Post-apocalyptic Narrative of Metro: Last Light and Fallout: New Vegas

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Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Sveučilišni diplomski studij

Anglistika; smjer: znanstveni

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Student/ica:
Klara Milić

Mentor/ica:
Dr. sc. Zlatko Bukač

Zadar, 2024.

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Zadar, 28. travnja 2024.

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1. Introduction

This master thesis delves into the theme of narrative within the realm of video games, placing a particular emphasis on the various array of narrative techniques employed by video game designers to convey a story, cultivate character development and evoke emotions characteristic for the post-apocalyptic genre. Through an exhaustive exploration of the multifaceted narrative elements inherent to the video game medium, the thesis ventures to provide an enriched comprehension of how the games *Metro: Last Light* and *Fallout: New Vegas* present an intricate and captivating post-apocalyptic narrative platform.

The narrative potential of video games stretches beyond the traditional definitions of narrative, with each of its parts contributing to the overall impact of the gaming experience. In addition, while traditional media allow the reading and observation of human behaviour in various contexts, video games allow the player to fully immerse themselves by leaving their own imprint on the game story, while assuming the role of the protagonist. The interactive nature of video games highlights their medium-specific features making them different to other types of artistic expression, which lead certain scholars to view video games as cybernetic systems instead of storytelling ones. Demanding non-trivial effort, according to Jesper Aarseth, video games are classified within the framework of ergodic literature. They are cybertexts in that they take place outside the human thought, leave a sense of aporia, and allow players alter the story (1, 10). This perception of the medium laid grounds for a new discipline – ludology, whose representatives, such as Gonzalo Frasca and Jesper Juul, separate video games from the field of narratology. However, the thesis will show that there is a significant overlap between the essential qualities of both fields of study.

Furthermore, in order to demonstrate the unconventional narrative strategies used for the creation of video games, the thesis will compare *Metro: Last Light*, a linear game, and *Fallout: New Vegas*, an open world one, mainly differing in the order in which they present the

story events. *Metro: Last Light* was developed by 4A Games and was released in 2013, while Obsidian Entertainment developed *Fallout: New Vegas* and released the game in 2010. Setting the two side by side brings about the question whether linearity in games refers to player choice or temporal sequence. So, the general postulation according to which open world games are not linear will be challenged and a new categorization of the linearity concept will be offered.

Moreover, since open world games emphasize the role of the player, the correlation between the narrator and player immersion will be analysed through Gérard Genette's concept of "focalization" (161-212). In order to understand how the worlds of *Metro: Last Light* and *Fallout: New Vegas* are developed and how their respective spaces create stories, constituting the pillars of the games' narratives, general conventions of the post-apocalyptic genre need to be presented. The thesis will rely on some of Henry Jenkins' methods of environmental storytelling to illustrate how game design incorporates indications of narrative on top of the obvious storyline (Domsch 106). Likewise, the thesis is to present the manner in which an interplay of the games' graphics and narrative elements including the theme, setting, and events, culminates in an intensely credible surrounding of the wasteland. This narratively evocative landscape will be explored in terms of Marc Augé's "non-places" (87) and Arnold van Gennep's concept of "liminality" (53).

The setting of *Metro: Last Light* and *Fallout: New Vegas* offers a proliferating atmosphere for recognizable post-apocalyptic themes of the genre to emerge. The post-apocalyptic world, existing as an anarchical transitional gap between the lost order and a future imagined one, appears as a "carnivalesque" world described by Mikhail Bakhtin (10). Traditionally, carnivals of Medieval Europe were sole occasions where the political and ideological authority of state could be inverted, or rather erased (Bakhtin 160). Viewing the games' worlds in given terms allows for the thesis to analyse the possible (and current) political and social institutionalizations after a resetting nuclear disaster. In addition, both games

incorporate mutated animals and humans, formed as a result of radiation, in a way that they can be studied through Edward Said's notion of the "Other" (43). Finally, as the post-apocalyptic world brings about a constant presence of death, the thesis will uncover how *Metro: Last Light* and *Fallout: New Vegas* invite players to make certain choices that may alter the course of story and reevaluate their respective moral systems, possibly leaving them with a lingering sense of guilt.

2. Narrative

Before embarking on a discussion regarding the subject of the thesis, which is to present how the narrative operates in the relatively new medium of computerized games, this chapter and those that follow intend to clarify relevant details about the very concept of narrative by offering a brief historical overview about the findings from the field of narratology.

Narratology as a literary theory derived from Russian formalism, notably Vladimir Propp and his work *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) that offered one of the first structural analyses of narrative texts. Acknowledging the presence of a mutual literary language and common pattern codes within a text allowed for creating a basis for the study of narratology. Yet, owing to technological advances, the discourse on narrative theory applies not only to literature but also to other media, allowing for the exploration of the idea of narrative in many different forms. However idealistic, inadequate, or ephemeral elucidating the conventions of narrative may seem, there have been numerous attempts. In order to discuss the contemporary western narrative theory, one should spring back to more than two millennia in the past when Aristotle's *Poetics* (1996) canvassed a footing for the narrative theory and criticism.

Aristotle (12-28) divides the art of writing into epic, lyric poetry, and drama, all of which, to his belief, are means of imitation, i.e. *mimesis*. Removed from the actual states of

existence, representations grant the audience to contemplate emulated realities while dissociated. Devoting most attention to tragedy, Aristotle reveals that it is an imitation, not of people and their characters, but of life and human actions. This leads to the concept of *muthos* or the emplotment, which refers to the arrangement of lived events and actions. These events and actions are pieced together in a way that they all relate back to the story. The author of *Poetics* also points out that *muthos* must consist of the beginning, middle and end for the episodes to appear as a complete whole. In other words, plot unity is created through logic causality. Actors act out believable actions within lifelike situations carefully crafted and causally connected by the dramatist. With plot being the purpose of tragedy, one may also observe it as the purpose of its narration. Thus, according to the earliest understandings, narrative is the *mimesis* of agency, or simply *muthos*, "number and nature of poetry's component parts" (Aristotle 77). The recognition that there is an organizing principle that configures a story is the key revelation which allowed for Aristotle's successors to identify other narratological aspects of texts.

The structuralist Gérard Genette objects the afore presented peripatetic opinion suggesting that narrative cannot imitate, i.e. represent reality, it merely recounts or signifies it by means of language emanating from a certain narrative instance. For Genette, all narrative is *diegesis,* or the telling, and can seldom achieve an impression of *mimesis* by utilizing language to breathe life into a story. The narrative is thus meant to be a fictional act of language deriving from a *narrative instance* (30). Moreover, according to Genette, the narrative consists of the story or plot, which he describes as the chronological order of events suggested by the narrative, a narrative discourse that is represented by the text itself, while the act of storytelling is the narration (27).

Recent narratology extricates the notion of narrative from the notions of plot and story, which are often used interchangeably. An international classic based on the structuralist

tradition; Mieke Bal's *Narratology* (2017) differentiates between three constitutive parts of narrative writings: the fabula, the story, and the text. While Bal conceives the fabula in the same terms as Aristotle does *muthos*, she establishes the contrast between the story and the text as follows:

> "A narrative text is a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee ("tells" the reader, viewer, or listener) a story in a medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof. A story is the content of that text and produces a particular manifestation, inflection, and "colouring" of a fabula." (5).

The assertion that neither of the three components are identical is proved by the fact that if we take any fairy tale into consideration, all narrative texts about the fairy tale may present the same story, however they may differ from one another in other aspects. In other words, there are different versions of a narrative text (regardless of the medium) that recount a story which is essentially the same (Bal 5-6).

The fabula or the sequence of events requires time and location, as well as actors and events to produce a logical whole. The manner in which they are arranged into a story is meant to affect the readers or viewers in terms of convictions and emotions. Still, a story with an organized fabula is not yet a narrative text. The latter manifests once the story is presented to an audience converted into "signs" through a medium. These signs are uttered and related by an agent, who is not the writer nor a filmmaker (nor, to which one may add, a video game designer), but a fictive teller, the *narrator* (Bal 7). Nonetheless, the topic of the narrator will be revisited somewhat later in the paper.

Moreover, Marie Laure Ryan departs from the standard perceptions of narrative as an object that has its clear definitions, by emphasizing the recognition the abstract quality of *narrativity*, which refers to certain indicators "that have the potential to elicit a narrative

response" (Wolf qtd. in Ryan et al. 327). This, in a way, suggests that narrativity can be measured, i.e. some narratives appear to be more narrative as opposed to others (Prince qtd. in Ryan et al. 387). Thus, it is safe to say that non-literary media, such as film and video games, may carry narrativity although occurring as unconventional narratives. So, to be able to view something as carrying a narrative one must judge it by "the amount of commentary pertaining to the situations and events represented, their representation, or the latter's context" (Prince qtd. in Ryan et al. 387).

Having in mind all the definitions provided, one may summarize the notion of narrative as both architecture and engineering of a story. It focuses on the aesthetics and how to bring the story to life. While the narrative governs in what manner a story is portrayed and told, the story itself adds causes and effects to an otherwise bleak sequence of events presented by a plot, showing how the events are related.

2.1. Narrative in video games

Game designers, critics, theorists and even players generally seem to fail to agree on the correlation between stories and games. This exchange of views is hard to resolve due to a number of factors which, for the most part, refer to the fact that the video game is a medium susceptible to change since its features highly depend on the technological limitations, which is why they keep undergoing aesthetic experimentation. Comparatively, the video game combines qualities of many distinguishable cultural traditions such as stories, games and theatre making it a hybrid mode of expression. Moreover, the category of video games is extremely wide-ranging, referring to all modes of playful partaking, and so no other medium may be said to match the equivalent scope of experience offered by digital games (Ryan et al. 80).

Jan-Noël Thon highlights that the specific mediality and interactive nature of video games bring light upon their medium-specific functions that draw attention to the formal dissimilarity in the way conventionally definite narrative media realize certain narrative strategies. Apart from interactive gameplay, video games can embody cut-scenes and formulated events that may be as broad as in feature films and graphic novels due to the ability of computers to imitate various kinds of semiotic systems as narrative elements. Thus, players often encounter filmic sequences and graphic narrative systems as the default mechanism of telling a story within the games they play (Ryan and Thon 84).

More often than not, video games are studied in regard to their relationship to literature and cinema. Janet Murray argues that games are not more than a step forward to the ideal medium – a virtual reality, a completely immersive and responsive environment sustained by a complex narrative and psychological depth identical to the works of Shakespeare. For Murray, digital games serve as a form for "procedural authorship" since the player's narrative experience is preconditioned by the process of creating rules controlled by the game designer (qtd. in Ryan et al. 81). However, Espen Aarseth claims that one should perceive video games as cybernetic systems instead of storytelling ones, paving the way for defining this new type of fiction that demands greater effort from the audience as *ergodic literature* which will be elaborated on in the next chapter (1).

2.2. Cybertext

Focusing on the visual and textual interplay of computerized literature and its various genres, *Cybertext – Perspectives on Ergodic literature* (1997) by Espen Aarseth played a vital role in defining the term *ergodic*. The notion of *cybertext* on the other hand, is derived from

the discipline of *Cybernetics* founded by Norbert Wiener who laid the foundation for the development of digital media. Cybertext puts forward the complexities of the medium as an integral segment of the literary transfer, thus concentrating on the mechanical arrangement of the text. As it is the case with regular texts where the role of the reader, as the source of interpretation, is to contribute to the creation of a text, similarly, the consumer of a cybertext effectuates semiotic sequences manifesting as physical constructions which render him an even more integrated figure. While the reader's performance occurs in their head, the performance of the cybertext user takes place outside the limits of human thought. This is what Aarseth intends to imply with the use of the word *ergodic*. Ergodic literature requires "nontrivial effort" to "allow the reader to traverse the text", whereas the nonergodic one demands nothing more than the movement of eyes and page turning (Aarseth 1).

Aarseth attempts to unveil in what manner hypertexts may be seen as texts, since "hypertexts, adventure games, and so forth are not texts the way the average literary work is a text" (3). For the purpose of aesthetics, hypertexts fabricate verbal constructions, a feature that brings them closer to other literary works. However, hypertexts are much more than what they let on, and this "paraverbal dimension" has proven difficult for literary scholars to describe. Unlike traditional texts, for Aarseth, hypertexts cause consumers to feel as though there were more paths or decisions they could have taken that would have uncovered more pieces of the narrative. The consumer may never know the missing parts, and as opposed to a linear narrative and its case of ambiguity, he views this as an "aporia", i.e. unavailability of possibility (10).

Furthermore, while the reader of a narrative is merely powerless by having no influence on the manner in which the story will unfold, the consumer of the cybertext is a player in a game world where they can "explore at will, get lost, discover secret paths, play around, follow the rules, and so on". So, the reader of a narrative is simply amused by observing as a voyeur, they may "speculate, conjecture, extrapolate, even shout abuse, but they are not a player"

because they are not provided with the player's delight of control (Aarseth 3, 4). This separation of narrative from the concept of games will pave the way for the development of a new discipline that opposes traditional narratological views, the premises of which the paper will propound in the next chapter.

2.3. Ludology

Gonzalo Frasca defines ludology as a discipline that deals with video games, gaming, game mechanics, players and cultures surrounding them. The term was formerly used to describe the study of nonelectronic games, notably board games, and was henceforth applied to video games, a relatively new phenomenon lacking nomination as it was just getting recognized by the academic community. Since the formal discipline had not yet been established, researchers borrowed tools and theories from narratology, literature, and film. Slowly, 'ludology' began to be used to refer to a person studying games as such, not as extensions of narrative. Frasca admits that one needs to investigate narratives to comprehend the characteristics that games share with stories (characters, events, and settings), but he also attests that video games are not held together by narrative structures (1).

Contrary to narrativists, ludologists argue for recognizing the cultural merit of video games under the conditions and analytic categories they themselves create. In place of narrative construction and plot devices, they favour the rule systems and mechanics of game design (Ryan et al. 81). Narratologists argue that video games integrate play within a fictional framework conveying narrative. Players manipulate avatars created based on human-like features and are placed in a fictional world which is far from abstract, having been inspired by real architecture and geography (mazes, dungeons, mountains, hallways, etc.).

In his paper, *A Clash between Games and Narrative* (1998), Jesper Juul attempts to elaborate on the reasons as to why the concept of narrative does not fit video games very well. Narratives presuppose stable sequences of events that had to unfold because they arise from each other. On the other hand, video games are not necessarily linear, as they give to players an opportunity to decide on the course of action which may result in the altering of order. But, as Ryan remarks, game's free order causes its story to suffer only when it generated disjointed sequences of events. However, if a game is highly developed, the limiting of the player's choice of actions will guarantee the logical development of each new situation (Ryan 279).

For all that, it should be considered that the aim of ludology is not to try to bring to light the technical inaccuracies of the narrative model. Instead, being a formalist discipline, ludology prioritizes understanding the structure and elements of its focal point of study. It focuses on the rules, designing typologies and paradigms for explaining game mechanics. Still, the formal proceedings of ludology are not infinite, although they are the least problematic way of discovering the structural distinctness between games and stories (2).

3. Linear games and open world games

Since this thesis will attempt to analyse how the building of narrative, a post-apocalyptic one in particular, is integrated into the two of the most representative post-apocalyptic games: *Metro: Last Light* and *Fallout: New Vegas*, it is necessary to understand the intricacies of a linear game and an open world one. So far, it has been discussed whether games being chronological or not is indicative of narrative, however, since players can have a significant impact on the games' course of events, to the point of altering stories, this medium should be studied within the conditions set by itself.

According to Jennifer Mendez, an open world of video games signifies that "the players can go where they please, when they please". There is a main storyline, but players have the final say in whether they will follow the structured path of the storyline, or swerve from it to complete side quests. On the other hand, in a linear world game "there is a leash of sorts, a boundary line surrounding the area where the player is fighting, looting, exploring, purchasing, and selling items", meaning that the gameplay is driven by the story ("Game Design"). However, this perspective begs the question whether one should differentiate between the linearity of a digital text and that of the player action. In other words, if there is a linear organization through which players experience the narrative of digital texts.

Johansen Quijano believes that digital text's aptness to present linear narratives following regular dramatic structures is less than unquestionable. It is important to point out that printed texts, mostly adhere to a traditional narrative composition within which readers are presented with a linear story arranged in a unified plot structure (Quijano 74). So, narrative linearity is often understood as "arranged in a manner in which one event sequentially leads to the following event", analogically, this definition implies that a non-linear narrative depicts events that do not "follow a direct pattern of causality" (Quijano 88).

According to Quijano, in terms of ergodic literature, the idea of linearity is viewed differently in the sense that it refers to consumer choice in place of temporal or narrative linearity. Apart from reading, digital text consumers are provided with the possibility of changing the text itself. Understanding computerized devices, how they integrate digital texts and the way they need to be read, allows consumers to alter the virtual texts by taking away or adjoining certain parts (76). So, if the player of an open world game such as *FalloutNV* decides to do a quest that is irrelevant for the main story, it may seem as though they are able to change the course of action. With this in mind, the open world video game narrative would be seen as non-linear, whereas the one given in games employing coinciding interactivity are viewed as

linear. This perspective is problematic because it assimilates narrative linearity with game design, instead of contrasting between an open world design and a restricted world one (88-89).

Events presented in an open world video game may or may not be linear, just as it is the case with a restricted world video game. For example, irrespective of the game design, the story may start in *medias res*, or players may see flashbacks or flashforwards. The game *MetroLL* opens with Artyom (non-verbal character controlled by the player), awakening from a coma, being met by Khan who informs him that one of the Dark Ones survived the missile strike[1], and invites him to a meeting with Miller, the leader of the Order[2]. As the player-Artyom moves through the bunker, some of the NPC[3]s interact with him congratulating him for releasing the missiles, obviously suggesting that Artyom is responsible for the killing of the Dark Ones. Miller instructs Artyom to resurface and eliminate the remaining Dark One which may be a potential threat. Having the gift that allows him to communicate with the creatures, Artyom's mind is immediately consumed by that of the creature when the player enters close contact with it while trying to shoot it. The result of this is a cut-scene into the past which confirms the missile event to the player from the perspective of the surviving Dark One who found itself beyond the destructions reach. So, even though *MetroLL* is a restricted game, the back-and-forth movement along the temporal axis would suggest that it is a nonlinear game.

Inversely, despite it being an open world game, *FalloutNV* has no such movements along the timeline, and regardless of the paths chosen by players, each storyline will lead the player to a pre-envisaged ending, making the idea of sequential order inherently present. Although it may seem as though narrative options of *FalloutNV* are limitless as opposed to

[1] The missile strike was released by Artyom in the ending of the original novel in order to wipe out seemingly threatening and mysterious creatures, the Dark Ones. *Metro: Last Light* follows the events a year after the bombing.
[2] The "Sparta" Order is a special military order, also called the Rangers, who want to install peace while other factions are trying to take over the Metro.
[3] "Non-Player Character" – non-controllable characters that the player can interact with.

those of *MetroLL*, game designers of both games had made certain interventions to guide the player to a particular ending(s). As Marie Lynn-Ryan explains, no matter the degree of ergodicity, such texts are almost always carefully organized in a tree-like structure. The consumer of a digital text progresses through the text in a standardized manner: "they are prompted to make choices which will lead the reader through one of many predetermined narrative branches and unto one of many conclusions" (qtd. in Quijano 74).

As we have seen, when it comes to the plot, event sequences in *MetroLL* are interrupted by flashbacks, thus one may conclude that the game is nonlinear. The plot in *FalloutNV* depends on the player's interactions with the world and NPCs; hence one may observe an open world game as comprising of several different stories, but it must be noted that each of them, being played out in the present moment possess, sequential temporality, therefore making the game linear. In conclusion, "to understand whether a narrative can be considered linear or nonlinear, the important element is not how the game world is composed, but how the reader experiences the narrative order" (Ibid. 91).

Nevertheless, Quijano notes that the division, disjoining the narrative linearity from game design, is not to say that the design has no impact on the narrative. Adequate terminology and schema should be established for the situation where a game provides the consumer with manifold of outcomes inside one text, which poses a problem of player navigation in narrative space. Espen Aarseth put forward the basis for building a framework that can mark out the function of spatial traverse within game narratives (92).

Aarseth claims that, since the narrative in games is experienced through the digital space, a more appropriate term referring to matters of spatial representation would be *cursality*, even more so because the word linearity is used to portray how the reader takes in a narrative (44). Being two separate elements, cursality and linearity are still intertwined. Apart from being classified according to a particular ergodic degree and form of media, digital texts can also be

categorized in terms of spatial direction, i.e. cursality, and narrative sequential order. A set of four feasible configurations can thus be perceived: linear unicursal, linear multicursal, nonlinear unicursal and nonlinear multicursal texts (Quijano 93). Once more, cursality applies to the number of possible narratives that are configured by a set text, while the way a given narrative is experienced by the consumer in regard to temporality is referred to as linearity (Aarseth 43). Based on this categorization, one may qualify *FalloutNV* as a linear multicursal text because the player's freedom allows them to construct their proper narrative, which is depicted and experienced in a linear structure, and *MetroLL* as a nonlinear unicursal text since the temporal order of its opening scenes is disrupted and the digital space is explored in a predetermined sequence.

In spite of the fact that the player creates a linear chronology of their gameplay within the cobweb of the open world game's possibilities by means of their actions, in both cases, the player, gathering information from the game space, has to reconstruct the events of the main story in their head (Domsch 3), according to which the story does not manifest linearly in the game. So, we can conclude that there is still some ambiguity regarding the concept of linearity.

4. Narrator and player immersion in *Metro: Last Light* and *Fallout: New Vegas*

The notion of the narrator is a somewhat abstruse because it is linked to that of the focalizer. Genette's framework makes a distinction between the narratological concepts of mood and voice. The voice concerns the questions of *who* and *where*, while the mood refers to *distance* and *perspective*. Within diegesis, the narrator is located either on the inside or on the outside of the text, so one may distinguish between an intra-diegetic and an extra-diegetic narrator. Likewise, if the narrator participates in the story as a character, then they are called homo-diegetic, but if they do not, then they are referred to as hetero-diegetic. Furthermore, to

talk about perspective, or the point of view, Genette coined the term focalization within which he distinguishes between an internally focalized, externally focalized, and non-focalized narration. Put simply, internal focalization provides readers information about character's feelings and thoughts, while the external one offers a lens merely on character agency. The zero focalization corresponds to the omniscient narrator that does nor withhold any information about the story world (Genette 161-212).

Game theorist Rune Klevjer holds that in "navigable 3D environments, the main 'body' of the avatar, in the phenomenological sense, is not the controllable marionette itself (for example Mario or Lara), but the navigable virtual camera, which becomes an extension of the player's locomotive vision during play" (Zylinska 32).

Most narratologists adopt Genette's ideas and separate between the perceiving agent, the character who sees and experiences, and the narrative voice of the text. Each adhere to two distinct levels: "the narrator plays a role on the level of narration, while the focalizer is to be found on the level of narrative" (Thabet 15, 16). The player of a video game may be situated on both levels. Moreover, Bal adds an additional narrative level, that of the actor as the "object of narrating" and emphasizes that "the narrator, the focalizer" and "the actor" may "overlap in the shape of a single *person*" (12).

In the case of the post-apocalyptic games of the thesis' interest, since both are first person shooter games, the player, takes the part of the character (the actor), therefore must let on the same amount of knowledge as them in the game world. Also, just like the literary narrator who controls the text structure by language, the player controlling the game character sets off events triggering a response from the computer system. The narrative stops unfolding the moment the player stops pressing buttons, however, the amount of narratorial control varies depending on whether they are playing an open world game or a restricted one. Nevertheless,

since the player assumes roles on all three narrative levels, one may claim that the player is an internally focalized, intra as well as homo diegetic narrator.

While it is less problematic to identify the narrator in literature, since much of their presence is inferred from language cues, such as verb tenses and pronouns, the way in which the two is viewed in audiovisual media seems vastly different. In film, when there is no voice-over narrator, a telling authority responsible for the showing is still present according to Seymour Chatman:

> "This cinematic narrator should not be confused with the voice-over narrator. This narrator is the composite of a complex variety of communication devices on auditory and visual channels: for example, noise, voice, music, image (of actors, locations, or props), and cinematography (lighting color and camera [distance, angle, and movement]). From these communication devices, the cinematic narrator is synthesized by the viewer through a semiotic process" (qtd. in Thabet 24).

When there is no voice-over narrator in games, similar narrative devices are employed as to any other audiovisual medium. For example, in *MetroLL*, the main narrators who drive the entire narrative are the navigating characters, such as Anna or Pavel, who guide the players by telling them what actions they need to perform in order to progress in the game. Simultaneously, these characters often recount important parts of the story, as well as reveal some relevant motivations and secrets. On the other hand, while attempting to escape from the Reich territory at the beginning of the game, Artyom can come across notes written by NPCs. These notes disclose information about the situation between the existing enemy factions of the Moscow metro, as well as their personal fears of the upcoming war. In this way, the NPCs are not only narrators, but they are also emotionally charged characters. It can be said that in these moments there is a change in the focalizer, just like in the above-mentioned flashback with the Dark One, since Artyom no longer inhabits his perspective. Likewise, Artyom keeps

his own journal narrating and recapitulating the main story points together with providing the player with an insight in his emotions. Depending on the attachment the player managed to develop for Pavel, a communist who helps Artyom escape from the Reich, they can too feel the rage and disappointment that come with his betrayal. Finally, it is up to the player to make the sense out of all the input that they are provided with and assemble the story in their minds (Domsch 3), which is why, again, one must consider the spatial narrative cues.

In *FalloutNV*, there is Ronald Perlman, a voice-over narrator who voices the opening and closing narrations of the game. Just as it is the case in *MetroLL*, there are navigating characters and NPCs that function as the narrators. However, the player has more control over the narrative itself being a part of the open world design. Unlike, Artyom who is entirely non-verbal, apart from his journal narrations, the currier of *FalloutNV* is given an actual voice in the sense that they can choose what to say from a set of responses when interacting with other characters, thus controlling the quantity of information about the story revealed or even the direction the narration might take. There are also spatial cues like computer journals which take the narratorial role. They may be found in vaults that, among other, allow the player to discover that mutants are a consequence of human experimentation. Whether the player finds and reads the contents depends on their level of curiosity. Identically to *MetroLL*, the focalizer may change depending on who or what the player interacts with. The biggest difference between the two games is that *FalloutNV* does not use cut scenes like *MetroLL*, where Artyom becomes an external focalizer observing interactions between other characters. *FalloutNV* is exclusively internal in that respect.

Internal focalization in games is one of the most important elements for player immersion. The depth of involvement of the *FalloutNV* player differs significantly to that of the one playing *MetroLL* because it is dictated by the extent of cursality of each game. In *MetroLL*, the narrative is in the hands of the game system, meaning that the player cannot

change their course of action. After Pavel is caught by Reich soldiers again, Artyom wants to go back for him to return the favour. The player has no choice but to go through with the decision, even though they personally might not feel the moral obligation. Also, the way the player navigates the territory is directed by the structure of the metro itself. However, it cannot be said that the player is completely subordinated to the game's conditions because they can make certain decisions; they can choose whether to kill or knock out certain NPCs, whether they want to do so in a stealth or abrupt manner, and in what order.

As for *FalloutNV*, after the initial tutorial, the gameplay is left for the player to enact for themselves. First, they are not playing the game as preset character like Artyom, the player can name their character however they want to and can build the character in terms of personality, strengths, perks, etc. The player thus leaves a "personal mark" by projecting their respective attitudes and personalities onto the character they control (Thabet 20, 21). This identification of the player with his avatar allows for high level immersion. Also, the player may choose to be someone they are not. Even though the player is always the same, that does not mean that the character the player impersonates will behave in the same way every time the game is played. Apart from the game itself, one of the most obvious instances of player influence on the game world in *FalloutNV* are changes on the billboard, when the player enters the city of New Vegas. The billboard records the results of your agency. The first time you see it, it is empty, but as you meet and recruit the characters of the city to perform in the casino, the billboard slowly fills up with announcements for their shows. The player may even attend these performances as a spectator. When it comes to fighting the enemies, a combat system called V.A.T.S. allows for more precision when shooting that in turn amplifies the immersive experience because, again, gives the player more options in eliminating the target, and they need not rely solely on their skill.

Finally, one may then argue that the spatial narratives provide a greater and richer player experience than the sequence narratives. Apart from the freedom of choice, there are other factors that make the players feel as though they are in the game. These segments will be analysed as recurrent themes and salient part of the post-apocalyptic world-building.

5. Post-apocalyptic genre

The affiliation with the post-apocalyptic fiction unifies the games of *MetroLL* and *FalloutNV*, incorporating many of the notorious conventions of the genre: nuclear war, tattered bands of survivors, tore-down urban spaces, depleted wastelands, obsolete technologies, scavenging, ceaseless violence, extremist outlaws, mutations, and nostalgia for the lost civilization (Hicks 16). A cliched aftermath of a cataclysmic event prompted by the public consciousness for the possibility of global obliteration by atomic weapons after the World War II. The nuclear bomb, a crucial onset and organizing concept of almost every post-apocalyptic world recreated in literature or film, appears to be the least of threats produced by the entirety of nuclear infrastructure (Hurley 14).

Jessica Hurley remarks that the transformation of the globe and its destruction preceded the atomic bomb, the humanity does not rely on bombs to kill the world. For Hurley, the post-apocalyptic narratives intend to defamiliarize the present, making it seem as though the everyday world is far from nuclear and apocalyptic, while the most general elements of human daily lives, including the air transportation, highways, processed foods, degraded environments, and species extinction, are saturated with underlying patterns of nuclearism, an ongoing apocalypse (10).

Further, James Berger argues that the world can create apocalyptic narratives only because the decline of modernity had already occurred. The world had already had an

opportunity to visualise in "a strange prospective retrospect" what the outcome of an end may be like, thus the post-apocalyptic and dystopian fiction may seldom reproduce the last historical events that have led to a global disaster (qtd. in Hicks 21).

Moreover, with an aim to inspect a variety of pressing legislative, environmental, economic, and cultural issues, many prominent authors from all over the world took up the same genre conventions, which led Berger to conclude that the post-apocalyptic genre serves as an effective critical mechanism :

> "Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic representations serve varied psychological and political purposes. Most prevalently, they put forward a total critique of any existing social order. From the Book of Revelation's condemnation of Babylon, through the millenarian movements of the Middle Ages, to more recent apocalyptic thinking—both religious and secular—visions of the end and its aftermath emphasize that no social reform can cure the world's diseases. Every structure of the old world is infected, and only an absolute, purifying cataclysm can make possible an utterly new, perfected world" (qtd. in Hicks 24).

As many modernists contend, it may be said that the premonition of an ending, inferred from the narratives of modernity, is bygone viable, i.e., it "no longer secures the dream of the future, and the idea of apocalypse is widely associated in these works not with revelation and renewal but with disaster and a sense of exhaustion with the model itself" (Heffernan 7). Historical, national and human metanarratives that Teresa Heffernan explores in her book *The Post-Apocalyptic Culture*, reflect the central idea of the apocalyptic myth which entails an imagined progress that is played out in the future and that will make the present meaningful. For an end to transition into a revelatory beginning, the apocalyptic imagination embraces the visions of cataclysm and redemption. However, postmodern thought breaks from these

traditional apocalyptic metanarratives by developing a postapocalyptic sensibility marked by a feeling that the end is already here. In other words, postmodernism rejects the apocalyptic notion that with the end comes revelation, consequently denying or problematizing the idea of resolution. Just as postmodernism refuses modern narratives about the progress of history and humankind due to postwar distrust, comparably, post-apocalypse discards the idea of improvement and a purposeful ending held by the traditional apocalyptic thought (Stifflemire 180-208).

Having stated different perspectives about the origins and understandings of the post-apocalyptic genre, the thesis may move onto defining the content and key formal elements of the post-apocalyptic texts relevant for the analysis of the worlds of *MetroLL* and *FalloutNV* games. Moreover, with the post-apocalyptic setting, appearing as a proliferating playground for sociopolitical critique, allusions and intertextuality, an attempt will be made to present how such remarkably abundant and poignant story worlds are created.

6. World-building

Since the game avatar internalizes the navigable virtual camera, "the artificial, laboratory-like aspect of the game environment is therefore getting ever closer to the experience one has in the world outside the game" and "life can thus be redescribed as an ongoing process of navigating between cinema and photography, with image-making becoming a mode of world-making, for gamers and non-gamers alike" (Zylinska 32, 36).

Planells de la Maza proposes a division between two major notions – *storytelling* and *world-building*. As suggested earlier, story is traditionally conceived of as something made from a plot set in a fictional world, but in games the notion of storytelling also refers to *ludofictional* narratives emerging from play. Fictional world borders are expanded by players'

interactions with the world and by the way in which game directives, starting points, actions, events, frictions, surroundings, and goals converge within a high-powered system (qtd. in Paterson et al. 19). Eddie Paterson et al. claim that the ludofictional elements serve as the foundation for plausible game worlds which are a combination of the digital game world and the physical world of reality. Thus, world-building may be understood as a complex "*ingredient* of narrative" in an imagined universe of video games (qtd. in Paterson et al. 19).

Tobias Heussner et al. explain that world-building includes the unfolding of "details of the world where a story takes place, including its history/geography, peoples/races, governments, science/technology, religions, and languages" (qtd. in Paterson et al. 19). Paterson et al. point out that world-building is affected by game aspects that resurface actively "during the play experience, including environmental storytelling, audio-visual design; game mechanics, such as combat or movement; camera point-of-view (POV); and interactions with player avatars, AI, and NPCs" (19). As aforesaid, since games are perceived as simulations modelling the underlying logic of the real world, in order to fully grasp this medium, one should consider their narrative architecture, i.e. their spatial aspect, as one of the world-building elements.

Game designers who do not want to impose a linear order in which a player should navigate the game space, i.e. create a restricted world in a game, face a challenge in finding new ways to provide elevated narrativity within the gaming spaces they are attempting to extend. Unlike restricted world games which employ external factors like cut scenes, open world ones integrate stories within the playing experience itself. So, one may say that open world spaces possess a rich narrative potential because of "the ability […] to evoke the mental representation that we call story" (Ryan, qtd. in Domsch 105). While experiencing computerized spaces, players inscribe their own narratives into them, as they perform them through motion and interaction. Therefore, these spaces are said to evoke *spatial narratives* in

contrast to *sequence narratives* that unfold as a sequence of events on a temporal axis (Domsch 104, 105). This leads to the greatest difference between the two types of game design; one privileges plot development while the other focuses on the spatial exploration (Jenkins, qtd. in Domsch 105). Nevertheless, even though the narrativity of a restricted world game is obvious due to players being handed the story via chronologically arranged cut scenes, they too use or rather reinforce their stories with the methods of spatial narratives. Spatial elements pertaining to the postapocalyptic genre in *MetroLL* contribute to the game world's credibility and player immersion.

6.1. Spatial post-apocalyptic narrative in *Metro: Last Light* and *Fallout: New Vegas*

For the analysis of spatial narrative within the postapocalyptic genre, it is necessary to refer to Henry Jenkins who lists four methods of environmental storytelling by which prerequisites for an immersive narrative experience are created: "spatial stories can evoke pre-existing narrative associations; they can provide a staging ground where narrative events are enacted; they may embed narrative information within their mise-en-scene; or they provide resources for emergent narratives" (Jenkins, qtd. in Domsch 106).

According to Jenkins, one of the methods of environmental storytelling are evocative spaces. They are named as such because they evoke or remind players of spaces that they may have already seen in films, read about in books, or experienced through other games. Being reminiscent of already existing narratives, one may claim that game spaces naturally integrate the quality of narrativity (Domsch 106). So, both *MetroLL* and *FalloutNV* contain narrativity because they call to mind all of the post-apocalyptic narratives that players have already encountered through other media. Therefore, as explained by Jenkins, games are able to provide

concrete “shape to our memories and imaginings of the storyworld, creating an immersive environment we can wander through and interact with” (qtd. in Domsch 106).

Both *MetroLL* and *FalloutNV* game spaces recall the same fictional, post-atomic bomb landscape of the wasteland. While *MetroLL* presents the devastated city of the Russian Moscow, the game of *FalloutNV* features the barren land of the Mojave Desert encompassing the American cities of California, Nevada, and Arizona. Post-apocalyptic wastelands, being characterized by an absence of the sense of place, ruins, and vastness, are conceived of as spaces devoid of fixed meanings. Because the world they were once a part of no longer exists, signs of culture and remnants of physical objects, resting in the imagined wasteland spaces, lose the significance they used to possess. The fact that wastelands lack fixed meanings, suggests that there is a potential for creating “a plurality of narratives” or, in other words, an overabundance of temporal and spatial possibilities. The wasteland of *FalloutNV* Mojave Desert may be thought of as laden with possibility, all the more so because, as an open-world game, it offers a play-out of different iterations of a story (Mukherjee 168-174).

Moreover, apart from a landscape, there are particular objects that makeup the game space for which can be said that they evoke, or rather reference elements of the post-apocalyptic reality/narrative. For instance, the “M42 Fat Man” is a *FalloutNV* weapon, a nuclear catapult referencing the code name of the nuclear bomb dropped on Nagasaki by the US. The Vault experiments may serve as reference for the human experiments conducted under the direction of Josef Mengele during the war. Furthermore, the buildings in the towns of the Mojave Desert resemble the ones players can pass by in real life. Most of the casinos, saloons, and road signs, such as the Buffalo Bill’s Resort and Casino, Pioneer saloon, and Las Vegas neon sign, may be recognized by the players since they have already been referenced by various Hollywood films. Also, the game’s soundtrack, consisting mainly of jazz music, is highly connotative of the American West in the pre-war period, consequently enticing a feeling of nostalgia for better

times. Unlike *FalloutNV*, *MetroLL* does not rely so much on the game space for storytelling, yet players can still find visual clues contributing to the narrative. For example, after saving Pavel, the player may explore the communist parts of the metro and find actual books of the *Metro* series itself.

Visual clues are another way in which games create narratively evocative spaces. In the games that rely on environmental storytelling, a sequence narrative is revealed through a temporal and causal relationship that is pieced together by players who "read the space", i.e. look for spatial signs with narrative potential. There are spatial signs that are key to understanding the main story, but there are also those that simply add more depth to it. So, in the words of Worch and Smith, it is up to the player to "associate disparate elements and "interpret [them] as a meaningful whole" (qtd. in Domsch 109). Domsch further clarifies that games which rely on the "observable traces" in space to create a storyline reflect the model of the detective fiction (109). "It is the task of the detective (and the reader as well) to correctly read these spaces for the relevant signs", since spaces are created for the purpose of giving meaning to a game (109).

Environmental storytelling depends, thus, on embedded narratives. Embedded narratives refer to any type of explicit narrative fragments, relevant for the game's storyworld, that players stumble upon while exploring the game space. "These narratives can be either included in the conversations that the player has with nonplayer characters (NPC), or in artefacts that the player discovers, such as diaries, audio- and video logs, answering-machine messages, letters, scrolls, books, etc." (Domsch 113).

Most of the back story of *FalloutNV* relies on visual clues and embedded narratives. Being distributed spatially, visual signs in *FalloutNV* are not encountered chronologically by the player, which is the main reason why open-world games are viewed as non-linear narratives. Even if the player discovers the clues, they can still choose whether they will interact

with them or not. Nevertheless, "by implying that they are the traces of past events, these signs prompt the player to perform an indexical operation, concluding the past events and their correct sequence out of them" (Domsch 109).

The introductory scene of *FalloutNV* provides the player with essential clues for the main story. The game starts with a man named Benny shooting a currier (the player) over a platinum chip. The game thus entices the player to look for Benny, to return the chip or take revenge. As they do so, wandering from one place to another, interacting with characters and objects, the player discovers that their feud with Benny is merely a fragment of a much larger storyline. But it is up to the player to decide whether they will simply follow the main story or broaden it by delving deeper into the details of the storyworld, or neither. The amount of information gathered by the player will shape their overall experience of the game as many of them are created to leave a profound emotional impact on the player. For example, in the NCR[4] side quest "I don't hurt anymore", the player is expected to find out what happened to Corporal Betsy, a First Recon sniper, stationed with the rest of Alpha Team at the NCR Army's headquarters at Camp McCarran, and convince her to seek professional help. If the player is interested in her story, they will be inclined to act. By avoiding such quests, players deprive themselves of additional layers of the games' story.

Another important part of spatial narratives is the idea of enacted narratives or event triggers. "An event trigger is an action performed by a player that triggers a narratively relevant event that would not have occurred or started without this action", and it "works best (most immersively) when the event trigger is not noticed as such" (Domsch 115). So, everything that the player does within the game space may have consequences for the narrative. That is to say, they can change the course of the story. In *MetroLL*, they do so unknowingly. The so called

[4] The New California Republic (NCR) is a post-War federal republic founded in New California in 2189, comprised at its peak of five contiguous states located in southern California, with additional territorial holdings in northern California, Oregon and Nevada ("Fallout Wiki").

"bad" ending, the one where Artyom dies, is triggered depending on the number of characters the player kills. Whereas in *FalloutNV*, which of the six possible endings a player may get depends on many things: factions the player sides with, quests they take, whom they kill, etc.

6.1.1. Post-apocalyptic atmosphere in *Metro: Last Light* and *Fallout: New Vegas*

In video games, the graphics, and the narrative, consisting mainly of theme, setting and story, work together to create a sense of deep involvement during the playing experience. According to Ribeiro et al., the notion of 'game atmosphere' understands "the emerging subjective experience of a player caused by the strong audiovisual thematic cohesion (i.e., the harmonic fit of sounds and graphics to a shared theme) of video game elements" (1). By sharing the post-apocalyptic theme, the sensory phenomena in the worlds of *MetroLL* and *FalloutNV* are, to a degree, similarly transmitted, creating the appropriate mood necessary for player immersion.

Apart from being evocative of post-apocalyptic narratives, the landscape of the wasteland strongly affects the games' atmosphere. For Marc Augé, while there are places that can be observed anthropologically in terms of "identity, relations and history", there are also some that cannot, hence they are called "non-places". Since non-places do not necessarily carry a specific identity or definition, they may be perceived as zones filled with myriad of possible meanings (87). Moreover, Augé views non-places as spaces of transportation and transitoriness where people become anonymous and lonely (94). Such non-places are "the ones we inhabit when we are driving down the motorway, wandering through the supermarket or sitting in an airport lounge waiting for the next flight to London or Marseille" (96). However alienating these places without meaning may be, they seem to, paradoxically, also feel like home, precisely because they are so generic. Since malls, airports and supermarkets are universal to all countries, for foreigners they carry a sense of familiarity as opposed to the rest of the

culturally coloured places of a country (108). Serving as a metaphor for social decay and ruin in the video games, as well as being stripped from the meanings it once carried, the wasteland itself may be seen as a non-place. For the player, a lone traveller, the wasteland is merely a transportational landscape which they must traverse to get to other places. Nevertheless, both *MetroLL* and *FalloutNV* feature the formerly mentioned non-places like hotels, motorways, shopping malls, or whatever is left of them, so that every player, regardless of their background, can relate to the game space.

Besides, according to P. C. Larlinmuani, the post-apocalyptic world as a whole may be understood in terms of liminality. The concept of liminality was initially implemented by Arnold van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage* (1909) to describe the transitional stage in the coming-of-age rituals. Young children are separated from the community in order to undergo a series of initiation rituals in isolation. The rituals are supposed to provoke extreme suffering so that the novice may reach a transcendental state necessary for establishing a connexion with the spiritual world. After entering the liminal zone, the ritual subject becomes one of the adults, a part of the cultural and civilized world. Since the entire process is understood as a rebirth, the transitional stage may be viewed as an ambivalent space for identity reinvention. Likewise, the post-apocalyptic world is that of transition and disorientation, a period between the old and the new, a world without determined social structures or cultural norms filled with alienated individuals (Lalrinmuani 23). The liminal essence of the game world in *MetroLL* and *FalloutNV* prompts a pervading forlorn mood, filling players with a sense of uncertainty.

Aside from the chronotropic eerie setting, the games amplify their post-apocalyptic atmospheric narrative with other visual cues, as well as auditory stimuli. With the intention of horrifying the player, *MetroLL* uses a dark colour palette and lighting. To combat the absence of light, the only thing Artyom can rely on to tread through the darkness is a lighter and a manually rechargeable flashlight. Heavy realism was achieved by blood splatter, rain drops,

cracked glass and flies on the gas mask that the player needs to keep wiping off in order to improve the visibility to combat an enemy. Moreover, the player experiences Artyom's paranoia by way of hallucinations. There are many instances in the game where the remaining skeletons come to life, becoming a witness to their last dying moments, the player learns more about the game world's past. These hallucinations are not just visual. For example, the player can hear the protagonists mother saying "Artyom, is that you?" if they touch the phone in the sewage system. Not only does the game offer incredible visual effects, but it also delivers intensely realistic auditory sensations. Apart from the ambient music constantly building tension, whether it is played by other characters or cut scenes, the player is able to hear every object inhabiting the game space, such as the rustling of leaves, creaking of metal fittings, clapping of creatures' wings, or simply thunder. Since everything appears and sounds alive, the player inevitably develops a powerful connection with the storyworld.

Being an open-world RPG, *FalloutNV* does not offer as equally graphic and vivid gaming experience, however, there are other ways in which the game builds a credible atmospheric environment. Besides the nostalgic music, here, player immersion is generated by the possibility of influencing the way the playing character looks and behaves like or by other characters acknowledging their presence and having something to say to them as they visit the buildings. By roaming across the empty wasteland, the player can acquire a feeling of journey or adventure that they perhaps cannot experience in real life. The player may also observe dynamic weather, lighting tweaks and luminosity changes suitable for a post-nuclear desert climate, as well as the accompanying rainstorm sounds. Even though there are no sounds suggesting looming threats like in *MetroLL*, the feelings of pressure and stress lie precisely in the not knowing of when, what or how many enemies the player must tackle.

6.2. Post-apocalyptic themes in *Metro: Last Light* and *Fallout: New Vegas*

6.2.1. Post-apocalyptic carnival of *Metro: Last Light* and *Fallout: New Vegas*

Since both games present rich post-apocalyptic narratives, it is worth exploring the way in which they incorporate the foundations of the corrupt and dysfunctional life. The post-apocalyptic genre concerns itself with the imagined reality in the absence of hope and restored order in the apocalyptic convention. Even if a future reestablishment of order might take place, the post-apocalyptic world persists in the transitional gap between organized states. Albeit this world may be seen as a postmodern assemblage, regenerating itself from pieces of the old world, it is also to an extent a carnivalesque world described by a Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* (1984). According to Bret Stifflemire, Bakhtin's theory stipulates that the authoritative figures sustain their power by occasionally allowing submissive groups to celebrate in a break from the social order and rules. The carnivalesque originates from festivals and rituals of the carnival in which social hierarchy is inverted by the fool reigning over the king for the sake of comic relief. By allowing this occasional revelry, the king can keep the subservient masses voluntarily subjected the rest of the time. In modern societies, one of the ways in which this type of carnivalesque outlet plays out is through parody in media (9, 10).

Even though the post-apocalyptic genre does not use the notion of the carnivalesque in terms of the ideological motives proposed by Bakhtin, the carnival square may be reflected in the post-apocalyptic entropic reality. "The interim, post-apocalyptic dilation is a carnivalesque period in which vertical social hierarchies have been made horizontal, cultural norms have been abandoned, and the order of the day is disorder" (Stifflemire 10).

Apart from representing a freedom from the social norms, the carnivalesque simultaneously puts the institutionalized structures in question. It becomes a way of stating objection against dominant political and social systems. The juxtaposition of emancipation and equality of the carnivalesque world with the maltreatment and inequality experienced by inferior classes in reality, incorporated into the carnivalesque tropes of political criticism, allowed popular culture texts to partake in a discussion about the governing system (Stifflemire 212, 213).

Just like any other medium, video games are as equally capable of encouraging complex audience engagement, not only as passive observers but also as active participants. Irrespective of the means of expression, all post-apocalyptic worlds appear to warn against the potential aftermath of rampant nuclear proliferation, social disparity, and climate change. Players of the post-apocalyptic games are invited to recognize and distance from the replicated vestiges of the present world detached from their present meanings. *MetroLL* and *FalloutNV,* respectively, make political and social statements within their post-apocalyptic worlds through creating violent and opposing factions and through the presentation of the Other.

Having failed to restore the government leadership after the nuclear catastrophe, the Central Metro Command fell apart, resulting in the creation of smaller organizations taking control of various parts of the underground Moscow metro. Artyom is one of the Rangers (or the Order), a neutral military faction working with the militia of Polis, the largest station and centre of the metro. Their objective is to rebuild civilization and ensure the safety of Polis and metro residents. The discovery of the D6 bunker becomes the main point of contention between Polis and other factions of the metro: Hansa, Fourth Reich, and Red Line. To avoid war, Polis wants to share the findings and keep the harmony by reaching an agreement with a peace conference at Polis. However, eager to expand their bases, Red Line tries to take D6 by force. Prior to the discovery of D6, both Red Line and Fourth Reich conducted minor aggressions for

territory expansion, cultivating their ultimate aim to reunite all of metro, one under the communist directive and the other under the nazi one. Hansa, on the other hand, ensures safe trading within the metro lines, although possessing a strong military force, their only threat are bandits (Derochebrune). Within such uncertain political conditions, rebellious groups take over. From the start the player is aware of the fact that everyone is left to fend for themselves and will do anything just to survive. Thus, the sediment of the former society, thieves and crooks, establish power through violence and fraud. With Pavel, the player sees that people have lost integrity, as well as with Korbut, a manipulative and cruel head of intelligence of the Red Line, who is responsible for the creation of the virus, the murder of Moskvin's brother, as well as the metro's destruction. These factions are shown using the same rouge tactics used by the Soviets and Nazis during WWII; while the Red Line spreads propaganda and executes disobedient traitors, the Reich maintains a concentration camp for enemy prisoners. The only hope for the habitants of metro is incarnated by the figure of Colonel Miller, the commander of Spartans, the last honourable representative of order and morality, meritable of the position.

The politico-societal situation in *FalloutNV* resembles that of *MetroLL* with multiple organizations attempting to assume control. The New California Republic is the biggest nation to ascend after the Great War that tries to implement the values of the past world. Unlike *MetroLL*'s Rangers, the NCR is not exactly humanitarian and peace-making. While pursuing an imperialistic expansion by force of arms over the West, they fail to protect and help the communities living on their territory and whom they heavily tax. Also, their high command consists of corrupt politicians and war criminals that plot against each other. As for the Caesar's Legion, it is a totalitarian dictatorship built on the enslavement of tribal societies. The Legion wants to create a new autocratic empire by conquering the territory of the NCR. Their activity is brutal and ruthless, crucifying anyone that opposes the regime. In addition, there is a mysterious ruler of New Vegas, Mr. House, who was able to predict the nuclear war and save

the city of Las Vegas. To ensure his own survival, he wired his brain to a supercomputer, placing his body in a li-support device. However, the software holding him alive has downgraded, and to reinforce the entire system he needs the platinum chip that the player-currier was supposed to carry over but was shot in the process. Although it may seem like his main concern is to preserve the human species, he is in fact a kleptocratic and capitalistic tyrant, ready to do anything to inaugurate his power. So, none of these major groups appear appealing enough for the player to be a part of. But this is exactly what a post-apocalyptic world entails, an absence of clear lines between good and evil. Even the player, as the courier, is by default forced to live by those obscure post-apocalyptic rules, killing others for money or because someone else wants revenge.

The governmental situations of both *MetroLL* and *FalloutNV* universe imply consistency, considering that in either fiction or reality, to maintain their position of power, the wealthy create systems by dubious means which allow them to abuse the poor. The supposed law enforcement, working for the corrupted system, pretending to effectuate change, are prepared to abandon their principles the moment an opportunity arises. Looking from today's perspective, many things remain the same, as greed drives the world. Since "the war never changes", the only thing societies can count on is impulse, instinct, and survival.

6.2.2. Transhuman as the Other in *Metro: Last Light* and *Fallout: New Vegas*

Regarding the "Other", although the concept originated from phenomenology, it was taken up by Edward Said to explain the relationship between the West and the Orient. Said asserts that "for Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them")" (43). So, it is a rather artificial division of people because of false

images and ideals based on the variations of culture and experience over a wide geographical area.

MetroLL overtly shows people's unfounded fear of something that is different and unknown, which eventually culminates in animosity and the releasing of the missiles to eliminate the Dark Ones. The Dark Ones are human descendants who survived the nuclear catastrophe and were able to physically adapt to the living conditions and radiation on the surface. As the story progresses, it becomes clear that they are not bloodthirsty monsters like the metro citizens believe. In the form of a flashback, the player is shown a moment in Artyom's past when he opens the metro's main entrance to glance at the surface, and as he does so, he is attacked but one of the Dark Ones appears and saves his life. Their benevolent nature is further suggested with a little Dark One, seemingly the last survivor of the species. Apart from being the only person that the little Dark One communicates with, the player is bound to grow fond of the character as he helps Artyom fight against enemies, draws away monsters, gives him an oxygen pod, and wears human clothes. The character of the little Dark One is used to provoke sympathy in players, an emotion that the game achieves by other means as well. In a fight with the mutated bear, the player realizes that she is only trying to defend her cubs from a potential threat and does not really want to hurt Artyom. The game constantly wants to display how nothing is the way it seems and toys with the players' feelings to create a memorable experience.

On the other hand, *FalloutNV* features many variations of the biologically enhanced human form. Super Mutants, a genetically engineered race of monstruous looking beings, override humans in size and strength. Due to their mutation, they tend to lack intelligence and exhibit cannibalistic behaviour. There is also an elite caste of Super Mutants, The Nightkin, who are not intellectually impaired but suffer from schizophrenia because of "Stealth Boys", a device that renders the user invisible for a short time. Some of the mutants formed their own

communities and are hostile to humans, but there are others that live alongside them in colonies across the wasteland. Because of their reputation and appearance, some of the mutants were subject to capture, torture, as well as anti-mutant campaigns initiated by politicians to gain votes. Another mutated human type are ghouls who have acquired their zombie-like appearance due to intense radiation exposure. Some were able to keep their humanity but are still discriminated because of the others that have fallen into a state of mania and turned feral.

This transhumanistic philosophy is a common controlling idea of post-apocalyptic narratives that favour the enhancement of the human mind and body via technology with the intention of achieving a new level of existence. The concept of the Other portrayed through persons or entities subsisting in beyond human-like states such as, the Dark Ones, ghouls, Super Mutants or The Nightkin, addresses a myriad of questions relating to justice, ethics, social systems, intellect, and trans-species cohabitation, offering players fertile ground for reflection.

6.2.3. Moral ambivalence in *Metro: Last Light* and *Fallout: New Vegas*

The post-apocalyptic worlds are marked by a constant presence of death as conditioned by the setting. Most video games are all about depicting death with detailed graphics and situating survival as the main objective of existence, although vanquishing death in such a place may seem meaningless given the fact that there appears to be no reason to continue living. The concept of survival leads players to reevaluate their morality in terms of pulling the trigger when another's elimination is requisite for keeping oneself alive. The moral relativism in video games often raises discussions about the ways in which players' moral values affect their gameplay and whether a game can leave consequences for the moral behaviours of players in the real world. Neveretheless, the aim of this thesis is to present how the moral ambivalence is incorporated in the worlds of *MetroLL* and *FalloutNV*.

Reasons why players empathize with game characters vary, but Hartmann believes that "human users tend to automatically perceive even simple animations as something social". A distinctive feature of human condition is to attribute social meanings to non-social stimuli, based on cues which indicate the presence of agency or emotion, thus anthropomorphizing the non-living. Automatic social responses in players are provoked by "eye-gazing, natural voice tones, biological motion, displays of natural facial activity and emotions, and displays of intelligence", resulting in players intuitively feeling as though the characters they interact with have a "mind of their own". According to Hartmann's MoDViG, players of violent video games are able to take guiltless pleasure in computer generated violence since such games import ways to disengage the players from violent actions. Players whose gameplay is contingent on their moral principles outside the game world struggle to find disengagement markers to justify wrongful but necessary actions, whereas those who are trained to search for them have no issues performing immoral acts for "the greater good". Therefore, the extent to which the player identifies with game world will be reflected in the way they make ethical decisions ("Moral Disengagement").

Contrary to *FalloutNV*, *MetroLL* is a goal-oriented game, allowing players to accomplish the intent of "saving humanity" in both endings. Humanity salvation is, more often than not, viewed as a noble sentiment and a universal moral principle as well as a biologically inherent trait. However, the player may or may not be inclined to commit morally dubious transgressions whilst saving the metro. While the player of *MetroLL* might not feel remorse for the killing of enemy soldiers or mutant animals due to accounted for cues, some parts of the game plot may trigger the player's reflective thinking. Instead of employing disengagement devices that help justify violence, the game sets the player before violent choices where, for example, Artyom can decide whether to release the prisoners from the Reich's concentration camp or to take revenge on Pavel by killing him for the betrayal.

Moreover, whether the game ends with Artyom being forgiven for his past or Artyom sacrificing himself to save the metro, depends on the player doing the "right" thing. Karma points are usually earned by performing kind acts, sparing lives, being stealthy, finding hiding spots, listening to other characters, exploring the map, etc. However, there is no way of telling how the reward system really works, but the game does suggest positive and negative acts through audio-visual effects. There are light blue flashes, whispers or dripping water sounds when Artyom earns a moral point, whereas when he loses one, the screen turns dark and sinister echoes can be heard ("Metro Wiki").

For the moral choices to be meaningful in games, they should be fairly deliberate and leave significant consequences. As an RPG, *FalloutNV* offers players thoughtful moral quandaries in the forms of quests, together with many paths to resolve them. In this game, karma mechanics joins reputation. While the courier can gain fame or infamy, karma can be both earned or lost. In the same vein as *MetroLL*, *FalloutNV* provides positive or ominous sounds to indicate karma gain or loss. While the player is unaware of the severity of their actions as Artyom, in *FalloutNV*, the player knows the exact number of attributed karma points. For each karma level, the player obtains a title, for example, on level 1, depending on their karma score, they are titled either as *Samaritan*, *Drifter* or *Grifter*. Karma is gained in the situations where the player kills feral ghouls or any evil characters, declining rewards for completing quests, freeing the prisoners of Vault 3, not crucifying Benny at the Fort, and so forth ("Fallout Wiki"). There are some decisions that can possibly cause strong subjective discomfort for the player. For instance, the Vault 34 presents a classic trope of sacrificing the few for the many. The vault has undergone substantial interior damage, leading to a radioactive leak that turned the majority of the inhabitants into ghouls, and polluted the water source for the nearby farms. After opening the vault and discovering that in an unreachable and closed-off part of the vault there is still a living family. The player faces two options: shut down the

reactor saving the farms, consequently writing a death sentence for the family, or reroute the power so that the family can escape but destroy the farm. Another example is deciding the fate of New Vegas. Near the game's end, players are given the choice to decide who will take control over the wasteland, Mr. House, the Caesar's Legion, or the NCR. Each of them is far from perfect, resulting in different speed of progression towards civilisation, hence making the resolution very difficult. Although Mr. House seems to be the best option for the fastest progression, siding with him means damning the inhabitants with dictatorship. The NCR is a mediocre and moderately speedy option for getting closer to the traditional America, but according to the numerous flaws presented earlier, the player may not be so inclined to choose them. Finally, the least appealing choice is the Caesar's Legion that, on top of being utterly evil, will take the longest time to bring the wasteland back to the present-day America. There is also a fourth option of independence, however, that requires getting everyone out of the picture by any means necessary.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, the aim of this thesis was to demonstrate how the post-apocalyptic narrative is built through the video game specific quality of interactivity and narratological elements of the story and world-building characteristic of the post-apocalyptic genre. Fictitious events forming a story unfold within a complex game space, where the post-apocalyptic setting and graphics set a foundation for an engaging atmosphere in which some of the most recognizable post-apocalyptic themes, such as the disruption of authority, emergence of new species and survival, attach layers and depth for a complete narrative.

While adhering to the conventional narrative structure, consisting of a story which relates sequences of events representing a plot, video games employ complex strategies to create intricate fictional worlds that demand more than the pure moving of the eyes and page

turning. How games' stories are told depends on player performance, each player being different from the other, having the freedom to choose what to interact with or which quest to take, the story can never be the same.

As it has been shown, different world designs yield different narrative outcomes. How much a player learns about the game world is dictated by limitations imposed by game designers. Which is why a linear and an open world game, within the post-apocalyptic genre, were chosen for the analysis, with one favouring the plot over player freedom and vice versa. *FalloutNV* provides a life-like environment for players to explore, where they may decide whether to follow the main storyline or veer off it to follow their own. In such games, the game space plays a vital role for the immersion of players into the game's content and setting, even if they are not sticking to a preset path. On the other hand, although *MetroLL* restricts players in terms of choice, they still have the option to read the game space and adjoin layers to the story.

Regardless of the game structure, what is identical to both MetroLL and FalloutNV is the wasteland of ruinous buildings which was viewed in terms of Augé's concept of the "non-places" that serves both as a meaningless area of transportation and as centres for developing relatable associations (94, 108). Essentially lacking identity, non-places bring about the idea of "liminality" (Gennep 53). Liminality of the post-apocalyptic world of both games replicates the transitional state within the process of rebirth inherent to rituals (Lalrinmuani 23).

Both *MetroLL* and *FalloutNV* use identifiable post-apocalyptic tropes to set a dark and heavy mood of a prospective reality in which players can physically transport to. Post-apocalyptic themes, introduced by the games, serve as controlling ideas which tempt players to reconsider existing environmental, political, cultural, and social issues. The politico-social structures represented in the *MetroLL* and *FalloutNV* reflect Bakhtin's "carnivalesque" absence of government and efforts for establishing a new order (10). Their radioactive setting generates

genetically mutated characters who, even in a post-apocalyptic world, live rejected from the rest, based on their unfamiliarity and appearance which constitute the main premise of Said's notion of the "Other" (43). Morally ambiguous choices that the games offer not only simulate a survivalist mode integral to every post-apocalyptic setting, but also propel player's decision making that impacts the course of the games' respective stories.

Ultimately, the narrative architecture of these post-apocalyptic games hyperbolically reflects back the world's fears and problems as a response to a possible cataclysmic future which is actually more unpleasant than the one its currently living in.

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9. Summary

Post-apocalyptic Narrative of *Metro: Last Light* and *Fallout: New Vegas*

This thesis investigates the narrative development in video games within the post-apocalyptic genre on the example of *Metro: Last Light* and *Fallout: New Vegas*. It begins with explaining traditional narrative elements and how they are assimilated into the video game mechanics, displaying narrative similarities as well as differences of the games in question according to their game design type. After calling attention to the purpose of the game space for the environmental storytelling and player immersion, the thesis will turn to post-apocalyptic themes featured in *Metro: Last Light* and *Fallout: New Vegas,* which serve as a political and cultural critique of modern civilization.

Keywords: *video games, narrative, post-apocalypse, Metro, Fallout*

10. Sažetak

Post-apokaliptični narativ u Metro: Last Light i Fallout: New Vegas

Ovaj diplomski rad istražuje razvoj narativa u video igrama unutar post-apokaliptičnog žanra na primjeru igara *Metro: Last Light* i *Fallout: New Vegas*. Rad započinje objašnjavanjem tradicionalnih narativnih elemenata i načina na koji se asimiliraju u mehaniku videoigara, prikazujući narativne sličnosti kao i razlike dotičnih igara prema njihovom tipu dizajna. Nakon skretanja pozornosti na važnost prostora u igri za pripovijedanje priče i uranjanje igrača u svijet igre, rad će nastaviti analizirati post-apokaliptične teme prikazane u objema video igrama, koje služe kao politička i kulturološka kritika moderne civilizacije.

Ključne riječi: *video igre, narativ, post-apokalipsa, Metro, Fallout*