

Marta KORONKIEWICZ

Paweł KACZMARSKI

pawel.j.kaczmarSKI@gmail.com

University of Warsaw



Beyond Busywork. Boredom in Contemporary Games

The aim of our paper is to compare and analyse two distinct types of boredom evoked by and experienced in modern video games. Drawing on the oft-discussed distinction offered by Walter Benjamin – who throughout his work, particularly in *The Arcades Project*, seems to suggest that the mind-numbing boredom born from the monotony of modern factory work coexists with its more contemplative, pre-modern and somewhat aristocratic counterpart – we would like to distinguish between „boredom as busywork” and „meditative boredom” as they appear in contemporary games and games criticism. It should be noted that these two types of boredom are not only associated with different game genres, they also seem to be rooted in two very different approaches to game development and the game industry in general. Whereas high-budget, mainstream games become ever more dependent on busywork as a way of engaging players with low-effort content, certain indie games periodically force the players to become idle in order to consciously and intentionally shape the rhythm of any given playthrough. In fact, it seems that few other media offer such a sharp contrast between these two fundamental types of boredom; video games remain uniquely placed to showcase in practice the difference between boredom as a result of repetition and boredom as idleness, an interruption of ostensibly productive activities – a crack in the system, if you will.

This is obviously not to say that the former is universally perceived as negative, and the latter universally praised. Drawing on select concepts from games criticism (Sterling, Juul), as well as contemporary boredom studies (Gardiner, Haladyn, Goodstein) and literary studies (Jameson, Silliman), we would like to try and pin down the exact techniques (or mechanics or strategies) that allow only certain games to transform

moments of simple inactivity into experience-defining narrative breakthroughs.