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

**Abstract:** This paper explores the intersection of race, humour and interactivity in GTA3. Interactivity has been extensively researched, race issues in games have been scarcely studied (Leonard 2003), but 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 (Grossman 1995; Irwin and Gross 1995; Griffiths 1997; Kirsh 1998; Anderson and Dill 2000). 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 ontologically 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 Grand Theft Auto III, 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 or global popularity, 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 is based on a fundamental assumption that video/computer games are texts and should be read as such. Just as Ien Ang (1985)sees the TV series Dallas as a text this analysis will be based on a similar belief.

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