Videogame Wastelands as (Non-)Places and 'Any-Space-Whatevers'

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On reflecting upon the hundred-plus hours that the average gamer spends in playing games like *Fallout 3* (Bethesda Game Studios 2008), it seems strange that one would like to spend so much time roaming a virtual post-apocalyptic wasteland. Given the recent popularity of the wasteland setting in videogames, such as *Fallout 3*, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl* (GSC Game World 2007) and *Borderlands* (Gearbox Software 2009), it might be worth asking what makes wastelands so interesting to the gaming community. Post-apocalyptic wastelands are a popular trope in Science Fiction on which all of the above games as well as others such as *Half-Life* (Valve Corporation 1998) and *BioShock* (2K Boston 2007), with their dystopian environments, heavily draw on. However, that is not the only reason: even a game like *Far Cry 2* (Ubisoft Montreal 2008), where the player drives through seventy miles of African bush, offers an experience similar to the wanderings of *Fallout 3's* protagonist. This is the experience of travelling in a world fraught with danger and uncertainty through wide expanses of game space interspersed with nodes of activity.

The Post-Apocalyptic Wasteland: A Metaphor for Videogame Spaces?

The environment of *Far Cry 2*, although contextually very disparate and having brighter-coloured African bush-vegetation, still resembles *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.'s* backdrop of the irradiated forests of the Chernobyl area in the Ukraine. Even if the environments vary significantly, the experience of videogame wastelands can be seen to have marked similarities in the games and, arguably, is also perceptible to a degree in other kinds of game spaces whether they are cities, buildings or battlefields. This paper, therefore, explores the experience of wasteland spaces with a view to commenting on their appeal to gamers and also on how the wasteland experience links to the experience of game spaces in general. In the main, the analysis here concerns itself with the above-mentioned examples and the

first-person shooter (FPS) and role-playing game genres into which all of them can be roughly categorised.

Located on the opposite extreme of the utopic Garden of Eden or the Land of Cockaigne with their symbolism of progress and plenty, the conception of the wasteland has been that of a space without fixed meanings. Post-apocalyptic wastelands are especially characterised by a lack of the sense of place and are vast, cold expanses of ruined landscape as seen in films like *The Road* (Hillcoat 2009) or in stories like Ray Bradbury's *There Will Come Soft Rains* from 1950. Bradbury takes his title from Sara Teasdale's eponymous poem *Flame and Shadow* from 1920 which imagines nature reclaiming the earth after humanity has been wiped out by war – in Bradbury's story this meaning collapses into irony and in *Fallout 3*, if the player happens to encounter the poetry-reading 'Mr Gutsy' inside the McClellan Town Home, the robot reads out Teasdale's poem, which amid the ruined landscape seems almost meaningless. The game of course can possibly avoid Bradbury's conclusion of the permanent loss of meaning (the result of the permanent destruction of life) if the player is able to fulfil the quest for restoring fertility to the wasteland but even then, the ending is fraught with uncertainty where stability and meaning still remain elusive.

For the most part the environment of *Fallout 3*, however, closely resembles that of the film *The Road* with its destroyed landscape where objects and cultures have lost their meaning. The lack of fixed meaning is of course characteristic of the wasteland in general: a most notable example is T.S. Eliot's poem, *The Waste Land* from 1922. As Lawrence Rainey (2007, 49) comments, "*The Waste Land* doesn't have a narrative; instead, it has the scent of a narrative, hovering in the air like a perfume after someone has left the room". As Eliot says, describing his urban wasteland (and perhaps the wasteland of his psyche): "On Margate Sands / I can connect / Nothing with nothing".

Models of Videogame Spatiality:
Space, Place, Non-place and Further Possibilities

Videogames have earlier been described as "*space of possibility*" (Salen/Zimmerman 2004, 390) and it can be argued that like Eliot's wasteland they leave the behind the 'scent of a narrative'. Many, though not all, games tell stories and whether in the monorail narratives of earlier games or in the increasingly open-world environments of recent games, the game creates a space for the player to play out different iterations of a story. Videogames are, therefore, story-spaces. Or even better, story-spaces of possibility. As spaces of possibility, videogame spaces are multiple. They do not lend themselves to linear structures. Instead, one can keep repeating one's game and the space configures and reconfigures itself with each temporal

iteration and creates multiple planes of spatiality and also multiple choices for the player. Instead of the beginning, middle and end, stories in games end up having structures that are difficult to even visualise, and are often described by abstract poststructuralist concepts, such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1987, 3-25) rhizome.

Instead of analysing the spatial structure per se, the key interest here is to approach the fuller spatial experience in videogames through the wasteland metaphor. Previous attempts to describe such complex and multiple story-spaces of possibility have involved models from Michel de Certeau's differentiation of space and place as well as Marc Augé's concept of 'non-places.' These models, while appropriate entry points for the discussion are, however, a more detailed analysis exposes some limitations in the way in which they describe game spaces. An alternative model, based on Gilles Deleuze's idea of non-homogenous and multiple spaces, is examined as being possibly a more applicable description. This is then seen in context together with the wasteland metaphor.

Enroute to the Deleuzian model, the earlier positions provide some key insights that need consideration. de Certeau famously differentiates 'space' [*espace*] from 'place' [*lieu*] on the premise that place is stable and 'proper' whereas 'space' is mobile, always in development and is in effect place that is being 'practised.' According to de Certeau's (2002, 117) definition,

> A place is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (place). The law of the 'proper' rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own 'proper' and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability.

A 'place' for de Certeau can be inhabited or not but for it to become 'space,' it needs movement and, therefore, needs to be peopled. The lack of fixed meanings and connections in the wasteland allow it to be viewed as a multiplicity. The many interpretations of Eliot's poem are illustrative of this because the stories in *The Waste Land* are too many by far. According to de Certeau, "Stories thus carry out a labour that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places. They also organize the play of changing relationships between places and spaces" (ibid., 118). The multiplicity and the implicit constant movement that characterise wastelands make them categorizable as spaces in de Certeau's model. However, although they might be actualised into multiple narrative instances, wastelands do not have identity, relations and history.

Augé, however, modifies this concept significantly in his definition of 'space'; his understanding of 'place' includes movement, possibilities and is a more inclu-

sive conception. For Augé (1995, 87) 'place' has the anthropological connotation characterised by "identity, relations and history":

> Place as defined here is not quite the place that Certeau opposes to space […] it is place in the established and symbolised sense, anthropological place. […] There is nothing to forbid the use of the word space to describe this movement. But that is not what we are saying here: we include in the notion of the anthropological place the possibility of journeys made in it (ibid., 81).

For Augé, such spaces are classified as 'non-places.' Sans identity and definition, they are zones that are throbbing with a multiplicity of possible meanings.

The Relevance of the Non-Place Model to Videogame Wastelands: Summarising Earlier Positions

Returning to the story(ies) of *Fallout 3*, the player encounters ruins of monuments in Washington that have all but ceased to have any meaning in the wasteland. There are, of course, small groups of people who cling to distorted history and myth: for example, the renegade ex-slave called Hannibal Hamlin has saved the stone head of Lincoln's statue as an icon of freedom but most of his speeches about Lincoln are inaccurate. This is similar to Russell Hoban's post-apocalyptic novel *Riddley Walker* from 1980, where the whole of human history has been distorted and summarised into a brief incantation. According to Augé (1995, 95),

> certain places exist only through the words that evoke them, and in this sense they are non-places, or rather, imaginary places: banal utopias, cliches. […] Here the word does not create a gap between everyday functionality and lost myth: it creates the image, produces the myth and at the same stroke makes it work.

The identity and bearings being lost, the myth becomes a superficial token and almost a fabrication of the words which surround it. The 'wish-granter' myth in the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* game, about a fabled place where one's wishes come true, is one such fabrication. The wish-granter is supposedly a room whose history has been distorted into legend in the wasteland expanses of the game's setting.

All the games mentioned so far have the common element of travelling across vast stretches of wasteland. The player is essentially a traveller and, as Sybille Lammes points out, a cartographer as well. Lammes illustrates how de Certeau's differentiation of the 'map' and the 'tour', where one is based on 'seeing' and the other on 'going,' collapses in videogame spaces where the two functions get conflated. In a similar vein, Stephan Günzel (2007) observes how GPS-systems, where

cartography is highly subordinated to the user's individual needs, find a parallel in the videogame maps (players in both *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* and *Fallout 3* have GPS-like maps on their in-game PDA's) which he calls 'augmented virtuality.' Furthering expanding on the role of the player in videogame spaces, Lammes (2008, 95) states that

> As cartographers on tour, players are engaged in a process that is targeted towards a personal rather than a global or homogenous conception of spatiality. Such games do more than just ask a certain degree of spatial attentiveness from players to win the game. In addition, they invite them to create and transform maps and landscapes according to their individual choices. Gamers are thus actively exploring and transforming territories and maps in a highly personal, precise and even reflexive way.

In *Fallout 3*, one of the perks that players can attain at an advanced level is to view all locations that they haven't explored or discovered as yet. Personally speaking, the experience can be really rewarding. Deviating slightly from the game's intended course, it is possible to play a game-within-the-game wherein one is a tourist as well as a cartographer in the Capital Wasteland. The map on the PDA (called 'pip boy' in the game) reveals all the locations as nodes on the map but the player still has to figure out the paths connecting the various nodes.

Lev Manovich (2001, 273) compares the user navigating a virtual space to nineteenth century explorers. One can easily visualise explorers such as Mungo Park, Humboldt or Tavernier as cartographer-tourists. The player who tours the Capital Wasteland travelling from node to node is both an explorer as well as a *flaneur* who is truly at home only when displaced amongst a crowd. The latter is Manovich's metaphor for the internet surfer. Because of the *flaneur*-figure's identityless wandering, Lammes (2007) compares the internet to Augé's concept of 'non-place.' Manovich also explores similarities between zones of navigation and what he calls the 'mega-non-place.'

Taking the example of Centre Euralille, the train terminal complex near the entrance to the Chunnel (the underground tunnel that connects the Continent to the UK), Manovich (2001, 280) points out that "[l]ike the network players of Doom, Euralille users emerge from trains and cars to temporarily inhabit a zone defined through their trajectories, an environment to 'to just wander around inside of'." The comparison is of further interest because it makes a direct link between videogames and non-places. *Doom* (id Software 1993) is indeed one of the earliest FPS ancestors of games like *Fallout 3* or *Borderlands*: the lone space-marine in the wasteland of an alien planet is a classic FPS game story. Before, moving further into the description of videogame wastelands as 'non-places,' it will be instructive to return to Augé's original concept and the examples to which he applies them.

This will help in understanding how far the concept applies to the experience of videogame players and to comment on earlier critical positions related to videogame space.

Augé (1995) describes spaces such as train and air terminals, supermarkets, theme parks and leisure centres as 'non-places.' As products of a 'supermodern' situation, they are devoid of meaning themselves and are the liminal or threshold spaces, where the individual moves from the social to the solitary in terms of his or her sense of identity. These spaces are characterised by movement as in de Certeau's formulation; however, they do not translate into 'places' but rather into zones that are drained of any immediate meaning once the movement stops – think about an airport where the staff are on strike. For Augé (1995, 94),

> Non-place' designates two complementary but distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, commerce, leisure) and the relations that individuals have with these spaces. Although the two sets of relations overlap, they are not confused with each other; for non-places mediate a whole mass of relations, with the self and with others, which are only indirectly connected to their purposes. An anthropological space creates the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality.

Instead of 'passing through,' as one would do in a city with its distinctive history and culture, one would 'pass by' a non-place. Augé points to the experience of the driver on the bypasses who sees the city as it is constructed for him through images and words on billboards and signs. As discussed in relation to the perception of identity and culture through the distorted myths in the wasteland, there is meaning-making going on in the non-places through the fragmentary symbolism of the billboards.

This brings up immediate parallels with *Far Cry 2* – and even *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (Rockstar North 2004); although that comparison will be made in a later section. The protagonist in *Far Cry 2* drives for miles together on the highways, paths and bypasses and the only way of construing the significance of his surroundings from randomly scattered cues around him such as signposts, enemy outposts, arms dealers' shops and bus stations. Even when he does get into the heavily barricaded towns, such as Pala and Mosale Seto, he is just a passer-by. He rarely encounters civilians and visits only for missions, medicine or money: there is no scope or even need to explore the history of the place and the culture of the people.

The same is true of *Fallout 3*, where settlements have started in random places, but they still remind the player of being in an airport or a train station. Rivet City, the game's largest civilian human settlement, is a case in point. It is a settlement within a partly destroyed aircraft carrier and its denizens live in cabins and inter-

act with each other in certain community areas. There is an attempt at reconstructing fragments of history (there is a church, a market and even a museum) but the identity of the place seems to be much the same as that of the Euralille terminal complex described by Manovich. Rivet City is a 'non-place' that tries to differentiate itself from the rest of the wasteland and to become an anthropological place. Sometimes, indeed, the player might even feel that he is passing through rather than just passing-by but in general, Rivet City is just another place to trade or to sojourn in (hence comparable to Augé's non-place examples like the supermarket and the terminals).

According to Augé, the "person entering the space of non-place is relieved of usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, driver, customer; passive joys of identity-loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing" (1995, 103). From a videogame perspective, it is important to note how Augé links identity-loss and the active pleasure of role-playing. From the very outset, videogame studies has linked this to notions of immersion and involvement. It is easy to see why early game research such as Janet Murray (1997) saw structuring participation as a visit as one of the ways to produce immersion.

The players as visitors (or cartographer-tourists) would then be seen as losing their identity-markers and seamlessly entering the non-place. Augé's position, arguably, does not allow for such seamlessness. Within the non-place, the spectator is simultaneously the spectacle – and this makes seamless immersion impossible as it constantly raises questions about the construction of identities within the non-place. The protagonist's in-game name in *Fallout 3* provides a good example. Although the player is given the choice to input his or her preferred names, the game narrative keeps referring to the player as the 'Lone Wanderer.' In effect, although the player has customised preferences (name, hair colour, gender, ethnicity) in the game, he or she is still the Lone Wanderer and the first-person narrative keeps slipping into the third-person.

To return to the discussion of videogame non-spaces, the name 'Lone Wanderer' adds another layer of significance to the role cartographer-tourist. This name suggests two things: the player is a solitary character and a nomad. The nomadic existence is characteristic of the wastelander and the Lone Wanderer's visits to the different settlements do not serve to give him or her a sense of place. The Lone Wanderer can get materials from other settlements and even a house in Megaton or a bunk in Vault 101 but he or she is always alone (even though there is the option to team up with some characters) and the relationship with characters in most part is that solitary contractuality.

The main driving force in the creation of the non-places with their identity-less existence and communities of solitary contractuality is what Augé describes as 'supermodernity.' Supermodernity "stems simultaneously from overabundance

of events, spatial overabundance and individualisation of references" (Augé 1995, 109), all of which are characteristics of the wasteland scenario. The lack of fixed meanings creates a plurality of narratives that, following de Certeau, create multiple spaces and related events. As described using the example of the Lone Wanderer figure, these overabundant spatial and temporal possibilities in the wasteland (as non-place) are traversed by solitary characters. Finally, according to Augé, this implies that there are no remembered places as "everything proceeds as if space had been trapped by time, as if there were no history other than the last 48 hours of news; as if each individual history were drawing its motives, words and images from the inexhaustible stock of an unending history in the present" (1995, 109). Memory has little to do with non-places.

Videogame Non-places beyond the Wasteland: Applying the Theory to Other Scenarios

Going by the above comparisons between videogame spaces and Augé's outline of the concept, it is not surprising that the non-place has been a popular concept for describing videogame spatiality. Manovich (as quoted above), Torill Mortensen, Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin among others have variously applied the concept to describing videogames or similar entities. Mortensen (2003) even observes that "the airport [is] more similar to a play-space than the public spheres of the net," which in turn have already been described as non-places earlier in this analysis. So far, this paper has been focusing on wasteland scenarios in videogames and analysing their similarities to non-places. Judging from the similarities, the appeal of the wasteland story for videogames seems to be related to the way both wastelands and videogame spaces function in the player's/traveller's experience of them as non-places. Before we can proceed further, one question comes to mind: does the wasteland's status as a non-place have any significance for videogame spaces in general and across genres?

While the wasteland-scenario is a popular one, there are many successful titles that use other settings for their game environments. Common examples would be city locations, such as San Andreas (modelled on sections of California and Nevada) or battlefields, such as Omaha Beach in *Medal of Honour: Allied Assault* (2015, Inc. 2002). As far as the exploration of or survival in an alien planet, the similarity of the experience of playing *Doom* to that of passing by non-places has already been pointed to. Although the landscape is vastly different, the experience of the city is not all that different from walking in Capital Wasteland or driving in the Savannah. There are certainly more cars (sometimes one can even steal them) but the buildings are usually inaccessible and those that let you step in are fast-food joints, gyms, police stations or hospitals. The player is still the lone wanderer

and even though he or she might perch atop the tallest tower in Jerusalem, as in *Assassin's Creed* (Ubisoft Montreal 2007), exploring and charting the rooftops and streets with intense detail, the player is always the solitary cartographer-tourist. One might make a comparison with Augé's (1995, 91) comments on Chateaubriand's visit to Jerusalem where he claims that "the abundance of verbiage and documentation really does make it possible to identify Chateaubriand's holy places as a non-place, very similar to the ones outlined in pictures and slogans in our guidebooks and brochures."

The set-piece battlefields in *Medal of Honour* also have 'historical' landmarks (e.g. Omaha Beach) but as Michael Nitsche comments, the battles take place, as it were, like a theme park ride: "after Mike Powell has been shot by virtual snipers, killed by virtual machine guns, blown up by virtual mortars, and annihilated by virtual mines, I start to reflect upon the situation. The overall game might remain a kind of World War II theme park ride" (Nitsche 2008, 166). Again, the theme park space may aspire towards the creation of an identity but as Bolter and Grusin (1999, 177) state:

> Nonplaces, such as theme parks and malls, function as public places only during designated hours of operation [...] When the careful grids of railings and ropes that during the day serve to shepherd thousands of visitors to ticket counters or roller coasters stand completely empty, such spaces then seem drained of meaning.

From the above examples, it is evident that the wasteland scenario has underlying similarities with other types of space in RPG and FPS games. Think, for example, of the chillingly nondescript interior of Armacham Technology Corporation in *F.E.A.R.* (Monolith Productions 2005) where players find themselves devoid of links with the outside – almost a passer-by albeit in an eerily silent space punctuated with bursts of random activity. The randomness of events (especially in 'anomaly'-infested radioactive zones as in *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*), multiplicity of meanings, the solitary contractuality with the game elements and the constant need to map and explore while traversing vast spaces seem to be common characteristics of most RPG and FPS games that have an even more heightened impact in the post-apocalyptic wasteland scenario; therefore, it is worth exploring the latter as a metaphor for videogame spaces.

Deeper into the Wasteland: Questioning the Non-Place Model

Just as the wasteland shows the above similarities with the non-place, it also highlights some key differences and actually serves to challenge previous positions based on the model. Extending the metaphor to more types of videogame spaces raises further questions. As Mortensen (2003) observes about MUDS and MMOs,

it is difficult to call them non-places precisely because there is a sense of identity that runs deep in the guilds and communities in these virtual places:

> The players and the administrators weave the stories of their characters together, and the intruder, the stranger strolling by and deciding to linger finds that there is history to each and every one of the characters about him, history on several levels, just as it is to the people in a flesh-world geographical space. [...] while it's a long stretch to claim that a MUD is a physical place, to claim that it is a social place is easier. Not the least of signs to that is what I mentioned before, the territorial behaviour. There is also the social behaviour, the way the inhabitants tend to seek each other out in certain clusters, which are resistant to outside pressures or attempts to split them.

As far as the physicality of the 'placeness' is concerned, she cites de Certeau's conception of place as an instantaneous configuration of positions thus negating any objections to the fact that the space is not located on tangible ground. The MMO is not always as Mortensen describes; especially for a solitary newbie the vast spaces of Azeroth or Norrath might be daunting and wasteland-like. However, Mortensen's comment necessitates a rethinking of wasteland spaces as a metaphor for videogame spaces if it solely resembles the non-place described by Augé. This is not constrained to multiplayer spaces and to interaction with human players; single-player game environments may also provide some sense of identity and belonging.

On analysing further, significant differences emerge that make it necessary to analyse Augé's claims both in themselves and in terms of videogames. One of the different types of spatialities that Nitsche (2008, 16) outlines is called "fictional space [and it] lives in the imagination, in other words, [it is] the space 'imagined' by players from their comprehension of the available images." This corresponds to the construction of space from a narrative, as described by de Certeau. Only this narrative might be drawn from the player's non-game world or from an anthropological place outside the game. While Augé is right in differentiating the non-place from the anthropological place, at least as far as videogame spaces are concerned, it is important not to look at them as watertight and not to ignore the powerful impact of imagination in building a sense of identity in the game space – even more so in the wasteland scenario with its enlarged space of possibility.

There is another issue related to Augé's concept: not much is said about whether non-places can actually become anthropological places. One would like to think of the many so-called 'non-places' like the railway stations and transit points that later became huge cities; Kenya's capital city, Nairobi, which started as a small railway transit point and is now a major city is a case in point. Within the non-place, despite the solitary contractuality that Augé argues for, it is possible

for deeper human bonds to develop. In the movie *The Terminal* (Spielberg 2005) an East European called Viktor Navorski is forced to live in New York City airport's international arrivals lounge until the US immigration agencies can resolve his situation. However, although living in Augé considers a typical non-place, Navorski builds many bonds and his life intertwines with those of many others. The Terminal becomes, for him, a 'place' as good as any other. As Ian Bogost (2006, 16) describes this:

> The recombinations of time horizons in the airport terminal allow Spielberg to paint the medium-term struggles of many characters, the long-term struggles of a few, and the short-term struggles of the airport itself. As different characters interact along one or more of these time horizons, the film's unit operations become apparent, and The Terminal reveals itself not as a film about a man struggling against governments for his identity, but as one about various modes of waiting.

Bogost sees the story as the glue for a configurative work about specific modes of uncorroborated waiting – for him, this begins to resemble a piece of software or videogame (ibid., 19). Such 'waiting' has in itself the potential of developing as yet unrealised possibilities into actions. It is more about the possible transition of non-places into places. In the wasteland scenarios in videogames, imagination can play a strong role in creating associations with the in-game characters, whether human (in multiplayer games) or NPCs, especially when the player joins an in-game faction such as the Brotherhood of Steel in *Fallout 3*, where it is possible to imagine some social ties with other characters in the group. In squad-based games like *Call of Duty 4* (Infinity Ward 2007), it is possible at times to relate to NPCs who are helping the player. Unlike the watertight conception of the non-place, the wasteland contains a key element that endears it as a spatial metaphor in videogames – it allows for many possibilities of change.

Another aspect in which Augé's conception of non-places struggles to describe the gamer's spatial experience is connected to the complex temporality of videogames. As noted earlier, Augé describes the temporality of the non-place as one where space seems to be trapped in time and where individual histories are, as it were, drawn from the inexhaustible stock of an unending history that is contained in the present moment. Curious as it may sound, in Augé's non-place, all history is subverted by an infinitely extended present. Seen in relation to videogames, there are both parallels and differences.

Paradoxically, temporality in videogames is a complex mesh of events that are different while remaining the same. It might even be tempting to see the entire videogame as an event stretched over a presentness – certainly all the actions in the game are being performed by the player in the immediate present although the storyline may have pasts and futures. The temporal structure of videogames is

problematized with the saves, reloads and respawns of the player's persona. While it is true that the entire history of the game can experienced as parallel moments in the present, it does not necessarily have to be so.

With each repeated event in a reload, the same event is nevertheless experienced as a different and unique one. Games like *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* (Ubisoft 2003) and *Assassin's Creed* have storylines which consciously play with and subvert the linear experience of time. So instead of the homogenous presentness that Augé describes in his non-place, the videogame space is the locale for a temporal complexity where a repeated event is simultaneously the same and different and where time forms a mesh of presents, pasts and futures.

Elsewhere, I (Mukherjee 2008) have used Gilles Deleuze's framework from *Difference and Repetition*, to help understand this. What follows is a quick summary that relates the complex discussion of videogame temporality to the present context. To simplify Deleuze's (1994) concept, events exist within a virtual mesh of events where all events that consists of different iterations of the same events existing simultaneously as potential events. However, only some of these will be actualised (or in simple words, will happen for us) depending on the possibilities that are available at that point and on the conditions surrounding the event (which Deleuze calls 'singularities').

Unlike in real life, it is possible to reload event-sequences and in each instance of reloading, a saved game allows different possible events to be actualised from within the mesh of events. Deleuze's concept of difference and repetition is important in drawing a framework for the peculiar temporal structure of videogames. When a videogame instance is reloaded, even if the event actualised is similar to the one before it, there are still changes in the surrounding conditions (singularities) and all the different factors influencing the event make it different. The narrative and consequently the spatial experience are also different. The game space thus does not remain in a perpetual present; rather it turns into a multiplicity of spaces within multiple time-schemes.

Videogame Wastelands as 'Any-Space-Whatevers'

This is only one aspect in which Deleuzian thought necessitates a second look at the experience of videogame wastelands in terms of non-places. The above point, however, will help in developing a more complex understanding of videogame wastelands, building on and then challenging the already established framework of non-places. Deleuze and Guattari are key figures in any modern thinking on space and their classification of space into the constant combination of the uncontrolled 'smooth' space with the controllable and delimitable 'striated' space is

popular even in videogame studies where major commentators such as Nitsche, Bogost and Mortensen have published on the subject.

This analysis, however, will look at a different aspect of Deleuzian conceptions of spatiality. The concept in question is taken from Deleuze's writing on *Cinema* and is called 'any-space-whatever' [*espace quelconque*]. There is some debate as to whether Deleuze developed this on Augé's concept of non-place because in his notes he credits a certain 'Pascal Augé.' Although critics are divided on this, some like Ronald Bogue and Réda Bensmaia have linked the concept to Marc Augé's non-place (Stivale 2006). Before commenting further on the link with Augé's non-place, however, it would be instructive to describe 'any-space-whatever.'

Deleuze analyses pre-World War 2 cinema in terms of what he calls the 'movement image' (he also has a subsequent category call the 'time image' which is less relevant to the present purposes). The movement image "is a form of spatialized cinema: time determined and measured by movement" (Totaro 1999). Deleuze's (1986, 1) understanding of movement is based on the Bergsonian idea that "movement occurs in the interval between the two [instants]" and therefore, we miss capturing the movement: in cinema, however, the in-between is perceivable as part of whole experience of movement. Between the perception of an object and the action that leads to a cinematic event, Deleuze posits an in-between state called the 'affection-image.' This is the state that is throbbing with multiple possibilities without having yet actualised any one of these.

The actualisation itself depends on a complex framework of restricting parameters that Deleuze calls singularities. These might be influenced by the game affordances, by remembered sequences of gameplay and by the player's experiential context at the time. One of the manifestations of the affection-image is that of the any-space-whatever. Ronald Bogue (2003, 80) describes this as a "virtual space, whose fragmented components might be assembled in multiple combinations, a space of yet-to-be actualised possibilities." Deleuze (1986, 101) himself elaborates on his concept in his description of the 'vast fragmented spaces' of Longchamp and Gare du Lyons in Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket*:

> Any-space-whatever is not an abstract universal, in all times, in all places. It is a perfectly singular space, which has merely lost its homogeneity, that is, the principle of its metric relations or the connection of its own parts, so that the linkages can be made in an infinite number of ways. It is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as a pure locus of the possible.

From this it can be inferred that the any-space-whatever is not a formal model of spatiality and indeed like Augé's 'non-place', it is an experiential concept. Jeffrey Bell (1997) attempts to link this to Augé's non-place:

> An 'any space whatsoever' [...] is an anonymous space people pass through [...] in such spaces -and this is what interested the anthropologist Augé – individuals become depersonalized [...] It is for this reason that Augé argued that the 'any space whatsoever' is a homogenous, de-singularizing space.

As mentioned earlier, whether Deleuze was influenced by Marc Augé's concept is still doubtful but Bell picks up Deleuze's reference to the fragmented spaces in the race course (Longchamps) and the railway station (Gare de Lyons) in comparison with Augé's non-places of transit. There is certainly a similarity in that both kinds of spaces are vast fragmented spaces and this is also true of the wasteland scenarios in videogames.

However, unlike Augé's 'homogenous, desingularising' space, the any-space-whatever has lost its homogeneity. It is loss of homogeneity that makes it rich with possibilities and Deleuze's 'pure locus of the possible' compares well with Katie Salen's and Eric Zimmerman's concept of the 'space of possibility' in game design.

In the affective zone of the any-space-whatever, the possibilities are actualised under the influence of the surrounding singularities, as described earlier. Like the non-place, the any-space-whatever is represented by fragmented zones that do not have any fixed meaning; they are usually liminal areas which are used for transit and where the traveller's relation with the space is that of solitary contractuality. The difference, however, lies in that the any-space-whatever supports difference and it need not constrain all history to an eternal present as Augé claims to be the case with the non-place. The any-space-whatever is not orientated in advance and it can create linkages in an infinitely multiple number of ways. Therefore, it does not preclude possibilities of Navorski making an anthropological place out of an airport lounge or of the videogame player converting the non-place of the game into a social place.

After the possibility within the any-space-whatever is actualised, it is possible to perceive identity in the spatial experience of the videogame. It is also possible to perceive a sense of history, contingent on the player's memory of the game events and the interaction with other players or non-player characters. In its experiential aspect, as opposed to its formal structural restrictions, the game space retains its ability to form 'linkages in an infinite number of ways' like the Deleuzian any-space-whatever. This considers the formal affordances of the game event, memory, the player's emotional and material environment among a host of other factors. Just as for Navorski the airport is not just a space where he acts out his daily routine but is simultaneously the locale for his experience, the videogame space is much more than a playing field. In fact, the very idea of a playing field, whether digital or otherwise, transcends the fixities of a rule-bound space and includes a host of experiences that form intrinsic parts of play.

As such, Augé's non-place or de Certeau's binaries of space and place both attempt to describe the fuller experience of space. Both conceptions, however, find it difficult to address the multiplicity that videogames involve without limiting the possibilities or creating mutually exclusive categories to explain them. The any-space-whatever with its characteristic loss of homogeneity addresses the fragmentedness of videogame space without taking away the potential of identity-formation and history. Further, it accounts for the multiple temporal iterations of the game space and at the same time, provides a model where the fragmented multiplicity and the emerging identity do not need to be separated.

At this point, it would be instructive to go back to the key question for this article: why are wasteland spaces such popular settings for videogames? The answer to this, it could be argued, lies in the way they function as any-space-whatevers. As dystopic wastelands, the spaces are barren and yet marked by a multiplicity of possibilities, mostly fraught with danger; the experience of moving through them leaves the player's nerves on edge, as it were. As in the airport terminal, there are various modes of waiting in the wasteland space and the space itself provides the locus where the player actualises the possibilities that create the game event at a specific moment.

The standard first-person shooters such as *Doom* are characterised by a fast-paced spatial progression where the speed often moves the focus away from the affective stage or the stage of 'becoming' in which the game actions are the result of the actualisation of possibilities rather than being essences. As such, this might lead to simplistic comparisons with the experience of a theme-park ride or a passing through other non-places such as an airport terminal. *Doom* gives us the impression of being a non-space, as Manovich suggests, precisely because although it is set in a post-apocalyptic space, the expansive wasteland-like feel is lacking. Slowing down the tempo, when the player has cleared an area and is moving ahead into another, the tension is palpable and the sense of the any-space-whatever pervades. The event that will be actualised is never a given.

Whether the player dies or carries on is determined by the singularities of the game's affordances and the player's experience; until the action is performed, the game space exists in an affective state or as an any-space-whatever. As opposed to *Doom*, the freeform wasteland space in *Fallout 3* or *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*, therefore, slows down or crystallises the experience – it lets us perceive the affective stage. It is possibly to traverse vast desolate expanses where the apparent quietude is charged with the potential of action. You might be attacked by mutants or perish in a radioactive anomaly any moment.

As said before, even game settings that are ostensibly not wastelands use this 'stretching out', as it were, of time and space as in *F.E.A.R*, where in the corridors of Armachem Tech, the wasteland metaphor works aptly as a pure locus of the possible. The wasteland throbs with possibilities that are unlinked and unformed

until the player and the surrounding environment intervene: it is an any-space-whatever. Such spaces make it clearer to perceive the workings of possibility and multiplicity in videogames. As any-space-whatever's, the videogame wastelands provide a locale for describing the workings of the complex experience of videogames that was hitherto not perceivable and hence was baffling on many accounts.

The Wasteland Metaphor as a Reassessment of Game-Space

Although the wasteland scenario has many similarities to the non-place described by Augé, the Deleuzian concept of the any-space-whatever helps by better defining it as a videogame metaphor. As the player enters the vast expanse of the wasteland, he or she is in a zone of possibility. The wastelands in *Fallout 3* or the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* games are zones invested with a multiplicity of meanings and randomness. At the same time, they are mostly bereft of any inherent identity or character – much like the transit points, theme parks and terminals that Augé describes. However, seen as an affective space or any-space-whatever, the wasteland is not devoid of potential to contain its own social places just as the airport lounge is converted into a home for the stranded protagonist of *The Terminal*.

Looking at the main quests of games like *Fallout 3* and *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl*, it is evident that the preferred aim of the game's plot is the restoration of fertility to the wasteland. The same goes for most wasteland narratives: Eliot's poem ends with a clamour for eternal peace or shantih. The preferred ending is, however, just one possible outcome among the many that the wasteland holds in its affective space. Seen is such terms, the similarities with videogame spaces are quite clear and the popularity of the wasteland setting in videogames is, therefore, hardly surprising. As such, when the experience of the Lone Wanderer in *Fallout 3* becomes representative of other experiences of ludic spaces, one can start thinking of the wasteland as a metaphor for videogame spaces and the way in which they are experienced.

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