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PLAYING WITH PUPPETS: FOUCAULDIAN POWER RELATIONS IN *BIOSHOCK* AND *BORDERLANDS 2*

Abstract

The article investigates whether power/knowledge relations observed by Foucault in real life could be possibly applicable in the video game context. Two blockbuster titles, *BioShock* (2007) and *Borderlands 2* (2009), are analysed to discuss the following aspects of Foucauldian theory: the existence of docile bodies, the creation of a dominant discourse of truth, and the maintenance of the created system. With regard to the creation of docile bodies, the perspective of two antagonists (Andrew Ryan and Handsome Jack) is centralised, and their role in creating a hierarchical system is presented. The Foucauldian rules of enclosure and rank, being crucial to the concept of docility, can be seen in the representation of the city of Rapture and the planet of Pandora. To develop the argument further, the rules connected to establishing and upholding the regime of truth, such as dissemination of knowledge, laws, monitoring and distribution of good, are analysed.

Key words: Michel Foucault, power/knowledge, video games, *Bioshock*, *Borderlands 2*

Introduction

Faced with rapid development, analyses of cultural products are bound to constantly expand to include new emergent genres. TV series, YouTube videos and blogs are reshaping and re-evaluating the state of the contemporary society, which in turn leads to greater confusion in their interpretation. One of the flourishing genres that challenges traditional modes of analysis are videogames. This

unique mix of interactive and immersive features with pre-written narratives, at a glance, will seem to require separate critical tools; however, videogames still derive richly from literary theory and philosophy, and as such can be interpreted in those terms.

This paper explores the mechanisms in which Foucault's theory of power relations is employed in two first-person shooter videogames published by 2K Games, *BioShock* and *Borderlands 2*. The following analysis will demonstrate how power systems and knowledge circulation function in a digital environment and how they influence the narrative. In other words, the point is that the realistic Foucauldian mechanisms may be well employed in fantasy games, connecting the two often juxtaposed modes. The study of the two main antagonists in *BioShock* and *Borderlands 2*, respectively Andrew Ryan and Handsome Jack, will reveal the process of creating and maintaining a system of power, particularly through the workings of the legal system, monitoring and the circulation of goods. The main pillar on which the analysis will be based is the process of creating docile bodies, particularly focused on the Foucauldian principles of enclosure and rank.

Creating Docile Bodies

Exercising power, as Foucault claimed, requires subjects in the form of manipulable bodies.[1] Only a specific kind of individuals is particularly susceptive to impose power upon, and so several techniques can be employed to achieve docility. Out of the rules distinguished by Foucault, at least two are of significance in the case of video games: enclosure and rank. The principle of enclosure, as the name suggests, describes the relation between confined spaces and their occupants.[2] A secluded, restricted area enables supervision and more efficient management; with isolation from external information, the circulation and dissemination of knowledge is disrupted, and therefore, controllable. A perfect embodiment of enclosure is presented in *BioShock's* main location, the city of Rapture. This underwater city is built on the seafloor of the Atlantic Ocean and, at first glance, still bears marks of its former glory, yet the heart of Rapture is in ruin. The protagonist reaches it only after surviving a plane crash, since there are, at least apparently, no natural, functioning ways in or out of the city.

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[1]   M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* New York: Vintage Books, 1995, p. 136.
[2]   Ibid., p. 141.

Even so, the mechanics of power appear to be still functioning, and at least partial responsibility for that can be tracked back to a single individual, who will become of relevance to the text in later paragraphs.

Rapture aspired to be a utopian community, "a city where the artist would not fear the censor. Where the scientist would not be bound by petty morality. Where the great would not be constrained by the small."[3] In principle, all members of the society would cooperate to sustain the perfect system, propelling the well-oiled machine that Rapture was intended to become. The individuals inhabiting Rapture are only those whom Andrew Ryan, the lead inventor and entrepreneur in the city, deemed "productive." The city itself facilitated weeding out of the unwanted elements since they could simply be denied entrance, the control being assured from both political and natural conditions. Referring once more to the Foucauldian rule of enclosure, "[t]he aim is to derive the maximum advantages and to neutralize the inconveniences (thefts, interruptions of work, disturbances)."[4] To ensure those conditions, "the citizens of Rapture need to avoid all contact with the surface world because it's filled with parasites that seek to destroy Rapture.[5] Rapture is, subsequently, detached from the outside world on two different planes: physical (as it is in the middle of the ocean) and psychological (because of the created division between "us" and "them", favoring the former). The microcosm of the city propelled its own detachment through ideological means, making the citizens believe that they are unique and superior. This isolation on the subconscious level has a function of making people more docile, manageable and productive, while at the same time promoting homogeneity of thought and reducing resistance.

In *Borderlands 2*, the player is confronted with numerous diverse locations, whose design is determined by external conditions such as climate. In fact, the whole planet of Pandora, the already-opened box, can be explored by the player. Despite the player's alleged freedom, the Foucauldian rule of enclosure is still applicable in this context. Being situated at the edge of the known galaxy, the planet is distanced from other human settlements. The majority of its inhabitants are ex-colonists and explorers seduced by the promise of finding immeasurable treasures in Pandora's Vaults. The living conditions on the planet, however, are highly unfavorable, causing few fully-functioning settlements to be es-

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3   Irrational Games, *BioShock*. [Windows], USA: 2K Games, 2007.
4   M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 142.
5   R. McKinnon, *Propaganda, Lies, and Bullshit in BioShock's Rapture*, in: *BioShock and Philosophy: Irrational Game, Rational Book*, ed. L. Cuddy, Chichester: Wiley/Blackwell, 2015, p. 108.

tablished and leaving the planet at the mercy of madmen and rabid animals. Separated from civilization, Pandora then becomes an enclosure of its own kind. As a living space, the planet is an artificial construct perpetrated by corporations trying to gain profit. Having only economic gains in mind, the population is particularly sensitive to manipulation from those who control the means required to get to the Vaults. This weakness opens up a range of possibilities for weapon manufacturers as well as self-proclaimed leaders, who will scrupulously exploit this situation to serve their own ends.

A more successful attempt to bring life and civilization to Pandora is the Opportunity city. Upon arriving into the city, the player is greeted with the phrase "feast your eyes upon the paradise that awaits you in Opportunity,"[6] which already sets up the mood for the place. The main antagonist, Handsome Jack, took it upon himself to create a safe haven in the midst of chaos. Opportunity is being created for Pandora's finest citizens; much like Andrew Ryan intended for Rapture. Jack does not seem to mind that Pandora lacks a functioning society, and thus there is no elite or proper intellectuals to inhabit his city. Another parallel between *BioShock* and *Borderlands 2* can be spotted in the selectivity concerning the society; in one of Jack's speeches addressing the workers he makes it crystal clear that a city representing beauty, purity, and order has no place for a working class (or rather, the workers building the city since claiming that a class system exists in the game is an overstatement). Despite recognizing the necessity of the workforce in the creation of a utopia, Jack sees little merit in creating a diversified society. Moreover, Opportunity is a propaganda piece, a symbol for all the bandits to admire and fear. In a way, it is Jack's extension of power, the proof that order can be created out of chaos that is Pandora.

Rank as a Functional System

The features resulting from enclosure, such as homogeneity of thought or emphasis on dominating discourses, define the in-game society. The wide range of characters, due to the mechanics of the game, needs to be hierarchically organized. The levels of relations can be described on a spectrum of different ranks or levels, with "bosses" being at the top of the hierarchy and the "mob" (the basic enemy) at the bottom. It is done in order for the player to progress

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6   Gearbox Software, *Borderlands 2*. [Windows], USA: 2K Games, 2009.

through the game and feel adequately challenged. Incidentally, a parallel between the videogame functioning and creating docile bodies emerges, since "[d]iscipline is an art of rank, a technique for the transformation of arrangements."[7]

Ernest Adams, while commenting on game design, mentions the hierarchy of challenges; a key factor responsible for introducing rank into the medium.[8] Most of the games employ a bottom-up technique, where a series of quests lead to a final one, with the difficulty increasing proportionally to the player 'levelling up' (gaining experience points, which in turn make their character more powerful and able to take up more difficult missions). In this sense, the *Borderlands 2*'s "psychos" would mirror "splinters" in *BioShock*, both representing the easiest, most basic type of enemies to defeat. Adams explains this process in the following way: "[i]n action videogames, players frequently face a recurring challenge to defeat a number of identical enemies, and then having done so, they must overcome a unique challenge to defeat a particular boss enemy."[9] A boss enemy indicates the end of a given sequence within the game (part of the story or a level), and requires more dexterity and thought put into defeating them. As Adams continues, "[f]requently having its own exclusive fight-style, the boss demands from the player to devise a particular technique in order to defeat the enemy."[10] Moreover, if the player attacks the boss out of their rank, they in most likelihood will be defeated within seconds. In this way the game controls the pace of the game and the player. Ultimately, it is the player who is supposed to be the highest in the hierarchy, but only at the pacing suggested by the game.

One may be tempted to question how the technicalities of a rank relate to discipline and power relations. Primarily, a tentative comparison between the social groups in real life and levels in the games can be made. As much as those two vary strikingly, for example in terms of complexity, it can be said that a high social position and a high level can be recognised from the outside. Whether it is a well-respected, affluent lawyer or a final boss, what they have in common is a set of qualities which sets them apart from other groups in the hierarchy. A rank in both contexts can be detected and represented in behavior, possessions or visual representation.

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[7]   M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* p. 146.
[8]   E. Adams, *Fundamentals of Game Design,* Berkeley: New Riders, 2010, p. 253.
[9]   E. Adams, *Fundamentals*…, p. 10.
[10] Ibid., pp. 405-406.

What is characteristic of the basic enemies, those of the lowest rank possible, in both games is that they lack voice. Voice, understood in narrative terms, is the ability of a character to convey the story from their own perspective. In pursuit of perfection, the citizens of Rapture in *BioShock* have lost their humanity and turned into mindless psychopaths by repeatedly mutating and manipulating their own bodies, subsequently becoming deformed, prompting the name "splicers." Their dialogues are heavily marked by their insanity; and although they still display remnants of their personalities, they cannot communicate anymore. Interestingly enough, it is partially due to the intervention of one of the boss-enemies that they became that way. Faced with a threat of civil war, Andrew Ryan encouraged the citizens to increase the intake of ADAM, a harmful mutagen designed to enhance their faculties and make them stronger soldiers. Ryan exploited his position of power as a founder of Rapture to control the population and did so without using force. Instead, he modified the content of ADAM in order to make the citizens susceptible to mind control. Consequently, Ryan created docile bodies through the dissemination of a commodity controlled by him, aided by heavy propaganda.

In parallel, the mob in *Borderlands 2* consists of "psychos" driven mad by their desire to reach Vaults filled with treasure. Similarly to splicers, they have the capability to speak, but their language has been heavily reduced to screaming profanities or threatening the player. As a result, no information can be obtained from them about the world or a given situation; they lack the narrative voice. Conversely, the boss-enemy is no longer a direct cause of the people's demise, but is still involved in the process. Handsome Jack exercises his power in quite a different way. Using a general distaste for the psychos, he attempts to equalize undesirable inhabitants of Pandora and the protagonist with psychos, trying to lower their ranks (and consequently elevate his own rank). Being well-aware of the hierarchical arrangement, he plays propaganda adverts on the radio or distributes posters to construct a rank system suiting his own needs.

Consequently, the inhabitants of most of Pandora and Rapture have reached the bottom of the hierarchy; they cannot create discourse nor take part in it. The full control in the hands of intellectuals, here on the example of Andrew Ryan and Handsome Jack, is therefore more prominent. It is them who have knowledge and control over its dissemination; it is them who control laws, monitoring, and distribution of goods.

Power/ Knowledge

In his works, Foucault at length debates the correlation between power, knowledge and truth. In fact, he believes that among various kinds of power, two can be considered fundamental – the power of knowing the truth, and the power to disseminate this knowledge.[11] The power systems functioning in *BioShock* and *Borderlands 2*, orchestrated by two intellectual figures, can be described precisely in those terms: the general awareness of what is 'truth' and its circulation within the society.

Knowledge of truth

Truth, as Foucault believes, "induces regular effects of power."[12] Ultimately, it is then another source of authority, "a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements,"[13] which can be instrumentally used. Those in power are responsible for creating as well as upholding the system, particularly because it is bound to face resistance. Discourses within a society will remain in constant flux, trying to establish dominance, and to become what Foucault calls a "regime of truth."[14] As he notices, the regime of truth operates in capitalist societies as well as in socialist ones; and as it would appear, also in fictional environments. In *BioShock* and *Borderlands 2* the dominant political figures have control over the regime and create their own truth, which in turn grants them power. By blurring the lines between fact and fiction, the truth and a lie, Andrew Ryan and Handsome Jack control their surroundings.

A valid place in the Foucauldian power schema is taken by an authority figure such as a monarch or an intellectual. In video game narratives, all those roles are frequently consolidated in antagonists, here Andrew Ryan and Handsome Jack. Despite not being formally monarchs or scholars of any sort, they fit the Foucauldian idea precisely because they are intertwined with the functioning of the apparatus of truth.[15] Ryan and Jack's goal is, as it turns out, parallel to this

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11   M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, New York:Pantheon, 1980, p. 35.
12   Ibid., p. 131.
13   Ibid., p.133.
14   Ibid., p. 131.
15   Ibid., p. 132.

of an intellectual. Continuing "the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth"[16] secures their own interests, while at the same time consolidating their position within the hierarchy of the society. The pattern represented by Foucault on the example of scientists, consequently, can be illustrated with the two entrepreneurs from the discussed videogames.

Dissemination of knowledge

Characteristically for dystopian environments, the elites (or the intellectuals) are reduced to a minimum, and so Andrew Ryan and Handsome Jack have virtually no competition. Subsequently, it is in their power to create, and most importantly, to disseminate knowledge. Being the Chairman of the City Council of Rapture, Andrew Ryan has political authority over the citizens, and his position in Ryan Industries grants him additional economic superiority. The two sources of power, politics and economy, validate his position and mark him as the source of dominant discourse. As a person responsible for establishing rules in Rapture, he issues regulations for everyone to follow. Drawing on the category of parasites with reference to the outsiders, Ryan draws on this assumption and places himself on the other side of the conflict, elevating his goals and values. While analyzing the actions of Ryan, Rachel McKinnon categorizes them as neither "true" nor "false", but rather as entities performing a function. To quote McKinnon, "[w]hat matters isn't fooling citizens about what's true or false; what matters is controlling the citizens' thoughts and behaviors so as to further the government's needs."[17] Truth is then a flexible matter, shaped according to Ryan's wish. All he truly needs is to establish its worth and spread it.

Ryan continuously asserts himself as a self-made man, and that his (initial) success is a meticulously realized project. At the same time, he has attempted to convince the citizens that due to their efforts Rapture could become a utopia. However, once carefully examined, his words betray his true nature and complete disregard for his people and their well-being. He labelled those who required free healthcare as "pervert[s] who prowl the streets, looking for a victim [they] can ravish for [their] grotesque amusement."[18] Moreover, he seems to turn a blind eye to disastrous consequences of testing plasmids on the citizens of

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[16]   Ibid., p. 133.
[17]   R. McKinnon, *Propaganda, Lies, and Bullshit ...*, p. 109.
[18]   Irrational Games, *BioShock*.

Rapture. In his mind, plasmids are economic goods whose circulation should not be regulated since it would impede the influx of cash. Once again, Ryan uses derogatory terms to diminish the true nature of a problem saying that "[t]he market does not respond like an infant, shrieking at the first sign of displeasure. The market is patient, and we must be too."[19] Ryan's effort would be then concentrated on presenting his agenda as superior, mature, and right. Using his audio diaries and recorded announcements he disseminates the truth he manufactures, and through laws, monitoring, and distribution of goods, the truth system is maintained.

Similarly, in the case of *Borderlands 2*, the truth is altered and later publicized. Handsome Jack's manufactured truths are continually contradicted with the actual plot of the game that the player observes. His efforts aimed at the upkeep of the system would then be less subtle than Ryan's, also leading to narrative paradoxes. Having in mind that "there are no relations of power without resistances,"[20] Handsome Jack, just like Andrew Ryan, has to establish himself as a power-wielding figure, elevating his rank and justifying his position. During a historical tour in the Opportunity city, for example, the guide explains to the player the *bildungsroman* of Jack the hero, namely, Jack who single-handedly brought peace onto the planet of Pandora. Consequently, he shapes the dual reality in which he is the hero and the resistance, including the player, consists of usurpers. Once more a stark contrast between "us" and "them" is made. In such understanding, there will be no more resistance, and Jack's power would be indisputable.

To fuel the heroic imagery even further, religious language is used: "[i]n the beginning, Pandora was chaos ... and then there was Jack."[21] The fictional radio program "This Just In" controlled by Jack clearly establishes the difference between Jack and the player who is called "bandit scum," "the lawless" or "a terrorist."[22] Modelled after real-life propaganda offices, Hyperion Truth Network constructs the truth of their own. All the events in the game are reinterpreted in such a way as to fit the dominant discourse. At times, information is completely falsified (for example when reporting alleged deaths of rebels). As a result, even if the planet is clearly spiraling into chaos, and Jack's corporation, Hyperion, is exploiting the remaining few sane inhabitants, his discourse pre-

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[19]   Ibid.
[20]   M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge...*, p. 132.
[21]   Gearbox Software, *Borderlands 2*.
[22]   Ibid.

vails. It is again because of the established legal system, constant surveillance and distribution of goods that Handsome Jack became an important figure in the game.

Law and (Dis)order

After creating a system based on certain rules, the dominant forces should strive to maintain it. In order to do so, laws are introduced. Although Foucault is skeptical towards reducing power to a law of prohibition, he does mention it as a valid part of power relations.[23] In such understanding, power is equalized with empowering an individual to forbid others to do something. In *BioShock* and *Borderlands 2*, however, prohibition plays a vital role in the creation of power systems. Often ridiculous or uncannily precise, the laws in those games function as humorous elements as well as reflect the dominant discourse.

BioShock's utopian city has no government but a City Council, to which, as it was already mentioned, Andrew Ryan is a chairman. While recording his audio diaries, Ryan repeatedly mentions rules and prohibitions. Already at this stage, it is clear that democracy is only superficial and that Ryan is the one who (at least at one point) held the power. It is illustrated in his own commentary upon introducing capital punishment for smugglers: "The death penalty in Rapture! Council's in an uproar. Riots in the streets they say! But this is the time for leadership... A few stretched necks are a small price to pay for our ideals."[24]

Handsome Jack is also the lead legislative force, insofar as he is the only person responsible for enunciating law. Pandora has no government and barely any functional, modern cities, therefore no legal and validated opposition can exist. Interestingly enough, Handsome Jack also refers to the law of capital punishment. Having implemented an anti-littering law, Jack extends it so that it covers "verbal littering", with "littering" being nothing else but complaining about the current system. In doing so, Jack excludes any competing discourses from threatening his position. With an army of robots and engineers at Jack's command, he can also execute those laws and attack anyone who does not follow the rules.

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[23]   M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge...*, p. 140.
[24]   Irrational Games, *BioShock*.

Monitoring the dissemination of knowledge

Creating and communicating rules, however, does not ensure the position of their authors. In order for knowledge to be disseminated properly, their recipients must be accessible. Once again, one of Foucault's principles can be employed, namely, the one of elementary location or partitioning. In his mind, all individuals under discipline have assigned places and can be readily localized and supervised.[25] The rule in the example of the videogames is frequently realized through their very mechanics. In the course of the plot, the player is confronted with various quests and in the case of *BioShock* and *Borderlands 2*, some of the commentaries come directly from characters to the playable character. The characters, including Jack and Ryan, can communicate with the player once the player interacts with a certain element or reaches a given location on the map. They know where the player is.

In *BioShock* the main character can be reached via radio. Some of the messages are pre-recorded, while others are reactions to certain actions of the player, proving that others are aware of the player's presence. On numerous instances Ryan notices the player's actions such as entering certain locations or activating mechanisms. Through that, Ryan seems to have power over the protagonist/the player, at least superficially. Later in the narrative, it turns out that due to Ryan's failures there is another source of power, but it is not revealed till the final stages of the game. For the most part, Ryan maintains the illusion that he is in control and that he sees all. "But there is something more powerful than each of us, a combination of our efforts, a Great Chain of industry that unites us. ... The chain is too powerful and too mysterious for any government to guide,"[26] claims Ryan in one of his audio logs, yet at the same time, he attempts to control the chain. His system fulfills the "principle of elementary location" or, in other words, the "principle of partitioning," in which each individual has their place.[27] It is as much part of the mechanics of the game (the player needs to be directed) as a functional part of the narrative.

The player is similarly supervised by Handsome Jack, primarily through ECHOnet, which is a Borderlands-unique wireless communication system that allows the player to receive instructions from other characters or gather information about the world. Both radio messages and ECHOnet serve a practical

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[25]   M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* p. 144.
[26]   Irrational Games, *BioShock*.
[27]   M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* p. 143.

purpose within the gameplay, as they are the means through which the plot moves forward, but at the same time, they allow for locating the player. Similarly, most of the NPCs[28] have an assigned place, usually connected to their functions, such as medics in med bays, a dealer in a back alley. In other words, discipline distribution can be used as an in-built game mechanism that makes the player act as the producers of the game intended. In a way, it affects both the playable character as well as the player.

Distribution of Goods

In Foucault's mind, "whoever wants to be able to govern the state must first know how to govern himself, and then, at another level…, his goods, his lands, after which he will succeed in governing the state."[29] As was shown in the example, both Andrew Ryan and Handsome Jack have control over the land, but the circulation of goods has a less defined status.

BioShock's rendition of dystopia consists of "ironic inventories of historical styles and technologies that mobilize multiple, asynchronous eras and their trappings."[30] The game mixes the futuristic technology with the limitations of the past, which makes progress, in a way, stagnant. Adverts and slogans stylized after those popular in the 1940s encourage the citizens of Rapture to infuse their bodies with superpowers or to undergo futuristic plastic operations. Plasmids, the substances which enhance human faculties after injection, were not initially created by Andrew Ryan; however, he was the one who took control of them and led their distribution. The citizens were encouraged to buy plasmids and subsequently modify their own DNA, with little regard for their safety. As canvas for modification, their bodies became products. On top of the system was Andrew Ryan, who manipulated the plasmids to turn Rapture citizens into an army to fight in a civil war.

Distribution of goods is more dispersed in *Borderlands 2*. Much bigger, the world of Pandora cannot be controlled by one person only, and so it is in the hands of a few weapon manufacturers. Each of them has a separate policy and a different agenda, but most of them are deeply ironic or parodic in nature. For

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28   Non-playable characters [IT].
29   M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 94.
30   J. Aldred and B. Greenspan, *A Man Chooses, a Slave Obeys: BioShock and the Dystopian Logic of Convergence*. "Games and Culture" 2011, 6(5), p. 483.

example, a company called Vladof is clearly inspired by a communist regime, which can be noticed in their advertisement: "The Vladof corporation reminds you that there are only two types of people in the universe: the oppressors, and the oppressed. The oppressors cannot be swayed with words, cannot be bargained with. There is only one way to stop your corporate dictators: bloody, bloody revolution."[31]

The weapons produced by those companies are the ones actually used by the player during the gameplay. One of the leading weapons manufacturers, Hyperion, belongs to nobody else but Handsome Jack himself. His character is a satire on the concept truth, amusing yet presenting the player with a bitter conclusion. While discussing public relations of his company, Handsome Jack makes an association between his products and class and proposes to achieve that by using words: "Words with heft. Words with meaning, so that you know they were made by smart sonofabitches, for smart sonofabitches."[32] Jack is aware of the huge influence that a manipulated discourse can have on the masses, therefore he manufactures it, much like guns, to achieve his goals and promote an improved image of himself.

Separate attention should be given to goods which are traditionally bound to a particular place, like medicine and hospitals. Using the example of a hospital, Foucault illustrates how distribution and "[t]he medical supervision of diseases and contagions is inseparable from a whole series of other controls."[33] The Foucauldian rule of functional sites is possibly more explicit in the context of videogames than in real life because functionality of locations arises from the nature of the gameplay. As *BioShock* and *Borderlands 2* are FPS[34] games, the player will be attacked by enemies and consequently take damage. In most games of this type, the playable character has a health bar where the health is converted into a scale of points that can be lost and regained. Usually, the health is regained through picking up first aid kits, and the case is no different in the abovementioned examples. Some of them can be found while exploring the maps, but in many cases the player will use specifically allocated vending machines to buy health kits. It illustrates Foucault's idea of "placing of medicines under lock and key."[35]

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[31]   Gearbox Software, *Borderlands 2*.
[32]   Ibid.
[33]   M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 144.
[34]   FPS – First person shooter [IT].
[35]   M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 144.

Interestingly enough, health stations in *BioShock* are treated as regular commodities; they are advertised on posters with slogans ("Need a boost? Try our new and improved prime health unit" or "Does a body better than a placebo!") and thus fit tightly into the capitalist system.[36] As a result, even if the vending machines are not controlled by a physical person, they are controlled by money, which, in turn, belongs to intellectuals. To cite Adam Ruch,

> Rapture may be best summarized by the vending machine that sells genetic mutagens and high-explosive ammunition like candy bars. These are not mere game-mechanical devices; both are plausibly explained in the story of uncontrolled capitalism combined with unimpeded scientific experimentation, and a civil war.[37]

Initially under Ryan's control, vending machines are hacked and manipulated in order to provide goods on illegal terms. The lack of control over the goods mirrors Ryan's gradual loss of power and influence.

Similarly, the products in *Borderlands 2* are labelled with the names of their producers, for example, health packs are produced by a fictional manufacturer named Anshin. It is then suggested that the control over medicine distribution is handled by a corporation. The player is then forced to save a certain amount of money during the game and can spend it only in a limited number of pre-selected locations. A number of competing weapon manufactures and pharmaceutical companies is beyond Handsome Jack's control despite him being the leader of one of the most prominent corporations. He still needs his resistance to exist, both in political and economic terms. However, the coexistence of other enterprises on the market shows that Handsome Jack is not a totalitarian ruler.

Conclusions

Having mechanics of the game in mind, game developers in *BioShock* and *Borderlands 2* designed unique, distinctive locations that derive from utopian imagery. Simultaneously, the very foundations of utopia are parodied. Both Rapture and Pandora are compressed, enclosed spaces that are subjected to ex-

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[36]   Irrational Games, *BioShock*.

[37]   A. Ruch, *Interpretations of Freedom and Control in Bioshock*. "Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds" 2010, 2(1), p. 86.

ercising power. Consequently, discipline was more concentrated and facilitated the creation of docile bodies. As Foucault wrote, "discipline regulates everything. Discipline allows nothing to escape."[38] The nature of the discussed environments propelled strict stratification of the society and maintained hierarchical system. The effects of this system were disastrous; the inhabitants of Rapture and Pandora have lost their sanity and exist outside the standard model of a functioning society. At the same time, they have no means of having nor exercising power and are passively subjected to the will of those in control.

The people in power, as it would initially appear, would be two solitary figures, Andrew Ryan and Handsome Jack. They are the intellectuals whose influence transpires into every aspect of life. Most notably, they control dissemination of knowledge and establish truths within their narratives, constructing themselves and the world around them according to their wish. Using legislative power and constant supervision, Jack and Andrew place themselves at the top of the established hierarchy. However, their partial control (or lack thereof) over material goods shows the weakness of the system, exposing their incompetence. It needs to be remembered that *BioShock* and, to an even greater extent, *Borderlands 2* have parodic undertones, and the figures in power are supposed to be treated with a dose of humor; in that, the games exploit Foucauldian conventions of power relations without overloading the narrative.

The models of power relations operating in real life are reflected in videogames. The immersion in the gameworld relies precisely on those links and references to the actual rules governing the society. Apart from a convincing narrative, the mechanics of the game forces the player to perform certain actions that fit into the schema. In other words, the players are also a docile bodies, even if they exist outside of the narrative of the game, they are still within the game's enclosure. Strangely, the player is unaware of their condition and it is precisely due to this illusion that the game can function at all.

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