Games as Landscape

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This is my claim: games are a form of landscape. I'll admit that this isn't the gospel truth, exactly, but it's an extremely productive metaphor. Games are constructed spaces, built to support satisfying human choice and human interaction. They are a *space*, under a certain abstracted, but useful notion of space.

The academic study of games, particularly the study of computer games, often relies on a different metaphor: an assimilation of games to texts. I mean here "text" in the modern sense, which includes written texts, movies, constructed images, and the rest. Importantly, I include interactive texts, like Wikipedia. Texts are meant to be "read" - their primary existence is as a set of symbols, referring elsewhere. And when we assimilate games as a sub-form of text, then games inherit our ideas of what texts are *for:* texts are there to communicate, to inform, to express emotions, to excite the imagination. I freely grant that games can do all these things. I simply things that they do many other things, things that textual theories tend to ellide. An over-reliance on the text-metaphor suppresses attention to those functions of games that are really unique, and really interesting.

What I'm particularly interested in is the way game designers shape game-rules to shape the challenges, and the space of choices for game-players. I am going to suggest that, if we must borrow from another field, we might do well to borrow from the study of the build environment, including architecture and urban planning. Landscape designers and game designers face a very similar challenge - designing constraints and incentives that can structure the choices of human beings, without excessively constraining their freedom. To put it bluntly, game designers make rules, and landscape designers make walls, and both often want to condition choice, without destroying it. To put it even more bluntly, typically a creator of a text creates a narrative for a reader to experience, where landscape and game designers create a space for players to, conducive for the players to create their own narrative.

Some examples of the text metaphor

Let me run through a few recent examples of philosophers and game studies folks that are engaged in the text-metaphor.

First, James Paul Gee argues that video games are now an art form precisely because they have come to "marry an abstract rule system about shapes, movements, and combinations with story elements."[1] Gee seems to think that it is the *referential* nature of video games that makes them art. Early abstract video games, like *Tetris* and *Pong* couldn't be art precisely because the elements didn't represent sufficiently to support a story. "Humans find story elements profoundly meaningful and are at a loss when they cannot see the world in terms of such elements," says Gee.[2]

Grant Tavinor, in his book *The Art of Videogames,* argues that videogames are art precisely because they are a form of fiction. Says Tavinor[3], and "videogames just are *representational artifacts* that depict situations with an imagined existence only, and that they rely on our cognitive abilities to imagine such things.[italics mine]."[4] For Tavinor, video games are a subvariety of fiction - they are interactive fiction. The interactivity is simply a new technique to achieve the traditional goals of fictions. Says Tavinor, interactivity functions primarily to increase identification with the characters and so increase the emotional impact of the fiction.

And one of my favorites: Lars Konzack, in "Philosophical Game Design," claims that as long as games focus on immersion, flow state, and obstacles, they will remain merely entertainment. "Game design should no longer just involve the question of how to create immersive experiences, but instead ask how to express and present philosophical ideas in a game system. Only though such an initiative will it be possible for video games to grow and prosper."

These are all markedly textual concepts of the *function and value* of games. Games need to represent, tell a story, communicate an idea, create a fiction.

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[1] Gee (2006) 59
[2] Gee (2006) 59
[3] Tavinor (2009) 38

What I claim is that much of the success of games has little to do with these elements. Let me begin with the simplest argument. If Gee is right - that a game's elements must represent story-elements for the game to be really involving. If this was right, then a novelty chess set - like the ones where all the pieces are figures from *Lord of the Rings* - would provide a deeper experience of chess. But this seems utterly wrong. There is a narrative energy in chess - there are traps, reversals, clever attacks - but referentiality only seems to distract from our absorption in that narrative. We might stretch and say that there is a minimal, iconic representation - the king represents something important, the pawn represents something weak. But this I think misses the point. The excellence of chess comes from the particular configuration of rules, and the way they interlace to create fascinatingly complex play. The quality of the rules and the play they generate is significantly independent from the representationality of the game. It is easy to imagine variations of the rules that don't change the representational content at all, but weaken or destroy the quality and involvingness of the game. Imagine, for instance, allowing the knights to move four up and one over, or allowing the pawns to capture straight ahead, instead of on a diagonal. I don't doubt that there is a certain representational element to chess. But it cannot be that story-representation is the *primary source* of the game's involvingness. That seems to emerge from some relationship of rule-sets and play.

Consider also games like Scrabble and its digital relative, *Words With Friends*. Gameplay in both consists of placing letters to form words in a connected network. There is no created world, no character-based narrative, no character to identify with. Tavinor and Gee theories exclude games like this, because there is no fictive world. Since these games aren't fictive, they aren't art.

In fact, a better example might be a sport, like basketball. There is no representation or reference - game-play here is involved in the actual people, and the actual objects. The pleasures of basketball are not fictive, and not representational. They are something else - they involve a pleasure of play that is not captured in the pleasure of fiction. Another way to say what I'm getting at is this. Take a multiplayer video game, a shooter, like *Team Fortress*, for example. I think some of the pleasure is fictive and representational, and akin to the pleasure of watching a war movie. But I think some of the pleasure of a well-designed shooter is very

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[4] Tavinor (2009) 55

much like the pleasure of basketball, and *that* excellence of game design is not captured by textual theories at all.

Games versus text, and the two sorts of play

What, then, is the difference between games and texts? This is a a very hard question. The first thing that it might occur to one to say is that we are free in games, but not free in texts. Players are free, and readers are not. But this simple claim immediately admits of two major challenges. First, as Aarseth points out in *Cybertext*, there are plenty of texts where we are free to choose the order that we experience the text. Aarseth mentions many modernist texts, but Wikipedia will serve as an easy example. Second, as Walton points out in *Mimesis and make-believe*, in the representative arts, we have a freedom of imagination with respect to the texts.

But the freedom in games is distinct from either of those freedoms. In games, we have the ability to causally modify the course of events. We have an active relationship to the course of events - we know that events depend on and evolve from our choices.

Over-reliance on the text-metaphor suppresses the basic fact that game players are essentially active, autonomous, causally active agent. Much of our pleasure in games is in making choices that will influence the course of events. Famously, game designer Sid Meier has said that the goal of a game designer is to create a series of interesting, challenging choices. What unites single player video games and multiplayer board games is that games require decisions and actions from the player, usually in response to difficulties or obstacles. This, I think is the part of games that a textual model is ill-built to capture.

What I'd like to suggest is that, in many significant ways, essential elements of game-design are closely related to essential elements of landscape design. Landscape usability discussion focuses on creating spaces for function and interaction - on traffic flow, on the circulation of individuals. Landscapes do not contain narratives; rather, they are environments which encourage people to build their own narratives, and in that way, they are a very close kin to games. It is success condition for most landscapes, and most games, that the user feels free and causally vital - that they have real choices, and that the outcomes of their actions evolve from those choices.

I'm not claiming that there is no relationship between texts, landscapes, and games. One can certainly read a landscape or a game as a text. I'm claiming that there are significant functions that are common between landscapes and games, that are not part of the typical picture of texts. To show this, let's consider two primary contemporary conceptions of the function of texts: texts as communicative objects, and texts as stimulants for the imagination.

A communicative object's purpose and function is to take an idea, understanding, or emotion from the author and deliver it into the mind of the reader. Landscapes are not primarily communicative objects. Surely some landscapes, and parts of landscapes, have some communicative function - a church in the shape of a cross, for instance, or a garden layout that forms the shape of a heart, might be primarily communicative. But these are the exception, not than the rule. Landscape studies often focuses instead on how landscape influences human inhabitants, often without their awareness - how changes in street patterns change the way human beings travel and congregate; how shifts the height of walls changes the awareness of inhabitants for each other. It focuses, not on the communication of a piece of content, but in the conditioning of human action, often unconsciously. Similarly, the mantle of communication is an imperfect fit for many games. What is the communicative content of poker? Of chess? The excellence of these games goes beyond their expressive powers. I love poker not because of the stories it tells me, but because of the stories I can create inside of it when I play, because the rule-sets make it so likely that I will be involved in bringing about excellent stories. Both landscapes and games function as enablers for human agency.

I think the communicative conception is an obvious non-starter. The next theory of text is a much more serious challenge. Walton, in *Mimesis as Make Believe*, argues that representative arts, especially fictions, work as stimulants to the imagination. They are what Walton calls props - stimulants for the imagination. A doll, an action figure, and *The Odyssey* are all props, because they are both take-off points for our own imagination. I take Walton's make-believe theory of the arts to be a serious break from a communicative theory, because the success or failure of a prop for the imagination doesn't depend on the stable transmission of a piece of content. An action figure doesn't need to communicate one idea - in fact, its success seems partially dependent on the variety of stories that it stimulates. Where the

communicative conception might draw a connection between, for example, a fiction and a philosophical essay, Walton's make-believe theory draws a connection between fiction and child-hood make-believe. Walton explicitly calls the experience of representational art a form of play. When we look at a Rembrandt, we are engaged in a sophisticated version of the same kind of thing we did when we played with dolls and toy soldiers. We are creatively imagining our own scenario in response to the prompting of a physical object. Thus, Walton's theory seems at first ready-made to fit games and game-play. For it emphasizes the freedom of the viewer to interpret and imagine, and the way in which art viewing is a form of play. Tavinor himself draws explicitly on Walton's make-believe conception. I'm going to spend some time on Walton, because I think Walton offers the best chance for a textual theorist to cope with games. But, in the end, I'm going to argue that Walton's theory can't do all the work it needs to do. I'm going to argue that Walton's freedom of the imagination is significantly different from the agential freedom that game players and landscape users have, and that Walton's idea of make-believe play is very different from what's going on with games.

First, Walton's make-believe play essentially involves imaginative transport. The freedom Walton gives readers is a reader to create an imagined world over and above the prop, and fill it in through creative acts of the imagination. But in game-play, there is often no imaginative transport. In fact, the experience of absorbed game-play is often characterized by an absorption of the present world and its details. In a difficult tennis match, the player is hyper-attentive to the position of his body, the angle of the ball. During a difficult poker hand, the player is hyper-attentive to the actual psychology, desire, and facial expression of their opponents. Similarly, landscapes typically don't function to transport a user's awareness away from the landscape. Landscapes usually function as the direct object of a user's awareness.

It is true that in game-play, we often imagine possible future responses. But this use of the imagination is crucially distinct from Walton's imagination. In game-play, imagination is a means to an end, and so constrained. In game-play, I am using imagination is an attempt to predict what my opponent will do, and map out the possible responses I might have. Imagination is not the end, but the means.

At this point, I believe it is crucial to distinguish between two distinct forms of play. I develop this more in another paper, but let me sum up my idea briefly here. Walton's make-

believe is clearly a form of play. But another form of play is what we're doing when we're doing when we're solving puzzles, trying to win a foot-race, or fencing. Call this kind of play striving-play. Bernard Suits develops striving-play in his book *Grasshopper: Games, Life, Utopia*. Suits advances the following definition of "game": games are unnecessary obstacles undertaken voluntarily for the pleasure of overcoming them.[5] Suits' insight is that the basic substance of a game is a set of restrictions on how players may act. The game of poker is not merely constituted by the goal of getting everybody else's money, says Suits, for the most efficient way of merely getting their money is to club them on the skull and rifle through their wallet. The goal of running a marathon is not merely to get to the finish line first, for there are far easier ways of doing so: cutting across the city, or tripping your opponents, or taking a taxi.[6] The easiest way to take the king in chess is to distract your opponent and seize the king while their head is turned, but this does not satisfy. In game life, he says, we don't take up the means for the sake of the end. We take up an artificial, which includes artificial restrictions on how we are to achieve that end, for the sake of the pleasure of the means we are forced to us.[7]

So now there are two conceptions of play on the plate: play as make-believe, and play as striving. Walton and Suits seem to each think that their own analysis exhausts the concept of play, and each seems to think that their own theory captures all of play. Walton makes no hint of the alternate form of play, and Suits claims that make-believe play is simply a sub-variety of striving play. I disagree, and I think that make-believe play and striving-play are distinct and irreducible to each other. The clearest way to see this is to see how they break. The goal of make-believe play is a creation and maintenance of an absorbing illusion. Make-believe play is broken by what Huizinga, in *Homo Ludens*, calls the spoil-sport - somebody who calls attention to the artificiality of the proceedings, and shatters the illusion of play. The goal of striving play is the experience of striving, overcoming. Thus, striving play is broken by the cheat - somebody who breaks the rules of play. And being a cheat and being a spoilsport are

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[5] Suits (2005) 37-55. This is Suits' quick version of the definition, which is enough to suit my purposes. He offers a more extended definition in the book.

[6] There are two varieties of games for Suits - the garden variety, in which the unnecessary obstacles come in the form of invented *rules* (including invented goals), which create the space of interaction. These include board games, field sports, and computer games. There is a secondary variety, in which the unnecessary obstacles come in the form of natural barriers, which we interact with in the pursuit of an unnecessary goal. A primary example is mountain climbing and rock climbing, as practiced by Edmund Hilary and Yosemite wall climbers. I'll focus on the garden variety for this paper, as they represent the majority of games, and the interesting examples of novel, created landscapes.

entirely different. If children are playing Cowboys and Indians, and one stops play to clarify a point about what the rules are, they are certainly not a cheat, but they are being a spoilsport. On the other hand, when a chess player pauses to ask a point of clarification about the rules, they are not a spoilsport, because nobody playing chess has any interest in maintaining any illusions. Chess play is all about striving, and not about make-believe at all.

We can also see the distinction in games that partake of both functions. When a group of players are playing a tabletop fantasy role playing game, like Dungeons and Dragons, it can often be that they care both about the pleasures of striving and the pleasures of imagination. But here it is possible to break the game in two distinct ways. A player that quietly erases his character sheet and changes the amount of gold and experience points he's accumulated is a cheat, but hasn't shattered the imaginative illusion. On the other hand, a player that constantly calls for rules clarifications and accuses other players of not playing by the rules is not a cheat, but is Huizinga's spoilsport - she is shattering the shared illusion. (The usual term for such a person among game-players is a "rules lawyer", and their failure is surely not that of the cheat.)

Let me be clear here. I'm not trying to reduce all game-play to striving-play. In fact, I think many games do both. I think that Cops and Robbers is mostly make-believe play, chess is all striving-play, and a graphically detailed first-person shooter set in World War 2 is enacting both forms of play at once. Integration between the two sorts of play is not hard, because make-believe and striving both require conflict and tension. What I'm claiming is that textual theories can deal with the make-believe function of games, but not with the striving function of games. And this is where I suggest we turn to landscape theory for help.

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For striving play, the player has to be free, and causally active. The solutions to the obstacles, and the narrative of tension, struggle, and overcoming, has to come from the agents'

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[7] Suits (2005) 37-41

own decisions and actions. Striving play is about an agents' causally active, causally central struggle.

This is why I think landscape theory has so much to offer for the study of games; landscape designers have spent a long time thinking about how to constrain agents subtly and artfully. They've thought about how constraint can actually enhance agency. Landscape usability discussion focuses on *creating spaces for function and interaction* - on traffic flow, on circulation. Landscapes are not fixed narratives; rather, they are places which encourage people to build their own narratives, and in that way, they are a very close kin to games. Landscapes facilitate agency. Certain environments may encourage particular kinds of narratives - bars help people do one kind of thing, and parks another - but in each case the story and the events are the inhabitants' own.

In landscapes and games, there is a fixed component. In landscape, it is the building, the layout. In games, it is the rules, the board, the level, the space of play. Call this the *setting*. In both games and landscapes, the setting guides and influences a set of events, but the events are shaped by the users. And *that* is precisely what we ignore when we treat games as texts. The core problem for designers of *settings* is deeply similar. It's a puzzle of how to shape agents' actions, without actually wrecking their essential freedom. The most interesting thing about the design of striving-play is that the basic substance of games is restrictions - rules, barriers, obstacles - but the success of games is in creating real, free choices for the players. This is why landscape theory is, I think, a useful source for the study of the design of striving-play. Game players create rules and obstacles; landscape designers create walls, roads, fences, and embankments; both are shaping the space of possibility for human choice. They are, in fact, trying to enhance human choice through the clever creation of constraint. . If the obstacles and rules of *Super Mario Brothers* didn't exist, there would be no opportunity for choice; if the obstacles and rules were oppressive, the player would simply feel like they were acting out a script. But the pleasure of *Super Mario Brothers* seems to depend on its finding that balance point, where the restrictions of the environment create new opportunities for choice. Similarly, an architect is trying to, with walls and roads and fences, create an environment where an inhabitant has a richer set of choices than if the inhabitant were simply in an empty field.

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Let me make a few points of clarification here. First, I'm not trying to claim that games ought to be subsumed entirely as a form of landscape. They are unique. And landscapes and games are significantly different. For one, game-designers usually get to set, at least partially, the in-game motivations of their players - they get to set the scoring principles, or the win-condition. Landscape designers have to deal with pre-set, and varying motivations. And most importantly, challengingness is a essential desiderata of much game-play, but not of landscape design. But the fact that one of the basic, elemental building blocks for both are constraints, and yet the goal is an enabling of human freedom, makes landscape theory a useful source of borrowing and inspiration for game theory. And I'm not claiming that landscape theory is uniquely useful. In another paper, I and a co-author suggest the government design is another source that we can draw from.

I'm not making the simple analogy that landscape designers make 3d environments and some game designers make 3d environments. My claim is more abstract than that. I'm claiming that both shape logical space - the space of options for human motion and choice. Landscape designers do that with physical constraints. Game designers sometimes do that with virtual physical constraints - walls and roads in a 3d environment - but they also do it with rules. The rules of piece movement in chess, and the rules of movement in Tetris and Super Mario Brothers, are also forms of constraint. They all shape the logical space of possible actions, and both are trying to do it without excessively impinging on human freedom. In fact, a typical desiderata is to, paradoxically, increase freedom through the artful manufacture of constraint.

Invisibility and Openness

Enough abstraction. Let me provide an example of the deep similarity of game and landscape design. Both often seek unobtrusiveness. The best texts are visible, and memorable. But the best urban planning is often invisible. We praise a space when its design is so refined that an inhabitant can navigate the space unconsciously. A well-designed kitchen is one that a chef can navigate without effort, where the desired object is always near at hand, where they can spend their time thinking about the *dish*. A well-designed social space is one that makes

the right sort of interactions simply happen, as if by accident. A well designed board game is one where the rules fall away, where a player doesn't feel like the rules are telling him what to do

Christopher Alexander describes in his landmark work of landscape design, *A Pattern Language*, a well-made socio-spatial arrangement for a home or workplace. Each person needs private space, to work and think. People also need to socialize, whether they think they do or not. There are heavy-handed ways to create socialization - management can schedule meeting times, etc. But Alexander suggests that spatial design can elegantly and quietly encourage socialization. One way is to put the public spaces between the private spaces and utility spaces. For example, in constructing an office, put a common area in the middle, and put the offices on one side and the kitchen, bathrooms, printers, and the like on there other side. That way, over the natural course of daily work day, people will tend to run into each other. Socialization and interaction is encouraged, without any experience of overt force by the inhabitants. This kind of design feature is virtuous by its very invisibility.

But the virtue of invisibility is hard to capture inside the text-metaphor, for texts are made for communication, and communication is aimed at producing conscious awareness. Texts do not want to fade into the background. But invisibility seems crucial to game-play. In so many favorite games, the desirable state is a state of *absorption in play*. A chess-player, thinking about an astonishing game experience, doesn't think with joy about the rules of the game and their eloquence - they think about decisions they made, actions they took. One is truly playing chess when one has assimilated the rules, the board, and all these elements fall away, when the player is lost in future possibilities, plans, traps. A chess player relishes moments when they outguessed their opponent, traps they laid, moments of creative brilliance. A player of a multiplayer online shooter game recalls with joy moments of her own reflexive brilliance, when she baited an opponent, when she figured out how to use the landscape to sneak up on an unwary victim, moments when they pirouetted brilliantly and slid *just-so* to avoid fire. Videogames are praised for their *transparency* - the less conscious that a person is of the control structure, the input mechanism, the more they can simply fall into and *play* - the greater the game experience.[8]

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[8] It's true that the degree of desirable invisibility varies from game to game. Abstract board games and card games, like chess, go, and poker, seem to cherish a very high degree of invisibility. Highly narrative single-player

What this suggests is that much of the success in a game design lies in the way in which game design invisibly guides players. But how does this invisible guidance work? Perhaps a hint can be found about how invisibility works by studying its converse property: intrusiveness. A common complaint about games is the presence of an intrusive, obvious limitation. Tim Rogers, independent game critic at ActionButton.net and game designer, criticizes the videogame *Bioshock* for some of its basic design decisions. *Bioshock* is a game in which the player, from a first person perspective, wanders an abandoned undersea city, fighting enemies and uncovering the history of the city. Rogers notes that the game's landscape is littered with large boxes. Some of these boxes you can open, move, and manipulate. Other boxes, which look identical, are immoveable. Says Rogers, the experience one has when running into these immoveable boxes is, "Oh, I guess the game designers didn't want me going over there." It is an experience of curtailed freedom.

What's interesting here is that some constraints are valuable and desirable to game players - they are what, as Suits points out, constitute the game, and bring the game-play experience into existence. But some of these game constraints fade away into the background, and others seem to jump into the forefront of attention, to annoy the players, a la *Bioshock's* boxes. Basketball's dribbling requirement encourages interesting and exciting interactions. But basketball players aren't annoyed by the requirement to dribble. But why do some constraints register as intrusive, and others do not? But how is non-intrusive constraint possible? Here we benefit by turning to landscape studies: Alexander's example of the central common area placement provides an excellent example of non-intrusive guidance. First, the arrangement of rooms makes the easiest passage from public to private spaces move through the common space. Alexander also comments that the common space should be arranged in loose circles of seating, with an obvious flow of traffic which skirts the seating circles. The room should be arranged so the flow of traffic takes people near enough to the seating circles

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video games, on the other hand, often prize a great degree of conscious impact. This is not surprising - it seems to me that some games are entirely un-text-like, while other games are quite text-like. (Landscapes are the same - I take it that good traffic design strives for great invisibility, while the architecture of places of religious worship strives for a very conscious, representational impact.) And it is certainly true that in those games with a strong text-like component, the tools of textual analysis are quite relevant. But overemphasis on the text-metaphor divides the space of games unpleasantly. If we think that games are art insofar as they represent, or are text-like, then we cleave very narrative videogames like *Grand Theft Auto* from very free-form videogames, like *Dwarf Fortress*, and from traditional boardgames - and to ignore the less text-like components of text-like games. The functionality of games

to hear conversations, but not so close that they feel obligated to talk. Thus the common space an arrangement never *forces* or *requires* a person to engage with others. Rather, it increases the opportunities for socialization by increasing the likelihood of situations in which a person may encounter others, and volunteer to talk with them. It the same time, it respects the autonomy of the individual - they are not required or ordered to interact with others, nor even encouraged in any way that they must consciously process.[9]

This mirrors the forms of praise given to games of all sort. A games must constrain, in order to sculpt the activity. But within the sphere of the activity, the players often want an experience of freedom, of being able to maneuver, of being agents deciding and influencing their environment. They want to act, and not be ordered. But the text-metaphor encourages conventional fixed narratives, and in order to generate these narratives, designers must act against the agency and power of the players. One of the most common complaints about videogames and boardgames is that they offer no real choices, that action and narrative are scripted, that that the player begins to suspect that their decisions ultimately, doesn't matter. Conversely, what many players praise in the experience of games is the quality of openness, of freedom, of being able to excel through skill and ingenuity, of the ability to choose and influence the game-world and the game-narrative. If we follow the threads of invisibility and intrusiveness, we come to another property important to games and landscapes: openness.

Let me contrast the sort of interactive openness that games have with the quality of openness we find in texts, which is of an entirely different sort. Textual openness is what we might call "ambiguity" - the ability for different readers to render different interpretations of the text. But ambiguity is a very different quality from the interactive openness, for, with ambiguous texts, the effects of my interpretative choices are confined to my own interpretation. My interpretation of the first page of *Crime and Punishment* can influence my interpretation of the second page of *Crime and Punishment*, but cannot actually change the events described on the second page. Openness is an entirely different quality from ambiguity - openness is the quality which lets agents have *causally crucial* choices.

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as *spaces for play* is the common thread between all games, for the essential quality of games is the centrality of human agency. We do not simply read games - we play them.

[9] This design trait - of encouraging without forcing - may explain Rogers' comment about *Bioshock*. But it doesn't explain why basketball players don't resent dribbling, which I think is an open and fascinating question.

Let's turn, again, to Alexander for some useful analysis. Good landscape design, say Alexander, allows for the wide variety of differences in people. For example, says Alexander, when buying chairs for a room, do not buy a matched set of chairs, all medium in size - for not all people are medium-sized. Buy many different chairs, of many different sizes and shapes, and people will gravitate to the ones appropriate to their body. (This explains why carefully designed, uniformly appointed corporate coffee shops are often subtly uncomfortable, and the classic bohemian coffee shop, with its eclectic variety of chairs, couches, and stools, is so subtly welcoming.) Similarly, common rooms should have both central areas and private nooks, so people may be part of a conversation, be on the edge of a conversation, or be private but near conversation, as they choose.

One should also, says Alexander, offer people choices of ways to navigate a space.

In a complex social fabric, human relations are inevitably subtle. It is essential that each person feels free to make connections or not, to move or not, to talk or not, to change the situation or not, according to his judgment. If the physical environment inhibits him and reduces his freedom of action, it will prevent him from doing the best he can to keep healing and improving the social situations he is in as he sees fit.[10]

Alexander says that some arrangements of spaces allow generous circulation, and others allow non-generous circulation. There are, for example, at least two ways to arrange a hallway of offices, as in an academic department. One is a long passage, and the other is a loop. The difference between the two is that the passage only allows one way to navigate from one's office to the other spaces, and the loop allows two. It may encourage a certain sort of motion, but it doesn't enforce it. A loop for example, might make it so that the quickest way to the utility spaces was through a common area, but also allow a longer passage that avoided the common area. This way motion through the common area would be quietly encouraged and built into the natural circulation of people, but somebody seeking privacy could easily avoid the common area anytime they chose. Loops have generous circulation.

I take it that a lack of generous circulation is what Tim Rogers is complaining about when he's talking about *BioShock*, and what I'm complaining about when I refuse to go back into an Ikea.

The qualities, then, that Alexander says make a space habitable are that the space subtly encourages mingling and interaction, but does not require it. Furthermore, the space is sufficiently varied that different people in different moods, with different personalities, and different desires, can feel free to act as they wish inside the space.

In some ways, what I've said here is quite simple and straightforward: players often enjoy games which allow them to use different skills, which allow them interesting decisions and the chance for creativity and ingenuity. I agree: this is dead simple, an absolutely elementary observation about game quality. But these are dimensions of game play that are suppressed by the text-metaphor, because of the essential linearity of text.

There are many other examples; I cannot hope to catalog them all here. My claim is that the textual metaphor is inadequate to capture the full complexity of game design, and game life. I don't think anything I'm saying about the desirability of openness and generous circulation, by the way, would be a surprise to any sensitive game critic, game designer, or game player. I'm claiming that these are essential terms of criticism, and that some academic commentary has, because of the traditional engagement of academia with texts, has missed. And I'm simply suggesting that landscape studies and game design are close cousins, and that there is overlap. Both design logical spaces, through playing with the conditions of constraint, often with a goal of supporting their users freedom and causal engagement.

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[10] Alexander (1977), 131

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