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"TRY AGAIN. FAIL AGAIN. FAIL BETTER.": ON SELF-DESTRUCTIVE VIOLENCE IN VIDEO GAMES

Abstract. *The article presents an analysis of the relationship between violence as depicted and performed in video games and its often-suggested prolongation into the physical world. The first part of the article gives a critique of the causal relation between the two types of violence through a theoretical reflection of the relationship between discourse and violence. The mentioned causality is problematized further through the distinction between the concepts of representation and performativity. The second and final part of the text moves to explain the pleasure of playing violent video games: it employs the psychoanalytical concept of death drive and connects it with the enjoyment in playing.*
Keywords: *video games, violence, discourse, performativity, fantasy, enjoyment, death drive*

"Yay, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, because I am the baddest mother fucker in the God damn valley!"
(Sykes, Jarhead (2005))

"Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should not?"
(Edgar Allan Poe, The Black Cat)

Grand Theft Auto, America's Army, Call of Duty, World of Warcraft, Doom, Counter Strike, Mortal Kombat, EverQuest, Desert Strike, etc. – what do they have in common? Firstly, they are all video games. Secondly, even though some of them are more sci-fi oriented than others that strive for realism, they all depict violence and require violent acts from avatars of their players in order to progress. Thirdly, they have all been linked to violent acts outside themselves.

After the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, for instance, 25 computer and video game companies were sued by relatives of victims, who claimed that "absent the combination of extremely violent video games

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and these boys' incredibly deep involvement, use of and addiction to these games and the boys' basic personalities, these murders and this massacre would not have occurred" (Ward in Lukas, 2010: 75). Jack Thompson, known as an anti-video-game activist, pointed his finger to video games in case of the shooting on the Virginia Tech campus in 2007 even before the police identified the gunman (Benedetti, 2007). Another example could be one of Thailand's top video games distributors, which removed *Grand Theft Auto IV* from their shelves "after a teenager allegedly robbed and stabbed to death a Bangkok taxi driver in an apparent attempt to recreate a scene from the controversial video game" (Buncombe, 2008). Or that of two stepbrothers, who fired at vehicles, wounded one person and killed another, during their game, which was composed of actions, resembling the ones in *Grand Theft Auto III* (Calvert, 2003). Or that of several studies that declare the connection between violence in video games, increase of "aggression-related thoughts and feelings" and decrease of "prosocial-behavior" (Anderson & Dill in DeVane and Squire, 2008: 267).

Claims on negative effects of displaying (in our case we should also add the active engagement in virtual) immoral actions, which may lead to imitation of such behavior, go back at least to Plato. In *Republic* he quotes Socrates, who advises a ban of "bad fables" for an ideal state, since "these things damage those who hear. For everyone will find an excuse for himself to be evil, if he believes that such things are done and were done by the nearest kin of gods" (Plato, 2008: 216). Nearly 2400 years later similar propositions are made in case of so-called violent video games. If we play reductionists and isolate the above mentioned and other similar examples and studies, if we do not consider the opposing arguments[1], we cannot but ask: Why such video games have not been banned already? Given their popularity[2], considering them as "an artifact of everyday life for millions" (Huntemann, 2012: 223–224) and taking the proposed behavioristic correlations seriously, the great massacre, the mass destruction is only a matter of time. On a more serious note, the fact that this has yet not happened, could itself be a clue, that something is not quite right with such claims.

Studies that differ from the above mentioned, indeed, fail in finding link or causality between violence in video games and violence in real, physical world. One study, for example, even suggests that longer playing times result in less aggression (Sherry in DeVane and Squire, 2008: 267). Furthermore, in case of school shootings, Sternheimer (in Benedetti, 2007) mentions one that took place at University of Texas in 1966, when even "Pong",

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[1] *Without which, of course and as it will be shown, they are quite deceiving.*

[2] *According to The Pew Internet & American Life Project 97 percent of American teenagers have played video games and 65 percent of all American households regularly play electronic games (Huntemann, 2012: 224)*

a simple tennis video game, hadn't been invented yet: "One thing that people often don't realize is that in the years since video game sales have really exploded, not only have youth violence rates decreased but violence rates in the U.S. have declined precipitously." Between 1994 and 2010 "the number of violent youth offenders fell by more than half", while at about the same time (from 1996) "video game sales have more than doubled" (Carey, 2013). Authors of another recent study conclude that in their experiments they "failed to find a detrimental effect of violent video games on pro-social behavior, despite using contemporary and classic games, delayed and immediate test-phases, and short and long exposures." (in Chiappini, 2013)

It is difficult to fully defend or reject either the first or the second position. The intention of (violent) video games is surely not on the side of "causality defenders"[3]. Primarily, they are meant for playing, for fun, for engaging in a potential fantasy world[4], they can also form communities, inform, educate etc., but that does not mean that playing can not return against its assumed purposes. However, despite (or because) their susceptibility for assistance in the initiation of unintended affects, they should be understood beyond the claims of causality, which are, if not completely wrong, at least inconclusive and disproportionate with actual danger[5]. Video games alone can hardly possess the power to trigger such reactions: "Players bring their own experience and knowledge to a game rather than passively receiving the games' images and content." (DeVane and Squire, 2008: 282) Most often players distinguish very well between the reality and virtuality, between what, in our case, is a game and what not: "In spite of all the emotion with which he cathects his world of play, the child distinguishes it quite well from reality." (Freud in Popova, 2012) That could also be the reason, why two boys from the scene in movie Babel (2006), located in a remote desert

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[3] *In terms of violence the same goes for a specific niche within the genre of violent video games, that is for war games. They present an inexhaustible component within the so-called "military-entertainment-educational complex" since the invention of first video game, Spacewar!, in 1962 (which is not to say, however, that the history of complementary relationship between wars and games does not go further). The war games are also often blamed for successful encouragement of players to join the army (it should be recognized that sometimes that may even be their purpose, like, for instance, in case of America's Army (see Huntemann and Payne, 2010)).*

[4] *That could be one reason (and suggestion for those critics, which are missing the point by trying to prohibit them), why the (violent) video games would be too uncomfortable in the moment they would try to include too much features of reality. In war contexts, for instance, that would mean also the boredom, terrible and painful consequences of confrontations, fatigue, civilians as victims, psychological difficulties, etc. "Because of [Call of Duty 4's] near-photorealistic visuals, moments such as this are almost too real and painful to bear," (Moses in Payne, 2012: 319).*

[5] *In order not to be deceptively turned away from probably more potential origins of physical violence, we can also ask ourselves: What is more dangerous – playing of violent video game or having the access to real weapons?*

location in Morocco, felt an enormous guilt after while testing[6] a newly bought rifle and directing it towards the bus passing by, the younger boy accidentally hit and wounded an American tourist. It is one thing to play and quite another to really wound.

How then, after the very brief rejection of reduced understanding and claims on proliferation of violence having its origins in video games, should we understand it? Furthermore, if not violence in reality, what do these games cause? Assuming that playing is usually related to pleasure, how can we understand the latter in the context of playing violent video games?

"The Words /.../ Maketh Murder"
(PJ Harvey)

If, primarily, we understand video games as something that belongs to the register of discourse, which we certainly do, it seems that in case of discussing their violence we are dealing with two different or, to say more sharply, two opposing subjects: one site of that opposition is occupied by discourse and the other by violence. Before addressing the specifics of violence in video games it seems therefore reasonable to address the relationship between the two first.

In his book *Discourse and Violence* Komel (2012) proposes and develops an observation, which shows the fallacy of our assumption. Through the variety of examples Komel elaborates the notion that the discourse is always accompanied by violence and vice versa. In other words, the relationship between the two is complementary, hence, the before mentioned strict contrast is only apparent. The implications of this interpretation are pretty much clear. Even though one might think that, confronted with a choice between discourse and violence, the decision is obvious – one has to oppose the violence as a medium of direct physical confrontation and choose the discourse as a social bond, grounded in language and using it as its basic tool, instead -, the right rejection is not the rejection of such violence, but the rejection of such dualistically established relationship itself. Therefore and in accordance with Deleuze's though, that there are not simply only right and wrong answers, but also the right and wrong questions (Žižek, 2007: 116), in our case it would be more correct to formulate a question, which is not based on a choice between *either – or*, nor is it positioned so that it presupposes the rejection of both (*neither – nor*). To exceed the notion of contradiction, Komel (2012: 9) proposes a solution, summed up

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[6] *And, in a way, playing similarly like their above mentioned peers, but, interestingly, not because of the previous playing of violent video games.*

through reference to Brecht: the discourse and violence can neither live with each other nor can they live without each other. We could conceive them as something living on the opposite, yet related sites of Moebius band[7].

To say that, it should be noted, does not mean at the same time to deny the possibility of discourse that by using language as a kind of "invisible hand" causes more violent effects than the physical violence[8], or the possibility of physical violence to act profounder on symbolic level[9]. If anything, by such cases the before mentioned way, in which these two are correlated, is only further confirmed. However, it should also not be overlooked that language is at the same time the medium, which is always and necessarily violent.

The inherent violence of language is violence of signifier. Here we can retrieve Žižek's call for a shift in the emphasis on violence from its direct agents to its background, from subjective violence to the invisible, objective and symbolic violence (Žižek, 2007: 9, 17). In case of language it is misleading to limit it to the tool, used by human beings, "speaking animals", for exchanging meanings, for recognition and as renunciation of violence. In Žižek's words: "What if, however, humans, in their capacity for violence, exceed animals precisely because they *speak*?" (ibid.: 56–57) Human reality is based on language. The latter is "the only possible human reality", structured "by a chain of signifiers and epitomized by the big Other" (Šterk, 2012: 171). Furthermore and as Žižek continues, violence is characteristic for every symbolization[10] and, referring to Lacan, each space of discursivity is based on a violent imposition of an ultimately "irrational" master-signifier in a final instance (Žižek, 2007: 57). That leads him to assertion that language as the very medium of non-violence, of mutual recognition, by imposing the standard in relation to which some events appear as violent and other as

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[7] *In context of violence (and war) this can be nicely illustrated with contemporary 3D printers – machines that used to serve us as tools for spreading words, are now able (and will surely become even more sophisticated in the near future) to print weapons. First functional gun has already been printed and named "The Liberator" (see Franzen, 2013). One cannot but ask: The liberator for whom and the liberator from what? In the same context, the reverse is also true: thoughtful, clever rhetoric and, in a way, the usurpation of language (ideological metaphors, patriotism etc.) is an essential companion of violent acts in wars.*

[8] *Butler (1997: 159), for instance, speaks of words that can "enter the limbs", of slurs that "live and thrive in and as the flesh of the addressee."*

[9] *Here we can mention Baudrillard, who identifies the symbolic dimension of the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers as follows: "The collapse of the towers is the major symbolic event. Imagine they had not collapsed, or only the one had collapsed: the effect would not have been the same at all. The fragility of global power would not have been so strikingly proven. /.../ T/he two towers are both a physical, architectural object and a symbolic object. /.../ The architectural object was destroyed, but it was the symbolic object which was targeted and which it was intended to demolish. /.../ It was, in fact, their symbolic collapse that brought about their physical collapse, not the other way around." (Baudrillard, 2010: 195).*

[10] *"It [the language] inserts the thing into a field of meaning, which is external to it." (Žižek, 2007: 57)*

non-violent, involves the unconditional violence (ibid.: 59). For a brief illustration we can recall Althusser's[11] concept of interpellation, which, in simplified terms, means a discursive production of subject. An individual becomes a subject by accepting the rules of discourse, as an effect of language, by being subjected to the power of discourse. It is precisely that gesture, as mentioned also by Komel (2012: 161–162), which is violent. Subjectification as something that ties an individual to his signifier is an act of violence, in other words: "To be called a name is one of the first forms of linguistic injury that one learns." (Butler, 1997: 2)

Although it may seem that so described discursive violence is precisely previously rejected completely united living of discourse and violence, it does not seem right to enact it with violence mentioned before, that is the violence that hurts, whether induced by deeds or words. "/N/ot all name-calling is injurious. Being called a name is also one of the conditions by which a subject is constituted in language." (ibid.) In addition, what can we make with a claim that discourse is always and inevitably violent? At least in our case hardly anything else than find it not very helpful.

It is, hence, crucial to differentiate between violence that is generative and destructive, pain causing violence. To use Butler's (ibid.: 62) words: "It will be necessary to distinguish between those kinds of violence that are the necessary conditions of the binding character of legal language, and those kinds which exploit that very necessity in order to redouble that injury in the service of injustice."

Causality, representation, performativity

To return to video games: what kind of violence are we dealing with here? What are the effects of this violence or, in other words, what can we say about violence not only *in,* but also *of* video games? Although we are well aware that playing can lead to unintended consequences, that it can contribute to later, real-time actions, it will be argued that violence in video games or, rather, that the representation and commanding of violence in video games is in itself not something harmful and that we are not dealing with violence as something with the power to injure. The danger of violence in video games is, in other words, an illusion. It will be claimed that such violence, on the contrary, erases itself, it is self-destructive and, also, it alone

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[11] *Due to above mentioned relationship between discourse and violence and alongside with using Althusser's thoughts, we cannot but juxtapose Althusser, a philosopher, thinker and developer of ideas, with Althusser, the murderer of his wife Helene Rytman. An analogy can also be found between formulation, to which we have referred before, and the one in part of Finn's interpretation of the incident: "And so it was that Louis and Helene, who could not live without each other, could not find peace through each other." (Finn, 1996: 4)*

does not lead to violence beyond the virtual world. The causality between violence in video games and that in the physical world, as proposed by some critics, is deceptive.

To additionally explain the erroneousness of making the simple connections between the two, of reducing and translating them into causal relation, we will begin by referring to Judith Butler again. While examining Austin's concept of performatives[12], Butler elaborates a thought that some speech acts not only communicate hate, but are hurtful as well – language not only acts, "but can act *upon* its addressee in an injurious way" (Butler, 1997: 16). However, as she continues, these are "two importantly different claims, and not all speech acts are the kinds of acts that act upon another with such force" (ibid.). Firstly, not all performatives are injurious, secondly, in order to work, the performative needs to be recognized as such, and thirdly, not all language utterances are performatives. In case of the latter, even those, which are, do not entirely or exhaustively perform their referents. By proposing the incommensurability between performativity and referentiality, that is also welcomed by Butler (ibid.: 108). Declaration, for instance, that one is a homosexual, is a performative act, but it is not homosexuality itself or at least not in its entirety (ibid.: 22). Furthermore, to represent something is not the same as to perform it: "/W/hen conservative critics suggest that gangsta rap is responsible for urban crime and the degradation of women, they construe representation not merely as performative, but as causative." (ibid.)

The connection between her theory and our case of video games should be clear by now. In verbalizing it, we can start by saying that video games, even though not based in pure language, are inherently performative: they operate through codes, which are performative for sure – they make computers do things, they are repetitive, they are never determined definitively, once and for all –, thus, by losing the codes we lose the games as well. However, let us leave that level for a moment, for it does not really interests us here. Since what we are addressing are claims of critics, which result from symbolic meanings, transferred from real, physical world to the virtual, fantasy one and now threatening us back from there, it should be sufficient for our purposes to begin by stating that video games inhabit discursive space.

The violence, which is represented in them and with which players operate, is in itself not harmful. Similar to what Butler claims about rap music and other similar issues, it can be said that by representing such violence does not mean the same as performing it. By playing, the player does refer to its

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[12] *To sum up, performatives are described as speech acts that do what they say in a moment of saying (illocutionary) or produce certain effects as their consequence (perlocutionary). Performatives can therefore serve us as a tool for explaining the material effects of signifiers. (Butler, 1997: 3)*

symbolic meanings and (s)he does perform a kind of act, but while (s)he can do some harm to his/her keyboard, (s)he does not perform the violence in a way that would expire or left behind real wounded bodies:

> *In a world of video games, guns have a similar makeup, with the main difference being that they are immaterial; meaning that their use will not generally result in injury or death. /.../ For gamers, the gun signifies pleasure, a means to an end, and even (for some) an uncomfortable tool needed for the pleasure of gaming, while for many non-gamers the gun signifies hedonism, unrestrained violence, and social deviance."* (Lukas, 2010: 76–77)

The performance of player does not constitute "the referent to which it refers" (Butler, 1997: 112), it does not possess such power. The violence to which we refer in the context of video games is not violence with injurious consequences, but the depiction and discursive performance of such violence at most: "/M/ilitary realism is not military reality. The former is an aesthetic and discursive category; the latter is a factual state of affairs." (Payne, 2012: 309) It is a discursive, codified performance of physical violence, which is not meant to be taken literally, since its effects are not directly transferable and since it is itself constructed through code. In other words, while on one hand it does refer to symbolic meanings in real world, it goes further on the other, yet it does not become mystical or inexpressible. It enters the world of code, where while still referring to the meanings in physical world, in depicting itself and in being performed it becomes self-destructive, violence without violent consequences. The performance of player in terms of causing physical injuries is effective only inside the code and only to the creatures of the code. The performative efficiency in real world is here suspended[13].

If the world of virtual games is not to be taken literally, but together with its fantasy it nevertheless affects us, how does it then do that and how is it that we enjoy playing *violent* video games? How can they be among the most popular? How can it be that what is frightening is inviting at the same time (Šterk, 2012: 168)? Why don't we, for instance, rather let ourselves lose in a fairy-tale world of goodness, infinite kindness, a world without violence (be it self-destructive or not), a world without wars, without pain of any kind? To borrow (and abuse) a thought from another context: is that so because being "born between urine and feces" as Lem writes in his novel *Fiasco* (in Hayles, 2005: 189), "humans cannot attain the purity of completely rational mind" as Kandel reads it (ibid.)? Let us rather say: homo homini lupus or

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[13] *The efficiency of performance that nevertheless still appears in reality will be explained below.*

'a man is a wolf to his fellow man' as writes Freud (2001: 60). But before returning to that, we will begin from somewhere else.

Fantasy as something more real than reality

It is proposed by some anthropologists that upright posture of humans is interrelated with the use of tools (Hayles, 2005: 216). One and the other "have coevolved dynamically in synergistic interactions. Walking upright made tool use easier, and tool use considerably increased the fitness advantages of bipedalism. Moreover, tool use is associated with the beginnings of human culture" (ibid.) This example, further, leads to the suggestion of ongoing coevolution of humans and their tools. As mentioned by Dolar (2001), in some way a human being as 'a tool making animal' can be a human being only with/through his prosthesis. The same interdependence can be seen in before mentioned notion of humans as "*speaking animals*", which stands opposite to the idea of self-sufficient subject as well. As users of language – our tool for communication – we are always already subjected to it, under its influence, we are transported, or, rather, "outside" ourselves from the moment of being named. Our tools are therefore not only tools, but something with or through which we think and evolve. One could say that we *cannot live* (only) *with each other,* but *nor can we live without each other.*

Understanding language as a tool, which shakes the boundaries of our autonomy, by which we are transported, by which we are moved as well as by anything else, which we see or feel, the same can be said about our virtually created environments, tools, based on codes. We can hardly deny that our lives are becoming more and more entangled with the virtual, which leaves its traces on us in reverse. World Wide Web, for instance, certainly extended our cognition into the virtual world and changed the way we think, which was also recognized by Times, giving its 2006 'Person of Year' award to "you", users and creators of it (Grossman, 2006; Žižek, 2006; Žižek, 2007: 35)[14].

The virtual world can be understood as an extension of the social reality of actual, real people, but: "I am never simply my screen persona. First, there is the relationship of the real bodily person to my screen persona."

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[14] *"But look at 2006 through a different lens and you'll see another story, one that isn't about conflict or great men. It's a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before. /.../ It's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes. The tool that makes this possible is the World Wide Web. /.../ It's a tool for bringing together the small contributions of millions of people and making them matter. /.../ Who are these people? /.../ Who has that time and that energy and that passion? The answer is, you do." (Grossman, 2006)*

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(Žižek, 2006) In other words: cyberspace's virtual reality is not simply a copy or imitation of real world, but it generalizes the procedure, with which Žižek brings together a series of products deprived of their "malevolent" substances (coffee without caffeine, cream without fat, beer without alcohol and now reality, deprived of substance (ibid.); in our case we could add: violence without injuries).

Before trying to explain, what that could mean, we should add to above exposed features at least one another dimension, which is relatively free to flourish in playing video games[15], that is that of a fantasy. This aspect enables the player to develop completely different relation than the one (s)he has to the real world: "The opposite of play is not what is serious but what is real." (Freud in Popova, 2012) The virtual world of video games provides players the space free of constrains, which in reality rule over the Freudian pleasure principle.

/I/t is precisely in the conditions of "just playing" – when the rules regulating our "real life" exchanges are temporarily suspended – that we can permit ourselves to display these repressed attitudes. Take the proverbial impotent shy person who, while participating in a cyberspace interactive game, adopts the identity of an irresistible seducer or sadistic murderer. It is all too simple to say that this identity is just an imaginary escape from real-life impotence. The point is rather that, since he knows that the cyberspace interactive game is "just a game," he can "show his true self" and do things he would never have done in real-life interactions. (Žižek, 2006)

The "decaffeinated reality" of video games allows players to throw away the masks that are our constant companions in social, non-virtual lived reality. It allows them to bring forward the disturbing pleasure, which is otherwise kicked out by culture, but nevertheless no less persistent and perpetually returning. "It is only within the frame of fantasy that the subject encounters the uninhibited (surplus) enjoyment epitomized in *object a,* which he or she had to sacrifice in order to become a subject of the symbolic order." (Šterk, 2012: 172) The fantasy here appears as more real than reality and the reality as more fictitious than the fantasy. Playing a fantasy game allows the players, therefore or at least to some extent, to really get to know themselves, to see this part of themselves mirrored outside of themselves, to come closer to their truth (Žižek, 2006). And, to repeat Šterk's (2012: 172) question: What is so horrible about that? "Nothing really, except that this encounter would mean fulfillment of all our repressed, infantile, passionate

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[15] *And even more in the process of their creation.*

desires." (ibid.)[16] *A man is a wolf to his fellow man.*[17] A man is a "human animal" – here we are again faced with an opposition, which is such just apparently, with Moebius band, where "human" on one site of it and "animal" on the other are inextricably intertwined[18]. Therein could, thus, lay the key for giving us, as we hope, one possible explanation of the enjoyment, brought about through playing not just any kind of video games, but the so-called violent video games. The games that could be linked with terrifying enjoyment, the 'uncanny' pleasure, the negative pleasure, in other words: the pleasure of the sublime (see Šterk, 2012).

To suspend and maintain. At once. Again and again.

For elaboration of just written we will first recall Freud again, since he teaches us that every individual is prone to aggression (Freud, 2001: 60). The aggression is understood as inevitable part of our lives, which, however, is not to say that the same goes to violence. The aggression cannot be equated with violence, for the latter is only one form, through which the aggression can be expressed. Within this perception violence can be identified as the very excess of aggression: "But how can one *en toto* reject the violence, when struggle and aggression are part of life? The easy way out offers the terminological distinction between the "aggression" that actually amounts to a "life-force" and the "violence" as a "death-force"," (Žižek, 2007: 58).

Could we say, then, that playing "violent" video games is one way of releasing aggressive tendencies, which by passing the imprisoning constraints of social reality and becoming realized, at the same time do not assume the violent form, but that such is only their appearance? That the latter is thus violence, assuming the form of oxymoron, that is violence deprived of its excess? That playing of such video games, furthermore, allows enjoyment through suspension of social constraints while at the same time it enables maintaining of the fellowship with others and does not lead one to his delusion? That seems quite reasonable, but could that really be the only reason for developed satisfaction during the process of playing or is there anything additional? Furthermore, could that additional hide in the very expression

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[16] *In Žižek's words: "The Mad, obscene God, the Supreme-Being-in-Evilness, is exactly the same as the God taken as the Supreme God. The difference lies only in the fact that we got too close to Him," (Žižek in Šterk, 2012: 172). With yet another articulation: "/T/he Beautiful is the veil of the Horrible." (ibid.: 173)*

[17] *Even though a wolf is not a wolf to his fellow wolf and despite the wolf being a man's best friend, a man is still a wolf to his fellow wolf (Dolar, 2001).*

[18] *In this text we would only like to reject the understanding of human as something opposite to the animal. Otherwise, the relationship between the two can be shaken with an additional dimension, that is: inhuman. "/O/nly a human can be inhuman." (Šterk, 2012: 178)*

that we have just used, that is in the notion of "playing"? In what we are interested by giving this suggestion is the repetitive nature of playing. One does not play the game only once, but over and over again.

As already mentioned above video games themselves are inevitably dependent on code, which at the same time reveals their performative character. Being performative means being repeatable as well, for the performative requires the repetition and cannot be a singular act (Butler, 1997). Precisely such, that is repeatable, is also the process, running in their interiority[19]. In case of the depicted and controlled violence, which ultimately leads the player's avatar to death (or, to be more accurate, more of them), it should be said that it is as repeatable as was the day of Phil, the weatherman and main character of movie Groundhog Day (1993), in which he lived the same day over and over again. It is impossible to progress to higher levels in games without dying (or failing) again and again. The player is meant to fail, it is written in the code (having more lives, for instance), but, however, the failure should not be understood in terms of losing. We should read it in *Beckettian* way, that is, to use his quote: "Try again. Fail again. Fail better." In other words, the failure should be understood as success. Another question then comes up, namely, what is so appealing about failing? To which concept can we attach the enjoyment in it, taking the aforesaid inherently human aggressivity also into account?

In Freud (2001) aggressivity is related with the concept of death drive, the drive that at first sight appears as something leading an individual towards self-destruction. Its essential characteristic is returning to inorganic, returning towards death (Dolar, 2001). However, it would be wrong to suggest that enjoyment of playing violent video games arises from, ultimately, performative death of one's avatar. From engaging one into the imaginary scenario, where he can finally safely suffer "decaffeinated death", the death without really dying, but also the death that at the same time allows one to release his aggressive tendencies by active participation in playing[20]. The error would be at least double: firstly, that consideration would turn us away from the red line that we have started to disentangle above and, secondly, it would reflect a lack of understanding of the concept of the death drive. It would not be too misleading to suggest that the satisfaction in playing of such games is obtained without having to suffer the unpleasant side effects ("decaffeinated death"). Nor would it be misleading to say that an individual invests a large amount of emotions in his playing (Freud in Popova, 2012). That is all true, but the real mystic of enjoyment does not lie in the

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[19] *Doubled by physical actions of a player.*

[20] *A similar example would be that of canned laughter in TV series, where one feels relieved after watching even though one does not laugh (Žižek, 2007: 91).*

performative death itself just as the death is not true (and right) value of the death instinct.

The place where we should search for it instead is the repetitive character of that instinct. What it implies is the death that is not a signifier of finality (Dolar, 2001). It is the death that is repeatable, the death towards which we return again and again. Didn't we say something similar when we were describing the nature of death (or failing) in playing violent video games? What is then the enjoyment in playing violent video games if not something arising out of an overlap between these two processes and an opened possibility for freer imaginarily constant returning and releasing of something inherently human? That is, of aggressivity, which is constructive for an individual and can thus also be labeled as narcissistic just as the experienced enjoyment directed towards the player (her/him)self.

Furthermore, even though the death drive is not a desire to die, it still is a desire. Even more, it is pure desire (Sheehan, 2012: 31). It should be read as an instant seeking for something more than bare biological existence[21], an instant yearning for Real (ibid.) that is out of reach for humans from the moment they are interpellated into symbolic order. The Real, of course, remains inaccessible even in case of (violent) video games. We do not want to suggest that they are something pre-ideological, something that enables a jump into the Real. On the contrary – the fantasy itself makes that impossible since it is well known that it serves us as something that keeps us safe from such an encounter[22], something that works as a protective shield (ibid.: 37). However, the satisfaction of desire (and thus the death drive) do overlap with satisfaction of playing violent video games in that they are both bound with failure and based not on reaching the goal, but on the process of searching and trying instead. Process is their natural habitat, their goal, and it is the failure itself that keeps that searching alive.

Freud distinguished between internal and external forces: it is possible to escape from external forces, but the same does not go to internal ones (Dolar, 2001). With projecting our most intimate impulses on screen, with providing them imaginary visualized space, we also enable them to become more manageable. Still caught between somatic and psychological (ibid.: 136), or perhaps, to be more precise, between somatic and conscious, they become easier to control. Instead of being repressed (again), they occupy a space, that turns their potential destructiveness upside down. Not in order

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[21] *The desire is something more than a need from the very beginning.*

[22] *We can recall here the well known example of Lacan, often used by Žižek, where the proximity of the Real lies not in reality, but in dreams: "/I/t is not that dreams are for those who cannot endure reality, reality itself is for those who cannot endure (the Real that announces itself in) their dreams" (Žižek in Sheehan, 2012: 37). Fantasy in this example, which has its origin in dreams, reported by Freud, stands on the side of reality.*

to get rid of them, to overcome them, since that would even not be possible, but to transform them, engage them in a constructive manner. In a way, through which we can at the same time (and again) observe the dialogue between humans and their tools, which – kind of – take the form of an extra organ[23]. As Hayles would say: "We humanize virtual creators; they computationalize us." (Hayles, 2005: 201)

Conclusion

This could then be the reality *of* violence *in* video games. The pleasure that is not derived from transferring the violence beyond the code, but is based on performatively living the nature of death instinct. Dying again and again, failing again and again, searching and keeping the desire alive precisely through failures, which by being "decaffeinated" are not violent at all. If that proposition cannot be anything but failure (at least in terms of inevitable inability of one text to holistically embrace all possible meanings), let us finish with pointing to another possible beginning. To a place, from which a new falling could be started and another perspective revealed. In our case we could perhaps search for it in violence of code that (can), indeed, results in physical injuries. In the context of (violent) video games such possibility, something that exceeds present text, something that is its "lack", or, why not, its "surplus", could be violence, which, from performance of a player, is then literally turned against (her/him)self and can ultimately result in real, physical death.[24] But we would rather conclude by pointing to violence that is shared by us all, to a common experience, where the code alone can really be *pain in the ass.* Or is there anyone who has never lost a file, which was no longer possible to recover?

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[23] *As Dolar (2001: 113) says in articulating the Freud's hidden hypothesis about the technique-instinct bond: the technique fills the place of the missing body organ and becomes an object of instinctual investment.*

[24] *A baby of two Korean players, for instance, died, since the parents forgot about him while playing the game World of Warcraft. Similar is the case of a Chinese gamer, who died after playing the same game for 160 hours (see Vrtačič, 2009).*

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