better during dangerous maneuvers with Franklin. These special abilities will create a more player-friendly video game, because the experience of playing will be more pleasant with less game errors. Due to the change in graphics during all these special abilities, it would seem as if the characters hallucinate while performing their special skills. This not only creates a distinction between the realistic game world and the perception of the world by the characters, but also creates a feeling of immersion.

1.4 Rules

In his book Schell argues that rules are essential elements of video games, because the mechanism of rules is essential to define the game space, objects, actions, and goals. Physical laws, such as the law of inertia, the law of gravity, the act of action and reaction etc. are examples of rules that create a realistic experience in a video game. When game players play video games, the possibilities of the game space are explored by manipulating the symbolic systems, offered by a video game, such as the system of rules. This system of rules does not only create the experience of gameplay, but it also creates the meaning of the video game (Bogost 121). The game's importance is constructed by all the gestures, experiences and interactions the system of rules allows in the video game. Game players explore these possibilities within the gameplay and in this way encounter the meaning of the video game.

In order to comprehend this aspect of *Grand Theft Auto V*, I have divided this sub-chapter in three parts. Firstly, I will discuss various barriers and sanctions, and then I will analyze the goals and the motivation of the game players. Lastly, I will explain when the rules in *Grand Theft Auto V* are applied.

1.4.1 Barriers and sanctions

The barriers and sanctions in *Grand Theft Auto V* become evident when analyzing the freedom of a game player's experience. Freedom seems to be unlimited in *Grand Theft Auto V*, although, barriers are often encountered in the video game. Therefore freedom is well-defined. The game rules have created limits to this freedom to determine to what extent the game player's power reaches. The area in which the characters can move is limited to the area of the island and the characters' immediate vicinity. A game player cannot choose which home, apartment, or store he visits with the character, because there is limited access to selected buildings. Within these buildings a limited number of actions can be taken. An

example here could be that a character can only repair his car in the garage. The limits of video games are made up of the processes it supports and excludes, through which video games become procedurally expressive (Bogost 43). The parameters of *Grand Theft Auto V* determine the allowances and constraints of the game players and force the game players to make decisions within these allowances and constraints.

Another constraint in *Grand Theft Auto V* is the "wanted level" used to indicate the extent to which the characters are wanted by the police, the army or federal authorities. The "wanted level" is derived by the actions a character takes and the severity of these actions. If the "wanted level" is active, the police chase the characters and game players are not able to progress in missions. If a game player is unable to escape from the police or other authorities, the game player's character is killed or on a rare occasion busted. The character is spawned in front of the doors of the nearest hospital. The game continues and the only penalty that follows is a reimbursement for medical care. Nevertheless, this is a very symbolic punishment, when you take into account the seriousness of the violation. The actual prosecution by the police is in fact the only real penalty in the video game, as the player is forced to suspend his or her activities and make sure they flee from the police first. The barriers and sanctions do not hinder the progress of the storyline and it reinforces the belief in the inviolability of the characters. However, the limitations of *Grand Theft Auto V* created, by among other things, barriers and sanction, determine the way in which the video game is procedurally expressive and in what way game players create their decisions.

1.4.2 Goals and motivation

One of the main goals within *Grand Theft Auto V* is to earn money. Earning money in the video game will create a significant advantage; because it allows players to buy items and possessions they would otherwise not have access to. Characters can invest in the purchase of

property or they can get better equipment for missions. Money can also be invested in the virtual stock market, which can be influenced by characters. Characters can earn money in multiple ways. They can, for example, rob stores or civilians. The rewards characters will receive, encourage game players to use violence and commit illegal activities will therefore be more attractive than innocent activities in *Grand Theft Auto V*.

The game player can also neglect this goal to a certain extent, although completing the storyline is the main goal of the video game. The game players get more details about the lives of the characters, while following the storyline, so they are motivated to follow the storyline because of curiosity. In addition, game players are motivated by the differences of characters and their personal interests. Franklin, for example, is an ambitious young man, who longs for greatness and respect. The game player is motivated to make progress with Franklin and fulfill his desire to become something in life. Trevor is a psychopathic man, who loves adventure, violence and especially chaos and encourages game players to commit illegal activities. The rich, retired bank robber Michael has not been able to free himself from his distorted past and wants to prove to himself that he is not yet old. Michael's character raises the motivation for game players to continue playing the game, in order to stay successful (Figure 3). *Grand Theft Auto V* often gives the game players the opportunity to choose between trying to achieve the goals and wandering around within the game world. The game rules, such as goals and motivations, determine in which way game players interact with the gameplay and the possible outcome of this interaction. Thus, the amount of persuasive messages that is conceived by the game players, depend on the rules of the gameplay, such as goals.

Figure 3: The main characters of *Grand Theft Auto V* from left to right: Michael, Franklin, Trevor (GTA

Rockstar North Video Game).

1.4.3 When the rules speak

The mechanism of rules in *Grand Theft Auto V* challenges the game players to reflect

on the vision *Grand Theft Auto V* wants to communicate. The characters in *Grand Theft Auto*

V are a reflection of people's motivation in the real world to operate in a criminal underworld.

The video game shapes a simulation of a criminal's life through persuasive communication. It

encourages the committing of illegal and immoral activities to obtain goals and bonuses. At

the same time, the video game conveys beliefs about the value and power of money in the life

of the criminal by setting up its game rules. Money is not only a necessary means of

entertainment, respect and recognition, but it also helps the characters to survive beyond the

limits of the law. The video game also suggests that the characters, while acting illegally, are

impervious to the law and rules within the game, due to the fact that the way the characters

are penalized for criminal behavior is very symbolic. The game play of *Grand Theft Auto V* is

built around rules such as physical laws and artificial intelligence instead of deliberated and

direct narratives, which allow game players to define their own goals and motivations (Welsh

128). While the game players are in control, they not only test the limits of the game rules by

playing *Grand Theft Auto V*, but playing it is also "a kind of ideological critique" (Welsh 129). Because *Grand Theft Auto V* has an open game world with a set of rules it allows game players to ignore the laws of authorities and allows them to criticize ideological social systems and modern capitalism (Welsh 129).

1.5 Skills

Characters in video games need certain skills to achieve the goals of the video game, according to Schell (Schell 151). The characters of *Grand Theft Auto V* must be in a certain physical condition to achieve those goals. Emphasis is on leniency and coordination, which allows characters to be accurate, precise in maneuvering, and able to control their vehicles well.

Grand Theft Auto V is a video game that divides game player skills into a realistic and virtual layer. The real skills are the abilities of the game player, such as motivation. The virtual ones are the physical skills of *Grand Theft Auto V*'s characters. Each character has different skills at the beginning of the game. Franklin is a more skillful driver, Michael is more accurate at shooting and Trevor is a highly-skilled pilot. The game player is not aware of these statistical parameters until progressing in the storyline. These differences determine which position characters take within the team they form during certain missions.

When game players are not able to achieve the goals of *Grand Theft Auto V*, they will probably not continue playing the video game. It will influence the game players' experience and the game players will not be in control. As mentioned before, only when game players are in control while playing the video game, they will be able to accept the critique on American society in *Grand Theft Auto V*.

1.6 Chance

Speculations of chance were relatively difficult to find in *Grand Theft Auto V*. The video game is concrete and gives the game players the impression that everything is there for a reason. Coincidence is a rather subordinate attribute. If any event in the game happens to be random, it is rather the appearance of a person in the game, who is trying to betray one of the characters. Such an example may be the random events that characters can encounter in virtually any part of the game space (GTA Series Videos All Random Events). In this situation a new event icon will flash up on the map. This new event can be, for example, a woman who has been robbed by a biker. The character can either decide to help, take advantage of the situation or ignore the event. Although these events are called random events in the game, it is hard to tell if these events are randomly generated. However, these random events allow the game players to make a choice and feel in control, which will add positivity to the game player´s experience.

1.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the concept of procedural rhetoric by Bogost, to present the division of game mechanisms by Schell and to pay attention to the subsequent analysis of *Grand Theft Auto V*. The goal of this analysis was to illuminate the function of game mechanisms in relation to the persuasive expression of *Grand Theft Auto V*.

The game mechanisms of *Grand Theft Auto V* consist of the game space, the game characters, their actions and surroundings, the game rules, game player and character skills and the assumptions of chance. The realistic game space of *Grand Theft Auto V* and the first and third person perspective provide a way in which the video game can communicate persuasively, since game players will easily experience the feeling of immersion. The game players are also provided with limited freedom regarding game characters and activities, but

at the same time being motivated to progress in the storyline. The objects, such as the characters, attributes, and states are needed in a video game to fill the game space and to create interaction within the game space. These interactions are the processes that are used to effectively persuade the game players within the video game. One of these actions that can be performed by game players to create interaction is the ability to switch characters. Each character has its own special ability, which makes using it appealing for game players. Those special abilities create a division between the perception of the game world by its characters and the realistic game world. The realistic game world is created by different rules in *Grand Theft Auto V*, which are essential elements of video games (Schell 144). The game rules determine the barriers, sanctions and goals of a video game and determine why a game player stays motivated to progress in the storyline. The limits of the video game are communicated to the game player and which processes can or cannot be created in the video game. The game player will receive a message by experiencing these processes (Bogost 129). In order to keep game players interested in advancing in the storyline of *Grand Theft Auto V*, the game players' skills and the difficulty of the video game need to be balanced. It is essential for game players to possess skills to complete the missions of the video game and progress in the storyline; otherwise game players would not experience the processes anymore. A way to stimulate game players to continue playing a video game is creating a level of chance. Although it seems that *Grand Theft Auto V* does not have any speculations of chance, the random events characters encounter adds unpredictability to the video game experience.

All these game mechanisms have emerged as the key attribute of the game's perseverance, which confirms not only the validity of Bogost's concept of procedural rhetoric, but also the advantage of linking this concept to the categorization of game mechanisms by Schell. Nevertheless, it also confirms Bogost's claim that game mechanisms play a crucial role in creating rhetorical messages in video games.

2. Satire

When I first started playing the video game *Grand Theft Auto V*, I had no idea what to expect. After playing through the main storyline and completing most side missions, I slowly started to get an idea of the city Los Santos. Each mission added another layer or aspect of meaning to my experience. There are many references to cultural phenomena, such as particular social groups, landmarks, and parodic or stereotypical representations of the characters. These references to those phenomena and practices and the way in which they shape new meaning, made me, as a game player, more excited about *Grand Theft Auto V*. This pleasure, however, was strengthened when I became aware of the use of satire in *Grand Theft Auto V* and when I discovered that my experience was a common experience. Satire is inherent in *Grand Theft Auto V* itself. For me this issue is particularly interesting because I am an American Studies student. Analyzing satire in *Grand Theft Auto V* allowed us to look at classic American studies questions and let us discuss issues such as the representation of American culture. The interesting part is how we narrate it from a different angle, since satire will be discussed not from a literary angle but by analyzing a video game.

In order to analyze the ways in which satire in *Grand Theft Auto V* enables cultural critique, I will make use of George Test's four elements that define satire: aggression, play, laughter, and judgment. I will discuss those four elements with separate examples of situations in which the game designers use aggression, play, laughter, and judgment in *Grand Theft Auto V* by zooming in on its three main characters. I will go on to explain aggression by analyzing Trevor, discuss play and laugher by analyzing Michael, and give an analysis of Franklin to show judgment in which aggression, play and laughter all come together. These elements come together as a specific critique not only on American culture and each of them are linked to an aspect of American society; the American government, American race relations, and the American entertainment business.

2.1 Trevor Philips' chaos and violence

Grand Theft Auto video games have often been criticized because of the amount of violence they contain (Garrelts 146). These video games, however, do not only contain violence, moreover, it is also very difficult for game players to avoid it. Some of the time game players have a choice, for example when they decide to interact with another character. Almost all direct interaction between the main characters and other characters are paired with violence. Once a game player decides to interact with another character, it can quickly escalate to the point of having to escape or using violence, occuring because the interactions are programmed.

The programmed interactions differ depending on the location of the main character. In districts such as Chamberlain Hills, a low-income neighborhood with a high crime rate in the south inner city of Los Santos, the main characters will be threatened or attacked sooner than in a district such as Richman, a multi-billionaire neighborhood located in Los Santos. It is also determined by the gender of the person the main character interacts with. When a main character interacts with a woman, she will probably run away. However, whether the main character interacts with a man, he will most probably be attacked. In this way the game player is unavoidably pushed to use violence. The striking aspect of this forced violence is that while it may feel as freedom, it also entails a serious critique of some of the shortcomings and hypocrisies of American society.

This critique on American society is created within the processes and interaction between the game mechanisms by the game designers of *Grand Theft Auto V*. *Grand Theft Auto V* confronts people, institutions, and processes that are part of the social system of America through multiple parodies and references. Although, it forces American society to look in the mirror, it also protects the game players of self-criticism and it puts them in a position superior towards the satire. Satire functions when the satirist is positioned superior

relative to its target, even when satire in itself is a form of aggression to express the problems in American society. "Aggression is at the very core of satire" (Baumgartner and Morris 7). All this becomes particularly clear when we dive into the character of Trevor and his role in the torture mission "By the book."

"By the book" is a mission in which the game player has to torture another character using the main character Trevor. By the time the game player starts this mission, the main characters are all being manipulated by the FIB, the incompetent and distorted equivalent of the FBI. During the storyline the characters encounter many corrupt government officials. As in the case of the FBI, in *Grand Theft Auto V* the FIB works often closely with criminal characters. Since all the main characters need to execute illegal activities in order to advance, they are manipulated by the FIB. Three corrupt agents, Dave Norton, Steve Haines, and Andreas Sanchez, are related to the three main characters and give them several tasks, such as heists and attacks against the IAA, International Affairs Agency. The FIB and the IAA are rivals, which imitates the rivalry between the FBI and the CIA and the NSA.

In the beginning of the mission "By the Book" FIB agent Steve Haines requires that Trevor tortures Mr. K, a Middle Eastern man, in the hope he will identify an assumed insurgent hiding out in Los Santos. This mission is mandatory, although the game player might feel repulsed when playing this mission (GTA Series Videos Mission #25). Game players must select an instrument and perform a series of acts to torture Mr. K, which means the game player is directly involved. The game player can choose four ways to torture Mr. K: water boarding, beating him with a wrench, giving him electrical shocks from a car battery, or extracting a tooth using pliers. Mr. K cannot be pushed too far, because then Trevor needs to inject him with an adrenaline shot. Mr. K can die up to three times before Trevor runs out of adrenaline and will be unable to bring Mr. K back to life (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Trevor can choose between four torture weapons (GTA Rockstar North Video Game).

This torture mission is shocking and hard to complete for game players. Having played this torture mission in *Grand Theft Auto V*, I would argue that the way in which torture is portrayed, can make game players feel discomforted. Game players feel uncomfortable using all the torture techniques and completing the mission, because there is a conflict between their freedom to act and their freedom to will. While the game players have little freedom to act, they are free to identify themselves with the actions that are committed (Bartel 290). However, the game designers actually want the game players to feel uncomfortable during this mission, because torture is still an uncomfortable subject in American society.

When the game players succeed in accepting the discomfort and use all the torture techniques, the mission will be continued. Mr. K had given Trevor sufficient information and the game player must now drive Trevor and Mr. K to the airport in order to complete the mission. During this journey Trevor starts a monologue on the unsuccessfulness of torture as a tool of obtaining information, concluding that torturers only torture because of the kick:

> "The media and the government would have us believe that torture is some
>
> necessary thing. We need it to get information, to assert ourselves. Did we get

any information out of you? Exactly. Torture's for the torturer… or for the guy

giving orders to the torture. You torture for the good times – we should all

admit that. It's useless as a means of getting information"

(Trevor Philips in *Grand Theft Auto V*).

Trevor's monologue explains to the game players why Trevor tortured Mr. K; to get important

information. In a way this monologue can ease the feelings and discomfort game players just

felt by torturing Mr. K. The monologue can give game players the feeling that the torture

mission was necessary to eventually be exposed to the critique on the American government

that still uses torture techniques in order to get information. Also the fact that game players

will advance in the storyline and at the same time will give them the feeling that they did the

right thing by completing the torture mission.

Critics, however, find that the game designers went too far with this torture mission:

"Rockstar North has crossed a line by effectively forcing people to take on the role of a

torturer and perform a series of unspeakable acts if they want to achieve success in the game,"

says Keith Best, CEO of Freedom from Torture. "Torture is a reality, not a game and

glamourizing it in popular culture… If Rockstar North's message is a satirical critique of the

practice of torture, it's lost on us." (qtd. in Kain 6-7). There is a critical debate going on about

violence in video games (Ferguson 310, Finn 35, Jenkins 20). NGO's and game designers are

on the other side of the debate. Moreover, an important fact is that this torture mission draws

attention to something that is violent and still occurring in American society.

Although critics find the content of this torture mission disturbing, the game designers

of *Grand Theft Auto V* tried to address a problem. They wanted to express through satire their

critique on the use of waterboarding and interrogation techniques by the American

government. Trevor's explosive behavior provokes a response of the game players, whether it

is disgust or even sadistic enjoyment (Wisecrack).

2.2 Michael De Santa's arrogant cliché LA lifestyle

Play is a central element to satire, because it offers interaction between the satirist and the audience (Baumgartner and Morris 8). With playfulness satire does come across as only aggressive, such as the previously discussed torture mission, but it will also raise laughter among the game players, which is one of the main characteristics that define satire. Due to this laughter, game players can accept more easily the satirical attack, which makes them more open to judgment. Michael is one of the main characters in *Grand Theft Auto V* who is a parody on the cliché LA lifestyle. The game players can accept the character of Michael more easily because his parody contains play and laughter. However, one may argue that Michael's character contains such an amount of humor that the character is often not taken seriously anymore and is only seen as a means of entertainment. In order to prove this I will discuss Michael's cliché LA lifestyle parody and his position in the parody of the city space of Los Santos. This symbolic spatial representation is powerful in creating a persuasive message about American culture. The persuasive and controversial virtual environment of Los Santos is an affective satire of American culture and the virtual city space is designed with a deep understanding of the layered representations that define our saturated media world.

Grand Theft Auto V has built a virtual world from the perception of the city Los Angeles as it exists in popular culture, introducing fictional, yet familiar, places. This causes the virtual environment of *Grand Theft Auto V* to be brought to life (Bogost and Klainbaum 165). The symbolic representation of Los Santos will guide the experience of place of the game players and will put game players "in the game" (Bogost and Klainbaum 174). So, these virtual cities combine notions of real cities with fictional elements in order to maximize the experience of locality for the game players (Bogost and Klainbaum 175). The world of Los Santos is to a certain extent a twisted representation of reality. In various ways *Grand Theft Auto V* is a parody or "a form of high burlesque… that imitates a specific literary work or

style of an author for comic effect, usually to ridicule or criticize that work, author, or style…

parody is often used to make a satiric (and even a political) point" (Murfin and Supryia M.

Ray 328). In the case of *Grand Theft Auto V*, the video game offers a parody on the actual

setting and space of Los Angeles. Los Santos is a parody on the city space of Los Angeles.

Many textual references are presented in the city of Los Santos, which are parodies on

their originals, for example the Vinewood sign, in real life the Hollywood sign, or the Maze

Bank Tower, which is an imitation of the U.S. Bank Tower. These references cause the game

players to think more skeptically about different aspects of American society. It strengthened

the awareness of the satirical interpretation on American society in *Grand Theft Auto V*. The

layers and representations of the game elements that are recognized by the game players from

American culture are constantly influenced with negative meaning in the video game. When

Michael takes a tour through Vinewood Hills with the company Vinewood Star Tours, for

example, the tour will guide Michael to celebrity homes and various landmarks, while

multiple stories are told about them when Michael drives past them. These stories contain

mainly negative information about the Vinewood Hills district (GTA Series Videos Random

Events). In this way the player gets to know more details about districts that will add another

layer to the meaning of this location. Many districts and locations are represented and

changed throughout the storyline into a parody of their originals, which adds a negative,

though, comical critique to these locations.

The character of Michael De Santa lives close to the neighborhood Vinewood Hills in

a neighborhood called Rockford Hills, which is in real life Beverly Hills. Michael, a

narcissistic and egoistical person, is a medium to analyze the cliché of the LA lifestyle:

capitalism, personal fitness, concerned about earning a lot of money, celebrities, and all other

forms of media. Michael regularly watches TV and his criticism is definitely typical of the LA

cliché, which can for example be seen when he says: "I am rich, I am unhappy. I guess I'm

very normal for this city" (GTA Series Videos Michael Trailer). While Michael criticizes capitalism, he still chases the Vinewood dream: he owns a yacht, tennis court, swimming pool etc. However, this Vinewood dream is not working out for him: "Why did I move here? I guess it was the weather" (GTA Series Videos The Official Trailer).

Michael is the character who more than anybody else is involved in the cliché LA lifestyle and media driven world. Through Michael, *Grand Theft Auto V* criticizes the present day media driven world. Its parodies of Radio and TV channels, and film and social media all add to this satirical message. Even when game players drive from place to place and listen to the radio, they are infiltrated by *Grand Theft Auto V*'s parodies. The radio stations that feature in the video game contain some kind of social commentary. The game players spend a lot of time in vehicles, while for the most part they are accompanied by the radio stations. First of all, these radio stations function as soundtracks for actions, which can be changed by the game players. However, sometimes the soundtracks are also suggested by luck because a game player can be found in a carjacked vehicle or certain stations are played because they are associated with certain characters. Another reason is, radio stations establish the history of the game by telling stories that have occurred within the storyline. Furthermore, the radio stations engage in social satire, which is accomplished through parody (Annandale 96). The radio stations contain a negative honesty and the advertisements are absurd exaggerations. For example the radio commercial describing FlyUS, a parody of both American Airlines and United Airlines: "Sit back, relax and shut up" (TheAutisticAtheist FlyUS #1). This is a critique on the behavior and attitude of American flight companies. Those parodies provide an opportunity for the game players to look beyond American culture and expose themselves to another layer of critique.

Not only radio stations contain parodies of American society, also another aspect of the media industry is focused on in *Grand Theft Auto V*. "Lifeinvader" is a social networking

and data mining service. Each character in *Grand Theft Auto V* has their own "Lifeinvader" profile on which they post events that took place during missions. "Lifeinvader" is a pun and parody of Facebook and its name refers to invading other people's lives, called stalking in *Grand Theft Auto V*. Stalking is comparable with Facebook's like button. The "Lifeinvader" mission shows the playfulness and laughter that satire can contain.

During the "Lifeinvader" mission, Michael needs to explore the offices of "Lifeinvader" (GTA Series Videos Mission #8). He has to infiltrate the headquarters of "Lifeinvader" to plant a bomb inside a mobile phone that has to end up with Jay Norris, the CEO of "Lifeinvader" and the mirror image of Mark Zuckerberg. When Norris talks on "Weazel News" (Fox News) about "Lifeinvader's" latest invention, Michael has to call the phone to blow it up and end Norris' career. "Lifeinvader" comes with taglines like: "Inflate yourself online," and "making the private public," which criticizes the present lack of privacy in social networks. While Michael explored the offices of "Lifeinvader," a whiteboard reveals the statement: "Remember! We aren't ripping them off if they don't read the T&Cs" with the word "privacy" crossed out (Figure 5). It all adds to the parody *Grand Theft Auto V*'s game designers try to create of Facebook and the criticism on lack of privacy nowadays.
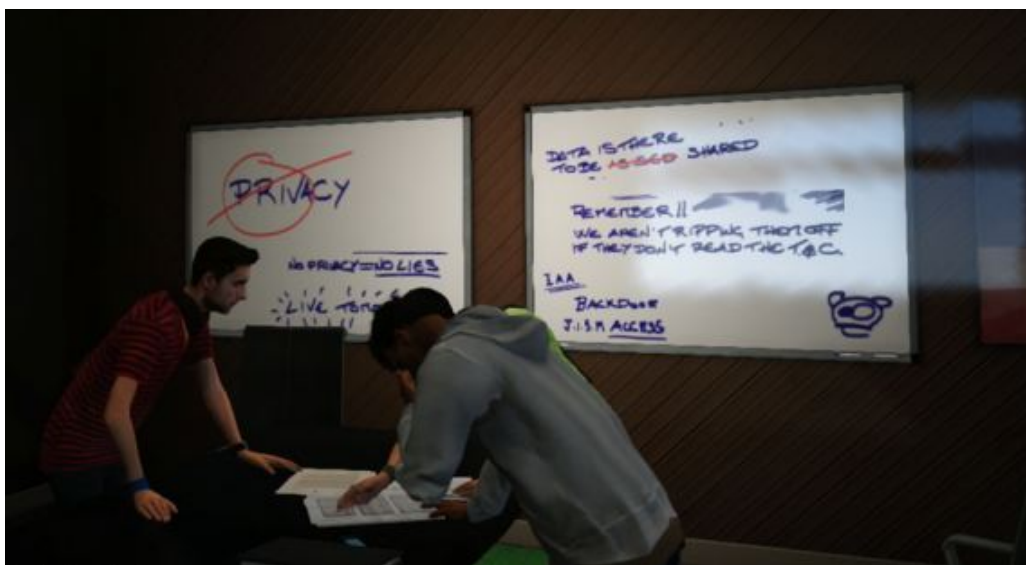

Figure 4: Whiteboard at offices of Lifeinvader (GTA Rockstar North).

The character of Michael in *Grand Theft Auto V* criticizes the American media industry and the cliché LA lifestyle. Because *Grand Theft Auto V* uses elements such as metaphors and parodies, the satirical message is disguised with humor and therefore can be accepted more easily by the game players of *Grand Theft Auto V*. However, in the case of the character of Michael, the satirical message is expressed with so much humor that the parody becomes implausible and game players feel that the character is only there for entertainment.

2.3 Franklin Clinton's race difficulties

The last element of satire that will be discussed is judgment. Judgment gives the other three elements shape, which will be presented by discussing the character of Franklin Clinton. The character of Franklin criticizes the corruptive economy of America and the racial inequalities in American society. Especially when analyzing Franklin, it is noticeable that *Grand Theft Auto V* is a video game that deals with a recognizable reality of poverty, corruption, and violent race relations.

Franklin is a commodification of black culture within American popular culture. *Grand Theft Auto V* explores America's complicated race relations through Franklin. This can be seen in the way Franklin interacts with other characters. A white character, for example will change speech and start talking with street language when interacting with Franklin. For example, Trevor speaks differently to Franklin than when he speaks to Michael.

The complicated race relations in American society is also noticeable when analyzing the relationship between Franklin and Jimmy De Santa, Michael's son. Jimmy tries to act as one of Franklin's gangster friends (SharinganRebirth GTAV Conversations). They do, however, have a special relationship with each other, because when Jimmy asks all three main characters to do activities as friends, Franklin is the only one who can take Jimmy to a bar and

go drinking although Jimmy is underage. This confirms the idea that Franklin and Jimmy are friends, while Jimmy does not have a friendship with the other main characters Michael and Trevor. Nevertheless, Jimmy and Franklin share one main difference: their ethnicity. Franklin has to deal with all the difficulties people of color face in American society, whereas Jimmy does not have to face these problems.

While game players interact with Franklin, which means controlling a stereotypical black male, they often need to make fun of other white characters. In this way *Grand Theft Auto V* allows game players to distance themselves from the racial issues that are dealt with in the video game. Instead of only creating the character of Jimmy, a parody of a white male who wants to be a gangster, *Grand Theft Auto V* also constructed the character of Franklin to create a way for game players to experience the racial difficulties colored people face in America.

These racial difficulties can also be seen in *Grand Theft Auto V* when white pedestrians react on various actions of Franklin. There are countless videos on YouTube from game players that show police officers attacking Franklin for no apparent reason (Scudpunk Racist Cops). While Franklin happens to stand just near them, the police become violent due to his ethnicity and skin color. Although *Grand Theft Auto V*'s police do not make the effort to capture white criminals, the police are extremely violent towards black criminals in South Los Santos, an area with predominantly African-Americans.

Grand Theft Auto's police, the LSPD's, whose motto is: "Obey and Survive," can be seen as a parody and an imitation of the LAPD: Los Angeles Police Department. The LAPD has been the subject of a number of scandals, mainly concerned with racism, police brutality, and police corruption (Reinhold 1 and Walker 1). In the mission "Eye in the Sky," it becomes known that Franklin was once arrested for public exposure. According to Franklin, it was because he collapsed in public and the LSPD committed racial profiling. Trevor is disgusted

by this (GTA Series Videos Mission #44).

The LSPD, however, does not interfere when Franklin manipulates the stock market. This happens in the beginning of the storyline, when the character of Lester, a reliable member of Trevor's and Michael's heists asks Franklin to help him to influence the stock market. Although many people disappear, because Franklin kills them, and no matter how much money is made by betting on the stock market, Franklin is never arrested and imprisoned because of his illegal actions. It is impossible to be caught for insider trading in *Grand Theft Auto V*. This is ironic because Franklin often expresses how much hatred he has for pyramid schemes, which is an illegal form of investment. In this situation the irony and laughter can be seen, which is used by *Grand Theft Auto V* in order to criticize the corruptive part of American society. The fact that this economic corruption stays unpunished is a satire of the current condition of the American people that make millions of dollars and who, suspiciously, never end up in prison (Frankel 34).

The previous examples show that the character of Franklin contains the four elements that according to Schell are needed to create satire that will be accepted by its audience. The parody of the appearance of Franklin as a black American gangster contains the elements of play and laughter. The illegal activities Franklin performs in order to manipulate the stock market contain the element of aggression. Franklin completes various missions, dealing with illegal economic activities, in order to criticize the corruptive part of American society. These issues conclude in a form of judgment *Grand Theft Auto V* shares with its game players. *Grand Theft Auto V* states that American society still struggles with issues such as corruption and race inequality.

Franklin's character shows that all the elements of satire are needed in order for the game players to get the joke and for the game players not to continue the joke outside the virtual space into reality (Higgin 78). The satire used in Trevor's character is not often

accepted because many game players and critics feel that his chaos and aggression, especially while the game player needs to complete the torture scene, is too extreme. Also Michael's satire can be rejected because all the references and parodies contain such an overload of destructive meaning, which causes game players to see the satire just as a sign of entertainment. Franklin's character, on the other hand, contains all the elements of satire in a subtle way. This means that the satire is easier accepted by the game players.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the four elements of Test that according to him are necessary for satire to be accepted. By using the combination of those four elements, satire could be defined and separated from other forms of expression. The first element, aggression, has been analyzed by looking at Trevor. Game designers created Trevor in order to provoke a response of the game players about violence and torture in America. They used satire to communicate criticism about the American government, which still uses waterboarding and tortuous interrogation techniques. The second and third element of satire, play and laughter, are discussed by observing Michael. The character of Michael is a critique on the American media industry and the cliché LA lifestyle. The metaphors and parodies used by *Grand Theft Auto V* bring across the satirical message with so much humor, causing it to be rejected more easily by game players. The last element, judgment, is explained through the character of Franklin. The character of Franklin expresses critique on American people who are engaged in corruptive economic activities. *Grand Theft Auto V* also makes game players aware of racial difficulties in American culture, by not only creating Franklin but also constructing the parody of Jimmy.

So, *Grand Theft Auto V* is not only a video game in which there is a possibility for game players to take part in a violent and illegal way of living, but it also serves as a mirror

for American society to show its true nature. *Grand Theft Auto V* provides representations and references of real-life objects or brands and it creates a parody that offers a critical satire of the American government, the American media industry and cliché LA lifestyle and American race issues.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to analyze the way in which *Grand Theft Auto V* conveyed its message through the concepts of procedural rhetoric and satire and the exact message being communicated. In order to analyze this video game and answer those questions, I have chosen to use the theories of Jesse Schell's game mechanisms, Ian Bogost's procedural rhetoric, and George Test's satire as frameworks to analyze the persuasive message of *Grand Theft Auto V*. My analysis of the procedural rhetoric, game mechanisms and the satire used in *Grand Theft Auto V* has led me to the following conclusions.

Procedural rhetoric is the production of a thought through a process. Game players can in this way receive a message by playing the video game and interacting with the mechanisms of a video game. This interaction between game players and the game mechanisms create the processes that are called procedural rhetoric. The game mechanisms of *Grand Theft Auto V* are the basic elements and are tools that connect the game player's actions with the purpose and main challenges of this video game. *Grand Theft Auto's* persuasive message is expressed through its game mechanisms. Game players can feel a sense of immersion and reality, and a promise of freedom. Game mechanisms, such as rules that create limitations, produce the possibilities of the game play and determine the amount of persuasive messages that will be received by the game players. These formal elements enable the possibilities for satirical effects. In this way game players encounter the meaning of *Grand Theft Auto V*. When game players are in control, while playing *Grand Theft Auto V,* they will more easily accept the critique on American society created by *Grand Theft Auto V*.

In the case of *Grand Theft Auto V* this critique is shaped by using satirical elements. Satire is rhetorical in form given that it can express a message about contemporary society. Satire in video games leads game players through processes that contain a critical view on society. In order to analyze satire in *Grand Theft Auto V,* I have used Test's four elements that

define satire: aggression, play, laughter, and judgment. Each of these elements is linked to an aspect of American society; the American government, the American entertainment business, and American race relations.

      Grand Theft Auto V tries to provoke a response of game players about American culture. Through the character of Trevor, satire is used in order to communicate a critique about the American government, which is still involved in the use of torture techniques in order to receive information. Another main character, Michael, is a critique on the American media industry and the cliché LA lifestyle. *Grand Theft Auto V* uses metaphors and parodies to bring across a satirical message. Franklin, the third main character, creates awareness of the race issues in American society. The characters of Trevor and Michael, however, are exaggerated so much with either aggression or humor that the satirical message of both characters can easily be rejected by game players. On the other hand, the character of Franklin contains all the elements of satire in a subtle way that it is easier for game players to accept his character's satirical message.

      In conclusion, the parody that is created by *Grand Theft Auto V* offers a critical satire of the American government, the American media industry and cliché LA Lifestyle, and American race issues.

Discussion

Before writing this thesis I was of the opinion that *Grand Theft Auto V* was a video game that criticizes American society in many ways. By discussing the concepts of procedural rhetoric, game mechanisms, and satire, these thoughts are confirmed.

Nevertheless, the reader should be aware of the fact that this thesis is based on only *Grand Theft Auto V*. In order to shape a complete and general idea about the persuasive message of *Grand Theft Auto V*ideo games, all the other previous sequels need to be taken into consideration. In order to come to a general idea of video games functioning as a way to express a persuasive message to critique society other video games should be analyzed.

My position as an experienced gamer of *Grand Theft Auto V*, helped me to recognize genres, rules and mechanisms more easily than an inexperienced gamer. However, as an inexperienced researcher of video games, I have certainly also encountered challenges and especially when deciding which approach I would use to analyze *Grand Theft Auto V*. One of those challenges is that it has been difficult that there has not been a theory especially about satire in video games.

This thesis should be considered an initial attempt to define satire in video games, in this case *Grand Theft Auto V*, and as such can be used as a basis for further research.

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