Playing politics – warfare in virtual worlds

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Abstract

Recent academic scholarship has resulted in the production of a broad body of interdisciplinary research that explores the representation of different political and spatial phenomena within popular culture, often focussed upon the analysis of film and television. Whilst video games now rival the popularity of these more established media forms, the different spaces that are represented within this medium have remained comparatively under-explored. This thesis addresses this lacuna and will show that military-themed video games are constitutive of particular spatial and political imaginaries, and that analyses of the medium can be used to illuminate broader critical debates. Such an engagement makes three specific contributions to knowledge. Firstly, a theoretical contribution is made through the increasing imbrication of approaches originating within International Relations and critical geopolitics. Whilst the former field addresses the relationship between political theory and popular culture, critical geopolitical analyses examine the process through which the surrounding world is spatialized. In offering an interdisciplinary perspective, therefore, this analysis highlights not only the production of a form of political power, but also the everyday mechanisms through which the associated assumptions, biases and cultural tropes are reproduced as commonsense spatial "knowledge". Secondly, a methodological contribution is achieved through the provision of a framework for an object-focussed analysis of the video game medium. This approach, which encompasses both structural and thematic aspects, addresses the limitations that are associated with exclusively ludological or narratological approaches and provides an important middle ground. Finally, an empirical contribution is achieved through the detailed examination of the urban, rural and temporally-inflected forms of spatiality that are represented within military-themed video games. Here, a focus on twelve high-profile video game titles is used to highlight the ways in which the medium can work to produce or preclude different geopolitical imaginaries. The video game world is shown to be a source of political meaning – one which is used to naturalise different claims about the "reality" of our contemporary geopolitical experience, including what the world looks like and what our place within it might be. These analyses are also shown to provide a means by which it is made possible to illuminate – and even destabilise – the foundations of prevailing critical frameworks, offering the potential for introspection and future growth.

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Chapter One: Going Cultural

1.1   Introduction

In March 2017, Ubisoft Paris released *Ghost Recon: Wildlands*, the latest in a series of video games that are loosely inspired by the work of the late techno-thriller writer Tom Clancy. In this game the player becomes a member of The Ghosts, a US Elite Operations team who are tasked with disrupting the machinations of a Mexican drug cartel that has seized control of Bolivian coca production. As a part of simulating the Bolivian space in which the game is set, members of Ubisoft's artistic team travelled to the country to document the environment and to speak to people about the realities of their daily lives. This process not only facilitated the realistic reproduction of key Bolivian landmarks in the game (see, for example, Figure 1), but also allowed for the inclusion of a series of subtle details that added a sense of authenticity to the simulation. These included, for example, the depiction of the "scarecrows" that are used to warn off unwanted visitors, as well as the perennially unfinished nature of Bolivian housing that allows its residents to evade property tax.

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Figure 1: Real and Digital Images of Laguna Colorada, near Potosoi, Bolivia (Hall, 2016)

The desire for authenticity was made particularly explicit during some of the promotional interviews that surrounded the game's launch, including one in which lead artist Benoit Martinez emphasised that 'it was very important for us, from the beginning, to be truthful to whatever we've seen… We've been very touched by what we've seen, the people we've met, the beautiful country we've been able to discover… I hope they'll realise that we treat all this material with a lot of respect – for Bolivian people, for this country, and for everything' (Martinez, 2017). Although aiming to offer a suitably authentic and respectful simulation of its host country, *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* caused political

controversy as a result of its underlying narrative. In an appeal to the French consulate, representatives of the Bolivian government argued that the game's representation of their country as a lawless, corrupt narco-state – though clearly a work of fiction – had served to undermine its political standing in the real-world (Ramos, 2017). These sorts of concerns, pertaining to the role of video gaming in the scripting of national identity, are not confined to this particular title. In 2007, for example, *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter 2* was targeted for governmental seizure in Ciudad Juárez, as its representation of Mexican border towns was deemed 'despicable, xenophobic and harmful to children' (Penix-Tadsen, 2016). In 2010, meanwhile, the parliamentary committee member Pavel Zyryanov announced plans to fund a Russian games industry, citing broad concerns about the portrayal of the country within Western produced titles: -

> 'The foreign games depicting the Great Patriotic War are sticking to the old Cold War images of Russia as a bunch of villains… In other genres, the games tend to simply ridicule Russia with images of bears riding unicycles down the street, and I mean, come on, this just doesn't correspond to reality' (Shuster, 2010)

In 2011, *Battlefield 3* was banned in Iran, as a result of its portrayal of an invasion of Tehran (Stuart, 2011). The following year saw the withdrawal of both *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* (Electronic Arts, 2012) and *Call of Duty: Black Ops II* (Activision, 2012) in Pakistan, as officials reportedly argued that these games had 'been developed against the country's national unity and sanctity (Pakistan Today, 2013). Similar anxieties also prompted the banning of *Battlefield 4* (2013) in China, as officials there argued that the game was tantamount to a 'cultural invasion… that smears China's image' (Tassi, 2013). Such concerns suggest a broader acknowledgement that control over the representation of space, including the construction of state identity, cannot be confined to the people and practices that are associated with elite forms of political discourse.

As highlighted in Chapter Two, this perspective resonates within the ongoing critical debates within both International Relations (IR) and critical geopolitics. Each of these fields has explored a multiplicity of different ways in which the relationship between popular culture and world politics can be understood to be important. In IR there has been a growing acceptance of an aesthetic, rather than mimetic, understanding of the nature of representation: -

> 'The latter [approaches], which have dominated IR scholarship, seek to represent politics as realistically and authentically as possible, aiming to capture world politics as-it-really-is. Aesthetic approaches, by contrast, assume that there is always a gap between a form of representation and what is represented therewith. Rather than seeking to ignore or minimise this gap, as mimetic approaches do, aesthetic insight recognises that the

inevitable difference between the represented and the representation is the very location of politics' (Bleiker, 2001, p. 510)

Some such analyses reflect on the role of popular culture as an accessible form of political knowledge. Doucet, for example, suggests that children's films 'contribute to reinforcing the prevailing interpretations of real-world events that children receive from elsewhere, such as television, the internet or other mass media sources' (2005, p. 291; see also Dittmer, 2010, p.21). Other research has tracked the pedagogical value of popular culture. Doucet, for example, reflects that 'films are pedagogically powerful not only because they can help us teach IR, but also because they help highlight how particular forms of IR are taught outside the ivory towers of academe. They bridge "high" and "low" culture, and help to popularise particular worldviews while excluding others, thereby enabling certain theories of IR to acquire footing in what appears as popular "common sense" about the way the world is' (2005, p. 290; see also Blanton, 2013, pp. 12-13; Ruane & James, 2008, p.392)**.**

This thesis highlights a complementary approach that is evident within critical geopolitics, a subfield of political geography that has aimed to 'highlight the use of geographical language and to underline the fact that, rather than being an apolitical and natural aspect of international politics, geography is a discourse and as such is a form of power/knowledge itself' (Sharp, 2000, p. 333; see also Dalby 1991; Dittmer 2010, O'Tuathail & Agnew 1992; O'Tuathail, 1996, p.61). This approach makes room for a specifically *popular* form of geopolitics, which 'refers to the geographical politics created and debated by the various media-shaping popular culture. It addresses the social construction and perpetuation of certain collective national and transnational understandings of places and peoples beyond one's own borders' (O'Tuathail, 1999, p. 110). It is a form of geopolitics which accounts for the accessibility of popular culture and the potential political influence that its different artefacts can be seen to have. As Dittmer surmises, the study of 'geopolitics is fundamentally about who "we" are, and what other people are like. Much to the chagrin of geographers and other academics who feel they can answer those questions best, those lessons are increasingly taught via everyday popular culture, whether through films such as *300* (2007) or the user-driven content of the so-called Web 2.0 (blogs, YouTube, Facebook, Myspace, etc.)' (2010, p. 21).

These different literatures suggest that popular culture can, therefore, be understood as a vital terrain for the construction and exchange of political meaning, offering an important forum within which we tell, and are told, the stories from which we are then able to construct our sense of Self and through which we are made able to make sense of the world around us (Saunders, 2012, p. 82; Shepherd, 2013, pp. 1-12; Weber, 2005, p. 4). Such meanings can take a variety of different forms, which 'may be explicit or implicit, conscious or unconscious, they may be felt as truth or as fantasy, science or commonsense; and they may be conveyed through everyday speech, elaborate rhetoric,

high art, TV soap operas, dreams, movies or Muzak; and different groups in a society will make sense of the world in different ways' (Rose, 2016, p. 2). These meanings may also serve different functions, fulfilling different cultural roles, and may act to influence the so-called "real-world" in a myriad of different ways. They may, for example, provide a unified group identity, such as that seen in the profound influence of the science-fiction series *Star Trek* upon the lives and behaviours of its fans: 'they actually talk about it and write about it' (Weldes, 1999, p. 133). These shared identities also have the potential to influence real-world politics. Nexon and Neumann, for example, note that NASA yielded to 'demand prompted by a Star Trek fan letter-writing campaign to change the name of the first [space] shuttle from Constitution to Enterprise' (2006, p. 23). These pop-culture discourses can also provide a means by which to confront and combat shared fears. Jason Dittmer, for example, notes that 'the first edition of Captain America Comics came out in December 1940 and features Captain America on the cover, punching Hitler right in the jaw' (2008, p. 407). Popular culture can also be used in the advancement of subaltern cultural discourses. Shapiro, for example, suggests that popular culture can function as a collective memory bank, ensuring that 'the worlds of pain, suffering and grievance remain readily available for reflection and recognition, even where those with actual experiential memories are no longer around to tell their stories' (2009, p.155). These cultural discourses can also function as a space of political contestation and dissent, providing a sphere within which elite narratives can safely be challenged: -

> 'Popular culture can, in the way it offers forms of identity, become engaged with politics, in particular with the politics of citizenship, the right to belong and the right to be recognised. Popular culture can also become a form of resistance, a weapon with which to deny power' (Street, 1997, p. 12; see also Shapiro, 2009, p. 48)

This thesis echoes the need for continued critical attention to the involvement of popular culture in the process of scripting specific understandings of politics and political spaces, noting the close scrutiny of the spatialized and spatializing worlds that are created and recreated within cultural artefacts such as cartoons, television programmes, magazines and popular culture (see, for example, Boggs & Pollard, 2008; Crownshaw, 2011; Dalby, 2008; Spigel, 2004; Van Veeren, 2009; Weldes, 1999). It is, however, notable that there has been a more limited critical treatment of the function of video game space in the manufacture of political imaginaries (although, see Graham & Shaw, 2010; Schulzke, 2013; Robinson, 2015a). Aiming to address this imbalance, this thesis will focus on the different ways in which the simulation of space within military-themed video games (i.) works to construct and maintain specific geopolitical imaginaries, and (ii.) serves to illuminate our broader critical understandings of particular forms of spatiality and spatial phenomena. Such an engagement will make three specific contributions to knowledge, offering theoretical, methodological and empirical

insight. This thesis makes a theoretical contribution to the analysis of the politics of popular culture through the increasing imbrication of approaches originating within International Relations (IR) and critical geopolitics. As Chapter Two will show, these two fields vary in their primary emphasis. Whilst IR focuses upon the relationship between political theory and popular culture, critical geopolitical analyses address the varied processes through which the surrounding world is spatialized. In offering an interdisciplinary perspective, therefore, this analysis highlights not only the production of a form of political power, but also the everyday mechanisms through which the associated assumptions, biases and cultural tropes are reproduced as commonsense spatial "knowledge". This thesis also makes a methodological contribution through the provision of a framework for an object-focussed analysis of video games. This approach – which encompasses both the structural and thematic characteristics of the video game form (see Section 4.2, pp.113-115) – addresses the limitations that are associated with the polarising ludology-narratology debate and provides an important middle ground between these two extremes. Such an approach properly acknowledges the complexity of the video game medium, highlighting the myriad of different elements that influence the player's encounter with the gameworld and its associated narratives, systems and structures. This methodological framework is used to facilitate the subsequent empirical contribution, which arises from the examination of urban, rural and temporally-inflected forms of spatiality within video games. The representation of these key geographical and political frameworks *is not* regarded as simple mimesis, *nor* is this merely the background for the narrative. Instead, the representation of different forms of space within video games is regarded as being fundamentally constitutive of politics and prevailing geopolitical imaginaries (Nexon & Neumann, 2006, p.19; see also Chapter Two). Understood in such a way, the video game world is regarded as a source of political meaning – one which is used to naturalise different claims about the 'reality' of our contemporary geopolitical experience, including what the world looks like and what our place within it might be. These video games demonstrate that there is no single filter through which we construct our notions of political and cultural identity, emphasising the myriad of smaller spatial sites at which we formulate notions of the Self and the Other. In addition, these different analyses are used to further our understandings of the established frameworks through which urban, rural and temporally-inflected spaces are analysed. Here, the encounter with video games is utilised as a means by which it is made possible to illuminate – and potentially destabilise – the foundation of the critical lens itself. The analysis of video games, therefore, is shown to offer the potential for critical introspection and future growth.

1.2   Playing Games

In her analysis of cult science-fiction, Jutta Weldes argued that 'there might be more going on when an audience sits down to watch television than students of international relations have previously

assumed. Until at least some of us go cultural and join them, then we can only speculate as to what that something more might be' (1999, p. 134). This thesis extends this focus to video games, suggesting that - as a part of this process of 'going cultural' - the researcher should also be called upon to pick up a video game console controller. There are several reasons underpinning such an engagement.

In the first instance, it should be highlighted that this is a culturally pervasive form of entertainment that reaches large audiences (Graham & Shaw, 2010, p. 790; Schulzke, 2013, p. 587). Recent figures released by the Entertainment Software Association (2018, p. 4) suggest that 60% of Americans play video games on a daily basis. Also, contrary to the common stereotype that video game players are antisocial teenagers, their research also found that the average age of a player is actually 34 (ESA, 2018, p. 4).

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Figure 2: Annual US Video Game Content Spend 2010-2017 (ESA, 2018, p. 10)

The available data implies that similar trends are evident in the UK, where 'there are 31.6m players, approximately 50% of the total population' (UKIE, 2018). As Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al highlight, 'one obvious way in which this matters is financial. The rising popularity of games translates into astounding amounts of cash. The game industry is quickly becoming a financial juggernaut' (2016, p. 7; see also Figure 2). Major video game releases – such as the *Call of Duty* games that are discussed within Chapter Five – can consistently produce high revenues, rivalling even blockbuster movies such as *Avatar* (Graham & Shaw, 2010, p. 790). These games can also be seen to be having an increasing level of intertextual significance, as their 'explosive evolution of creative possibility is beginning to influence

significantly other types of expression. It is clear by now, after the *Matrix* trilogy, after the *Grand Theft Auto*, *Uncharted*, and *Red Dead Redemption* games, that movies and games are borrowing from each other's arsenals' (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2016, p. 7). The film industry is not only drawing upon the aesthetics of video games, recreating their look and feel, but is also incorporating the associated characters and worlds into its output. According to the film industry website IMDb (2018), there is a film adaptation of the *Call of Duty* series scheduled for release in 2018/2019, which intends to ape the success of the Marvel Comics adaptions, whilst other forthcoming releases will draw inspiration from *The Division, Ghost Recon* and *Splinter Cell* franchises. It is, however, important to acknowledge the aesthetic elements that are particular to video games or game genres. Schulzke, for example, suggests that counterterrorism 'video games present information in a unique way. Television programs and movies usually adopt a detached, third-person viewpoint on events that shows multiple perspectives, and that may even provide a glimpse into the terrorist point of view. By contrast, counterterrorism games restrict players to a first-person view[1]. Players are only able to see the game world from the perspective of the counterterrorist operatives they control, thereby concealing the terrorist Other, which can only be seen as an anonymous opponent' (2013, p. 587)**.** This focus on video game aesthetics should also account for the specific role that the recreation of space plays in the experience of a video game. As Chapter Four will show, video games spend less time engaging in conventional forms of oral narrative, depending instead upon practices of 'environmental storytelling' (Jenkins, 2004) to progress the player's understanding of the world around them.

Artefacts of popular culture will often also draw from the discursive economy that is provided by international relations. As Nexon and Neumann reflect, these products can be tied to the political environments within which they were created and the different forms of political discourse that were in circulation during the relevant period: -

> 'Anti-Tutsi propaganda in Rwanda, D.W. Griffith's Birth of a Nation, American protest
> music of the 1960s, Errol Morris's The Fog of War, and Tom Clancy's techno thrillers can
> all be analysed as causes and effects of political phenomena' (2006, p. 11)

In drawing on a familiar political mise-en-scène, artefacts of popular culture can frame the issue at hand in a way that is instantly intelligible to its audience. With this in mind, it is worthwhile to note that the military and combat-themed genres of video games have proven to be particularly popular in the post-9/11 political environment (Graham & Shaw, 2010, p. 790; Ouellette, 2008; Stahl, 2006, p.

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[1] There are some exceptions to this. The *Ghost Recon* and *Rainbow Six* video game franchises, which depict counterterrorism operations, all default to a third-person ("over the shoulder") viewpoint.

118). Indeed, as Schulzke notes, 'the popularity of these games has consistently increased, even as interest in other entertainment about terrorism has subsided' (2013, p. 587). Such games will commonly reflect the prevailing political discourse of this period and can largely be seen to 'celebrate America's War on Terror as a grave, but necessary and patriotic undertaking' (Payne, 2014, p. 265). These video games also act to validate a post-modern imaginary of warfare, mirroring 'the US military's self-transformation to a global police force that functions secretly, with small rapid deployment teams in the context of a low-intensity warfare' (Stahl, 2006, p. 118). Whilst this depiction of present and forthcoming warfare ought not to be the most comfortable of subjects to serve as entertainment, our consumption of these 'proleptic, or anticipatory, histories' (Smicker, 2010, p. 113), provides the player with the hands-on, interactive opportunity to 'take satisfaction in dishing out the kind of fantasy justice that the Bush administration promised but could never deliver' (Annandale, 2010, p. 100). These games aim to evoke feelings of interactivity and participation, rather than of distance and disengagement, making the player into 'a virtual recruit in a war consumed' (Stahl quoted in Power 2007, p.273). This is not just a simple matter of these video games seeking to represent or somehow "gamify" reality, but an acknowledgment that the medium can potentially offer a space for the excision of national and personal trauma – this virtual space makes it possible to "play through" the anxiety, uncertainty and pain of the real world' (Leonard, 2004, p. 1; Power, 2007, p. 271). These video games also, as I argue in Chapter Seven, provide a space which allows for our participation in the pre-emptive confrontation (and conquest) of potential sources of future instability and danger.

Graham and Shaw have noted that, as a result of the 'bleeding between reality and virtuality, it is hard to know whether video games are becoming more like war, or if war is becoming more like video games. Certainly, for millions of players across the globe, war is a game' (2010, p. 790). As we continue to straddle this almost invisible 'thin line between entertainment and war' (Turse, 2003), we occupy highly political spaces that are rendered culturally knowable and finite, but which are also sufficiently removed from the theoretical vagaries of our "real world" to act as a valuable alternate arena for political study.

1.3   Aims, Objectives and Research Questions

As discussed above, the purpose of this thesis is to provide a detailed examination of the simulation of space within military video games, empirically exploring the ways in which different practices of representation, narrative and gameplay are used to reinforce or challenge particular geopolitical imaginaries. To this end, this thesis will offer detailed textual readings of the simulation of space within a series of 'insurgent-hunting' (Stahl, 2006, p. 118) or 'proleptic' (Smicker, 2010, p. 113) types of these games, engaging with the specific ways in which they script national, rural and temporal forms of

spatiality (see Chapter Three for a discussion of these different spatial types). There are two main motivations for this intervention. In the first instance, this thesis will contribute to a growing body of critical literature which has demonstrated sustained interest in the nature of the relationship between popular culture and political phenomena (see Chapter Two). This thesis calls attention to the geopolitical imaginaries evoked through the consumption of video game space, highlighting the importance of a medium that has been underexplored in comparison to the similar analyses of film, television and literature. A second, broader focus is to facilitate the continuing unification of approaches within critical IR theory and critical geopolitics, highlighting the commonalities that are shared by these two fields. This thesis is underpinned by a series of research questions: -

> **Question One:** In what ways does the simulation of space in console military video games serve to create specific geopolitical imaginaries?

As Chapter Two will highlight, research within both IR and critical geopolitics suggests that the various practices of representation that are evident within popular cultural artefacts should not be considered to be simple, benign acts of mimesis. As Sharp surmises, 'geopolitics does not simply "trickle down" from elite texts to popular ones' (1993, p. 493). Instead, it is suggested that these different practices should be treated as a 'source of micro-politics where political subjectivities, geopolitical and security imaginations, identities, and imagined communities are (re)produced at the level of the everyday' (Caso & Hamilton, 2015, p. 2). This means that the (re)creation of space and place should be regarded as an act of political power. Popular culture facilitates the creation and maintenance of constructed and contingent geopolitical scripts - naturalised and taken-for-granted frameworks for seeing the world, which are then constitutive of our ideas of identity and difference without direct reliance on elite discourse. Such a process is driven by practices of inclusion and exclusion, meaning that it is possible to examine the extent to which video games are productive of specific forms of space and place by tracing the presence or absence of different character types, settings, actions, narrative devices and visual tropes. This first research question works to expose the different ways in which the process of geopolitical scripting can be seen to operate within video games, accounting for some of the specific forms that the simulation of space in video games can be seen to take. This thesis differentiates between practices of representation, narrative and gameplay. The associated emphases of these different aspects, which are explored in greater detail in Chapter Four, are broadly outlined below: -

> i. *How is political space represented within video games?*

One approach to the analysis of the geopolitical imaginaries contained within video games is to focus on specific practices of representation. This thesis considers the following areas: -

(A) Setting: Is the game set in a recognisable part of the 'real world' or does it rely on a fictional backdrop?

(B) Scale: Does the game engage with the portrayal of space at a local level, or does it expand to cover a national or international scope?

(C) Type: What types of space are represented with these game? Is the game set in towns and cities (see Chapter Five), or does it depict villages and countrysides (see Chapter Six)? Are there identifiable official buildings and institutions, or does the game centre on more everyday environments and local dwellingscapes?

As a part of the process of representation, this thesis will also consider *who* is shown to be a part of these different environments: -

(A) What roles does the player adopt? What does the enemy look like? Does this vary between different types of space?

(B) How do the different characters interact with one another? How do the different characters interact with the landscape? Does this change when the surrounding environment changes?

(C) What characters are excluded from the representation of different landscapes?

In focussing on the practices of representation in video games, it is also important to call attention to the practices of signification. These aspects are the 'signs, ornaments, or game structures that have originally been used in other media or other games, and which have been put to use in the game we are about to analyse' (Konzack, 2002, p. 96). This should, for example, include the use of genre conventions and tropes: -

(A) Do the game adhere to/subvert the 'shooter' genre conventions?

(B) Do the environments that are represented serve any metaphoric or symbolic purpose? How are these alternative textualities manifested within the games?

As Chapter Three highlights, analyses of video games have tended to go beyond the examination of representational elements, and have debated the relative utility of narrative and ludic approaches to the study of the medium. Proponent of ludology suggest that the analysis of video games needs to account for the fact that video games are *played*, rather than watched, as the non-linear nature of this gameplay confounds the importation of the narrative methods that are used in the study of other forms of entertainment media (see, for example, Frasca, 2003; Juul, 2001). Proponents of narrative suggest that there is a need to *adapt*, rather than replace, these conventional approaches, allowing for forms of narrative that are unveiled through storytelling or spatial exploration (see, for example, Jenkins, 2004; Kirkland, 2005). In the creation of a method for this analysis of video game space, this

thesis aims to account for both narrative *and* ludic factors. These different approaches prompt the following questions, and their associated analytical foci: -

ii.   *How are the different forms of space utilised or subverted within particular narratives?*

A focus on *narrative* engages with the ways in which game space is used in the creation of storied meaning. This form of enquiry invites consideration of the following aspects: -

(A) How does the game seek to script the world that it presents? To what extent is this narrative congruent with 'reality'?

(B) What practices of narration are present in the game? What is shown to happen within these different spaces?

This thesis also examines the ways in which conventional notions of narrative form can be adapted to apply to video game content. Such a process is particularly influenced by Jenkins, who suggests that video games 'fit within a much older tradition of spatial stories, which have often taken the form of hero's odysseys, quest myths, or travel narratives' (2004, p. 122). This process of environmental storytelling accounts for a variety of different forms of narrative, as these 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-scène; or they provide resources for emergent narratives' (Jenkins, 2004, p. 123).

iii.   *What forms of action and interaction are promoted and subverted within particular spaces?*

This final sub-question considers the role of the ludic aspects of video games, with a series of different emphases that are used to account for the fact that this is a medium that is specially *played*: -

(A) What are the interactions that are afforded to the player? What are interactions are not available? What level of agency is afforded to the player?

(B) What is the player being asked to do in order to advance the game, or bring the game to a conclusion? Are there certain actions which are rewarded or, conversely, which are subjected to punishment/penalty?

(C) Do the actions of the player change the surrounding game world in a meaningful way? Do different actions have different effects?

(D) How does the game represent space? What role, if any, is played by maps, objective markers or the 'HUD' ('Heads-Up-Display)? What other visual aspects, if any, control the nature of the player's engagement? What is the role of cutscenes and FMVs in the game's content?

It is also important to engage with the broader significance of these structures, as detailed below: -

> **Question Two:** To what extent do these positions serve an ordering function of relevance to international geopolitics?

Whilst the foremost of these research questions examines *how* video game space engages in the manufacture of geopolitical imaginaries, it is also important to examine *what* such imaginaries might imply politically. Here, I argue that the different forms of militarised space that are encountered within video games can be coupled to broader issues of order, power and belonging. As Jason Dittmer highlights, 'popular culture conveys information about places, and also originates in certain contexts only to be consumed in various others. In this way, it is doubly geographical, conveying ideas about places from one place to another. Identity and power are thus invoked in multiple dimensions. Similarly, geopolitics is about the assignment of values to places, and it constructs hierarchies of people and places that matter and those that do not' (2010, pp. xvii-xviii). Video games are similarly productive of certain suppositions about the nature of political space and its occupants, answering questions such who belongs, who has power, and what the 'proper' forms of behaviour are in different spaces and places. In offering such an analysis I do, however, echo Shepherd's observation that 'no cultural artefact lends itself to single, authoritative readings. I cannot claim that this collection of chapters represents the definitive readings of the texts with which I engage' (2013, p. 5). Whilst there are many different ways in which spatiality could potentially be 'read' in games, this analysis is necessarily focused on just a few prevalent forms and the geopolitical imaginaries that are prompted by each.

> **Question 3:** How can video games be used to force 'reflection' on the ways in which we theorise political spaces?

Some analyses of popular culture have noted its utility in the theorisation of IR and politics, highlighting its potential ability to 'reveal key dynamics underpinning contemporary politics that might not register properly if expressed through the formal conventions of academia or political argumentation, even as it is complicit in reproducing them' (Grayson, 2013, p. 380). This final research question offers a similar emphasis, exploring the potential value of studying video games as a means by which we can then reflect on the ways in which we theorise space. As Shepherd reflects in her analysis of the representation of violence and gender, a politically engaged examination of popular culture 'can attend to the "conceptual" apparatus that structures knowledge in any given society and investigate not only how we (think we) know what we (think we) know – and mostly take for granted – but also what this means for who 'we' are. The categories we use to think with, those categories that are frequently assumed to be descriptive, such as 'white', 'female', 'heterosexual', and so on, are

constituted politically and are constitutive rather than reflective of identity. That is to say, such categories are always normative, rather than purely technical' (2013, pp. 2-3). Such a perspective is not limited to the ways in which we engage with personal identity, but can also be used to think about the ways in which we imagine particular spatialities. This can be at a broader level, such as the ways in which we think about the Netherlands, or in more technical terms, such as the ways in which we conceive of particular forms of space. In undertaking a "reading" of the spatial imaginaries created within video games, we are also provided with a means by which to expose some of the theoretical suppositions and internal conflicts that are used to create our critical lens. This thesis reflects on three key ways in which we understand the political space around us – engaging with the themes of urbanity, rurality and temporality (see Chapter Three) – utilizing an engagement with video games as a means by which to reflect upon the manner in which these particular spatial forms are commonly theorized.

1.4   Thesis Structure and Chapter Outlines

The remainder of this thesis is divided into a further seven chapters, which are structured into two broad parts. The first of these sections, comprising of Chapters Two, Three and Four, serves to provide the conceptual, theoretical and methodological bases on which this analysis of video game geopolitics is grounded. These chapters are produced through an engagement with a diverse range of different disciplinary literatures, drawing from fields such as rural geography and critical terrorism studies. In the second section, Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight offer an examination of some of the different ways in which military video gaming has engaged in the construction of particular spaces. These chapters not only use different bodies of theory to "read" video games, but also argue that their representations of different forms of spaces are co-constitutive of our broader geopolitical imaginaries. These chapters also draw upon video games as a means by which to potentially contribute to the formation of the critical "lens", exposing alternative or subverted approaches. The final of these chapters will serve as a conclusion, acting to unify this material and identify directions for potential future research into this area.

1.4.1   Chapter Outlines

Chapter Two focuses on the role of popular culture in the study of International Relations (IR), offering an overview of some of the different ways in which the existing literature has conceived of its analytical utility. Such a process draws upon the analytical frameworks that are provided by Nexon and Neumann (2006), Ruane and James (2008) and Robinson (2015a). These analyses go beyond the overly simplistic cause-and-effect framework, also conceptualising popular culture as a "mirror" of politics, as constitutive of political phenomena, and as a source of political data. This chapter will also aim to demonstrate the utility of critical geopolitics, a field of research which has been stimulated by

the recent re-militarisation of politics and the development of a neo-Reaganite foreign policy that is focussed on 'military build-ups and nefarious military doings in foreign places' (Dalby, 2008a, p. 414). Such an approach notably creates room for the study of popular culture as a site at which political discourse can circulate. Chapter Three then provides the theoretical basis for the analysis, providing an exploration of the different forms of political spatiality that are utilised within the subsequent chapters. Here, I focus specifically on the representation of urban and rural spaces, as well as a more future-orientated process of spatial representation. This chapter details the common theoretical approaches within each of these different areas, opening room for subsequent theoretical introspection. In Chapter Four, meanwhile, I begin by discussing some of the prevalent methodological strategies that are used in the analysis of popular culture and video games. This process is not limited to the literatures from within IR, but also draws from a series of related methodological approaches that have originated from within both Literature and Game Studies. Informed by these approaches, I outline a series of interrelated foci that account for the role of both the narrative *and* ludic aspects of the video game medium. Chapter Five is the first of the analytical chapters, engaging with the formation of different national imaginaries through the representation of different forms of urban spatialities. Here, I distinguish between "monumental" and "mundane" forms of space, which are shown to result in either collective or more individual modes of spatial attachment. Chapter Six engages with the other side of this spatial binary, focussing on the use of *rural* imaginaries within military video games. Developing on the literature discussed in Chapter Three, this chapter examines the formation of idyllic, backwoods and wilderness spatialities within video games, exploring the consequences of each for the formation of the individual identity. Of a particular prevalence within this section is the notion of the "Ghost" identity, which is used to denote the hyper-masculine warrior figure that is a commonplace part of popular culture. Chapter Seven concludes the analytical chapters of this thesis by exploring the temporal articulation of space, examining the extent to which geopolitical identity is produced through both forwards and backwards looking processes of mediation. Chapter Eight, finally, will then unify the different foci of these previous chapters. Here, I also outline some of the potential approaches that could be used in future research, including the examination of other video game genres and the broader surrounding cultural intertext.

Chapter Two: Popular Culture, Geopolitics and International Relations

Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the focus of this thesis, which examines the representation of different forms of space within military-themed video games. This chapter aims to provide a broader theoretical context for this endeavour, examining the ways in which both International Relations (IR) and related subfields within critical geopolitics have engaged with the study of popular culture. These literatures form the basis for my own analysis of the politics of popular culture, demonstrating the value of thinking critically about the role of spatializing imaginaries. In support of this objective, the remainder of this chapter is subdivided into two sections, as well as a conclusion.

The first of these sections examines the ways in which the relationship between popular culture and IR theory has been characterised, drawing upon the theoretical frameworks that are offered by Nexon and Neumann (2006), Ruane and James (2008), Weldes and Rowley (2015), and Robinson (2015a). These approaches suggest several ways in which popular culture can claim relevance to the study of political phenomena, highlighting a variety of analytical, conceptual and pedagogical functions. In reflecting on the utility of these frameworks for my own analysis, drawing upon the research questions outlined in Chapter One, I note the particular utility of the "constitutive" and "mirroring" roles that are afforded to popular culture.

In the following section, I offer a consideration of the insights that are advanced by critical geopolitics. This approach engages with the ways in which particular ideas of space are naturalised, suggesting that specific imaginaries are rendered commonsensical through their discursive (re)construction with a variety of formal, practical and popular sites (Dittmer & Dodds, 2008, p. 441; O'Tuathail, 1999, p. 110). Of a particular relevance for this analysis is the notion of a *popular* form of geopolitics, which examines the role of popular culture in the production of specific understandings of political spatiality (see, for example, Dittmer 2010; Sharp, 1993). Popular geopolitics suggests that the construction of space, even within cultural fiction, is a manifestation of political power and is contributory to the formation of a broader geopolitical imaginary (Dalby, 1991; Dittmer, 2010; O'Tuathail & Agnew, 1992; O'Tuathail, 1996). As Dittmer notes, this is a perspective which can be seen to share some objectives and methodological approaches with the research that has been undertaken within the fields of geography, cultural studies and IR theory: -

'Scholars in these fields often produce work that is easily aligned with the project of popular geopolitics, even if they would never label themselves as scholars of popular geopolitics' (2010, p. xviii; see also Dodds, 2008; 2015, p.53)

Unlike the literature arising within IR theory, which focuses on the relationship between political theory and popular culture, critical and popular forms of geopolitical analysis focus more specifically on the processes through which the surrounding world is spatialized. This section offers an examination of some the ways in which this is believed to be achieved, addressing concepts such as the 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2006) and banal nationalism (Billig, 1995). These concepts are used to demonstrate the utility of popular geopolitics for the engagement with video games that will follow within the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Following the completion of these analyses, a brief conclusion then introduces the discussion of the different forms of spatiality that are examined within Chapter Three.

2.1 Popular Culture and World Politics (PCWP)

Within the social sciences, there has been a 'tendency to privilege the big, the macro and the structural' (Dittmer, 2015, p. 47). This has been reflected in the mimetic approach to the study of IR theory, which can be seen to 'focus on the mechanisms, institutional arrangements, interests, bureaucracies and decision-making practices that constitute relations among states, business and civil society actors' (Grayson, et al., 2009, p. 155; see also Nexon & Neumann, 2006, p. 17; Saunders, 2012; Weldes, 2006, pp. 177-178). Such analyses view the examination of these formal, macro-level sites as the practice of a 'real, serious politics' (Weldes, 2006, p. 178), drawing upon scientific forms of analysis in an attempt to access the world "as it is" and free from interpretation. The study of popular culture, meanwhile, is viewed as a relative triviality, as it seems to represent 'ostensibly everything that world politics *isn't*: fiction, entertainment, illusion [and] distraction' (Rowley, 2010, p. 309; emphasis in original). This approach arguably has had a theoretical impact, evident in the distinction that is drawn between "high" and "low" forms of data: -

> '[A]ppropriate, serious – that is "high" – data are those that circulate among elite institutions, be they states, international organisations, multinational corporations (MNCs), NGOs, or the media. Eschewed as irrelevant, or worse, as inappropriately frivalous are "low data", particularly from popular or mass culture. Serious analyses of IR do not busy themselves with novels, films, television programs, computer games, advertising, and the like' (Weldes, 2006, p. 178; see also Caso & Hamilton, 2015, p. 3; Shepherd, 2013, p.2; Weldes & Rowley, 2015, p.2)

This approach has, however, been undermined by the development of an aesthetically-orientated form of scholarship, challenging this distinction between factual and fictive sources of political knowledge (Bleiker, 2001). Such an approach highlights the diffusion of representative power, which

is traditionally held to reside within "high" forms of discourse, down into more everyday sites (Neumann, 2001, p. 604; Weldes, 1999, p. 118). This suggests that, rather than continuing to treat popular culture and world politics as separate fields, we might instead think of these as being parts of a continuum in which 'each is implicated in the practices and understandings of the other' (Grayson, et al., 2009, p. 158; see also Clapton and Shepherd, 2017; van Veeren, 2009; Weldes, 2006). Such a perspective has prompted an increase in research that explores the connections between popular culture and IR theory, including examinations of film (Doucet, 2005; Weber, 2005; 2006), television (Buus, 2009; Carpenter, 2012; Weldes, 1999) and popular literature (Blanton, 2013; Nexon & Neumann, 2006). These analyses of popular culture have served to broaden the remit of IR, allowing the field to 'move away from stagnant macro-political analyses focussed on systemic relations between states to find new referents and highlight new dynamics of power' (Caso & Hamilton, 2015, p. 2; see also Nexon & Neumann, 2006, p. 6; Weldes & Rowley, 2015, p. 24). Nonetheless, it is important to remain attentive to the ways in which we might characterise the nature of the relationship between politics and popular culture. Kangas (2009), for example, has highlighted some limitations in the language that is used to talk about popular culture within the discipline of IR: -

> '[I]t has become characteristic for the existing literature to simply argue that popular culture *reflects* pre-existing ideas of international or world politics, provides a *site* for the reproduction or contestation of official state narrative, or is becoming increasingly *intertwined* with international relations and world politics. Such a choice of wording creates an impression that international relations and popular culture belong to different ontological categories' (Kangas, 2009, p. 318, emphasis in original; see also Grayson, et al. 2009, p.155)

Weldes and Rowley (2015) offer a similar reflection, drawing on their experiences of teaching IR through the study of popular culture. Their analysis highlights an apparent "stuckness" in the ways in which their students perceived the interrelationship between politics and popular culture, noting the lingering assumption that 'there is/ought to be a simple, perhaps even singular way to grasp how one "thing" – popular culture – "relates" (preferably causally) to another "thing" – world politics' (2015, p. 12). Whilst such a conceptualisation can be linked to the "disciplining" of knowledge within IR (Clapton & Shepherd, 2017, p. 9; Weldes & Rowley, 2015, p. 12), the recent interest in popular culture has served to highlight that, 'from the rise of "celebrity politicians" to the new political economies generated by online video games like "World of Warcraft", something significant is occurring with respect to popular culture, world politics and the perceived bandwidth of political possibility… The vexing question is precisely what that might be' (Grayson, et al., 2009, p. 156). Whilst there is *no*

convenient, linear answer to that question, a number of analyses have sought to classify the different dimensions of this relationship.

In introducing analyses of the *Harry Potter* franchise, Nexon and Neumann distinguish between the concepts of (i.) politics and popular culture; (ii.) popular culture as a mirror; (iii.) popular culture as a form of data, and (iv.) popular culture as constitutive of politics (2006, pp. 9-17). Weldes and Rowley (2015), meanwhile, can also be seen to differentiate between a range of different sites at which popular culture and world politics can be seen to interact: (i.) in the use of popular culture by the state; (ii.) within the surrounding political economy; (iii) within global flows/practices; (iv) in representative, intertextual practices and (v) in consumptive and cultural practices. Some further insights are drawn from the works of Ruane and James (2008) and Robinson (2015a), whose analyses expand on the potential pedagogical or "mirroring" utility of popular culture. Ruane and James examine *The Lord of the Rings* franchise, arguing that this cultural artefact 'can be used as a pedagogical light to illustrate the historical context and current debate within both problem-solving and critical forms of IR theory. In addition, it can be used as a pedagogical mirror to elucidate how paradigms provide a form of tunnel vision that both illuminate and restrict understandings of our world' (2008, p. 377). Robinson, meanwhile, differentiates between analyses that serve either 'theory-capturing' or 'foundation-revealing' objectives (2015a, pp. 454-455). These approaches not only outline popular culture's significance as a pedagogical resource, but also suggest that cultural artefacts can be used to create space for critical reflection and theoretical growth.

It is important to note that, whilst these frameworks 'can contribute to understanding the world… they also simplify it, including the actors, the acts and the relationship between them' (Ruane & James, 2008, p. 392; see also Weldes & Rowley, 2015, p.24). As a result, it is important that these literatures are *not* treated as rigid frameworks, and that it is acknowledged that any examination of popular culture will likely criss-cross between these different models. Nonetheless, it is notable that Nexon and Neumann reflect within their own analysis that 'the distinction between these models are imperfect [but] they have served us well as a starting point for thinking and writing' (2006, p. 9). The various attempts to model the relationship between popular culture and world politics will serve the same role within the following subsections of this chapter: -

2.1.1   Popular Culture as Data

One approach to the analysis of popular culture is to use the various artefacts as an accessible source of data. Such an analysis can, for example, be used to provide 'evidence about [the] dominant norms, ideas, identities or beliefs in a particular state, society or region. This approach draws on insights from hermeneutics, forms of content analysis, and ethnography, in which cultural texts and images are seen

as storage places for meaning in a particular society' (Nexon & Neumann, 2006, pp. 13-14; see also Kangas, 2009, pp. 323-324; Towns & Rumelili, 2006). One example of this process is evident in the work of Towns and Rumelili, whose analysis suggests that the *Harry Potter* franchise can be used to 'provide excellent data [with which] to analyse the construction of Swedish and Turkish national identities in relation to Others' (2006, p. 62). Their analysis traverses the themes of gender relationships and economics, noting that there is a difference of focus between the Swedish and Turkish national consciousness.

This approach to the examination of popular culture is not limited to the production of evidence about cultural values and norms, however, and can be used in order to generate data about political processes. Weldes and Rowley (2015), for example, posit that this interrelationship can be extended to examine the contested nature of global flows, whether these are referred to as the processes of homogenisation, hybridisation, cultural imperialism or globalisation. They highlight 'the *ubiquity* of these flows and the recognition that most of what flows *is* popular cultural… For example, Americanisation might be experienced through the pervasiveness of the US TV show *Dallas*, while modernisation might be experienced through the ubiquity of television in general' (Weldes & Rowley, 2015, p. 17; emphasis in original). In examining popular culture, we can more easily track the form of such 'flows', whilst also examining the ways in which they may act to shape the world. Weldes and Rowley, for example, not only track the spread of English through popular culture (e.g. within advertising and music, as well through encounters with tourists), but also note the extent to which we privilege certain forms of speech as the 'proper' modes of commerce, finance and governance (2015, p. 17). Such an analysis might permit us to challenge conventional understandings of the ways in which these 'flows' function, undermining their perceived linearity and contemporary temporality.

The use of popular culture as a form of data is not limited to any specific approach, and will form the basis for other types of analysis. Some of the objectives of these different approaches are discussed within the following sections: -

2.1.2   Politics and Popular Culture

Nexon and Neumann argue that 'one of the most straightforward ways to study the intersection between popular culture and world politics is to treat popular culture (and its artefacts) as causes and effects of the kinds of political processes familiar to any student of international relations' (2006, p. 11). This approach suggests not only that popular culture is influenced by political processes, but also suggests that artefacts of popular culture can potentially influence the course of political discourse, debate and action.

One aspect of this interrelationship is evident in the extent to which 'popular culture is influenced by events central to international relations, such as wars, terrorist attacks, political movements and the like' (Nexon & Neumann, 2006, p. 11). We can, for example, see the influence of the binary structure of the Cold War within the content of film (Power & Crampton, 2007, p. 194) and popular magazines (Sharp, 1993). A similar influence is evident within more contemporary culture, in which the lingering discourses of counter-terrorism and the 'War on Terror' remain clear thematic influences within artefacts of film (e.g. The Kingdom, 2007; The Hurt Locker, 2008; Four Lions, 2010), television (e.g. 24, 2001-2010; Homeland, 2011; Quantico, 2015) and a broad 'raft of redemptive military entertainment' (Payne, 2014, p. 265)'. Many contemporary video games also portray these themes, offering visions of proleptic conflict in place of the prior focus on the recreation of historical events. Annandale, for example, reflects on the extent to which contemporary video games have 'mirrored, tracked and questioned the dreams and nightmares that have shaken the American psyche in the wake of 9/11 – dreams and nightmares that have birthed dramatic actions in the areas of domestic and foreign policy' (2010, p. 97). This is not a linear relationship, however, as artefacts of popular culture can also act to 'shape the broader terms of political discourse, influence debates about specific politics and galvanise movements' (Nexon & Neumann, 2006, p. 11). This is particularly evident in times of trauma, when popular culture may provide an easy referent. It is, for example, often noted that those that witnessed the 9/11 attacks referred to them as being 'like a movie' (Dittmer, 2010, p. 2). A more complex example of this process is examined by Holland (2011), who notes the creation of a non-cannon episode of *The West Wing* in the weeks that followed these attacks. He argues that, 'as the official narratives and policy of the Bush administration were put forward, the West Wing gave credence to the particular and contingent vision they offered, helping contextualise the terror threat and naturalise the response that they entailed for the American public' (Holland, 2011, p. 106).

Popular culture can also be seen to have political effects on the occasions on which its content becomes the subject of political, religious or moral controversy. Gemmill and Nexon, for example, reflect on the controversy surrounding the portrayal of magic in the *Harry Potter* franchise, suggesting that this fiction is perceived to contribute 'contribute to a broader assault on Christian beliefs found in popular culture and society at large' (2006, p. 93). As highlighted in Chapter One, there are similar, well-documented controversies that surrounded the content of video games. In addition to the fervour that surrounds the depiction of violence in the medium, video games are often made the subject of political scrutiny for perceived attacks on the national identities of foreign nations, or for a disparaging depiction of prominent political figures (see, for example, Gabbatt, 2010). A useful reflection on the role of cultural controversies is offered by Hansen (2011), whose analysis examines

the publication of cartoon images of the Prophet Muhammad in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten in 2005. The examination of these cartoons, which sparked international protests, death threats and reprisal attacks, prompts Hansen to reflect that visual imagery 'does not enter into the political without being the subject of the debate, or engaging with the discourses already in place' (2011, p. 53). This salient observation emphasises that the mere existence of a cultural artefact, taken in isolation, is an insufficient indicator of political potency. Cultural artefacts may enter political discussion because of their interaction with pre-existent, externally imposed discursive frameworks, rather than the original 'meaning' that may have been intended by an author or creator.

The interrelationship between politics and popular culture may also extend beyond the artefact itself, placing popular culture amidst broader political systems. This might, for example, include an examination of issues such as marketing, copyright law, and localised media regulations (Nexon & Neumann, 2006, p. 11; Street, 1997, p. 6; Weldes & Rowley, 2015). An alternative approach is to consider a particular cultural artefact as a representative microsystem, examining the myriad of different political processes that are brought to bear upon it. Weldes and Rowley outline some of the numerous political dimensions to the manufacture of 'sneakers', concluding that a focus on this artefact 'allows us to get at multiple dynamic intersections of (gendered) economics, politics and popular culture' (2015, p. 16).

This conceptualisation of a cause-and-effect relationship is not without critical issues. Kangas, for example, highlights that whilst this framework offers a compelling means by which to identify the tangible "effects" of this interrelationship, it also 'reduces popular culture to a simple trigger of political events. The content of artefacts is left with little attention. Either specific products of popular culture are just assumed to set off particular international relations events, or events in international relations are argued to prompt the production of specific artefacts. The question over the complex ways in which popular culture actually comes to produce effects is left with little elaboration' (2009, p. 323). Whilst it is unclear whether the different aspects of this interrelationship can ever be fully disaggregated, some of the other frameworks examined within this section can be seen to explore some other potential linkages.

2.1.3   Popular Culture as Reflective

As Weldes and Rowley note, our conceptualisation of the relationship between popular culture and world politics 'often hinges on a "reflection" metaphor, in which popular culture (whether news media, film or TV) is interrogated on (and frequently judged by) the extent to which it mirrors the real world' (2015, p. 18). This conceptualisation implies an authentic, mimetic process of replication, through which popular culture potentially 'captures and reflects back some essential or important

features or dynamics of international relations and world politics' (Kangas, 2009, p. 323). This has implications for the study of IR theory: -

> 'Using popular culture in our teaching and research, we can illuminate different representations; produce different forms of knowledge about the issues, actors, events and theories that we seek to understand and explain; and recognise different claims to knowledge in the academic study of IR. We can stop requiring students to leave what they know about the international from popular culture and other sites of analysis that remain marginalised in the discipline 'at the door', and together learn new ways of seeing world politics, across the largely arbitrary disciplinary divides and in the spaces between' (Clapton & Shepherd, 2017, p. 15)

Both Ruane and James (2008) and Robinson (2015a) differentiate between the illustrative, pedagogical value of popular culture and its use in identifying and challenging our theoretical assumptions. Whilst Rune and James (2008) differentiate between these uses of popular culture as, respectively, a "light" and a "mirror", Robinson (2015a) distinguishes between "theory-capturing" and "foundation-revealing" analytical approaches.

Popular Culture as 'Theory-Capturing'/as a 'Light'

As Blanton notes, the study of popular culture is now afforded a significance as 'an undeveloped, though potentially fruitful vein of pedagogy. Indeed, the ready availability of engaging and amusing resources, ranging from horror and fantasy films to satirical sources such as The Daily Show and The Onion, provides great opportunities for making our classrooms engaging and relevant to new generations of students' (2013, pp. 12-13; see also Grayson, et al., 2009, p. 156; Ruane & James, 2008, p.392). The accessible nature of popular culture has prompted pedagogically-orientated analyses of a wide variety of cultural artefacts, including examinations of film (Engert & Spencer, 2009; Giglio, 2005; Gregg, 1998; Weber, 2005), television (Beavers, 2002; Carpenter, 2012; Drezner, 2011b; Salter, 2012; Weldes, 2003), and literature (Blanton, 2013; Nexon & Neumann, 2006; Ruane & James, 2008). Utilised in such a way, artefacts of popular culture provide an analogy for our own world and permit us to visualise the theories of IR more clearly. Ruane and James, for example, utilise *The Lord of the Rings* in their analysis of IR theory, noting that 'each approach has a different worldview, with different ontological, epistemological, and normative assumptions, and as such can be illustrated by specific characters or races' (2008, p. 379). Another prominent body of research has aimed to capitalise on the resurgent cultural interest in zombies as a means by which to illustrate the various theories of IR in an engaging and accessible manner (see, for example, Blanton, 2013; Drezner, 2011a; Hall, 2011; Hannah & Wilkinson, 2016). This "zombie IR" centres on the extent to which 'the transnational

challenge that an outbreak of the undead poses is very much akin to the threat of the "here and now" – terrorism, climate change, infectious disease' (Hannah and Wilkinson, 2016, p.6; see also Blanton, 2013, p. 9). Drezner, for example, utilises a hypothetical zombie outbreak in order to examine 'what the different theories of international relations predict would happen if the dead began to rise from the grave and feast upon the living' (2011a, p. 1). Blanton, meanwhile, draws upon *World War Z: an Oral History of the Zombie Wars* (Brooks, 2006) as an exaggerated analogy for the political characteristics of the world around us: -

> 'China represses news of the outbreak and virtually collapses, Russia practices similar brutality and becomes a religious/nationalist state, Israel becomes a zombie-free garrison state, Japan finds itself overrun with zombies and evacuates its entire population, and North Korea goes (literally) underground' (Blanton, 2013, p. 5)

This zombified, fictional world is used to explore issues of consequence to IR, including the role of fear and panic in the Iran-Pakistan conflict (2013, p. 3), the extent of one's moral responsibilities in times of trauma (2013, pp. 4-5), and the formation of the zombie identity as a proxy for the political Other (2013, p. 8). This approach to the study of popular culture is, however, potentially problematic, as it 'maintains disciplinary boundaries unchallenged, affirming current analytical priorities surrounding nationhood, gender and suchlike, and undermines our potential for critical thought' (Hannah & Wilkinson, 2016, p. 6; see also Clapton & Shepherd, 2017, p. 6). This means that it is increasingly desirable to go beyond this analogical use of popular culture, using these artefacts in order to disturb the bounded, "disciplined" presentations of knowledge that are common in IR analyses (see, for example, Clapton & Shepherd, 2017, p.15; Dixit, 2012, p.290; Grayson, et al., 2009, p.156; Hannah & Wilkinson, 2016, p.6; Ruane and James, 2008, p.378). This approach allows us to expose the core assumptions of the various IR theories to a closer scrutiny, potentially facilitating access to something that may be absent, taken-for-granted, or otherwise inaccessible. Such a perspective is described by Ruane and James as the use of popular culture as a "mirror", with the analysis of cultural artefacts used to allow us to 'reflect on our theoretical and pedagogical assumptions' (2008, p. 388). Robinson, meanwhile, refers to a "foundation-revealing" form of analysis within which cultural artefacts are used 'in order to open up gaps and reveal the foundation upon which [the] theory is based' (2015a, p. 454). Such a perspective is explored in more detail below: -

Popular Culture as "Foundation Revealing"/as a 'Mirror'

The previous section highlighted the increasing role of popular culture in pedagogical practices, noting that cultural artefacts – used as forms of political analogy – can mediate IR theory in a more engaging manner than conventional approaches. The analysis of cultural artefacts can, however, also create a

level of ontological displacement, which allows us to expose bias or challenge the preconceived, "common-sense" ways in which we are accustomed to seeing the world around us (Juneau & Sucharov, 2010, p. 173; Nexon & Neumann, 2006, p. 12). Such engagements can provide space for theoretical inspiration, introspection and innovation, often transgressing otherwise rigid disciplinary boundaries, meaning that there is the potential for the generation of new terminologies or alternative theoretical approaches to real-world issues (Clapton & Shepherd, 2017, p. 15; Nexon & Neumann, 2006, p. 11). We can also challenge the foundations of common theoretical concepts, utilising analyses of popular culture in order to 'shed light on that which has been previously marginalised or hidden, including those things that we in the discipline often take for granted' (Clapton & Shepherd, 2017, p. 15). Dixit (2012), for example, examines the extent to which the *Doctor Who* television series can be used in order to destabilise the conventional ways of understanding difference and danger within IR. Her analysis aims to demonstrate the extent to which 'popular culture can play a role in alternative ways of imagining our relations with those considered different or alien, rather than seeing them as threats to be eliminated' (Dixit, 2012, p. 290). She observes that whilst the perceived sources of "danger" are commonly assumed to be external to the core body politic – providing targets for the practices of state securitisation – the science-fiction series instead places an outside "Other" as its central protagonist. Whilst the earth is shown to depend on the protection of this (literal, and figurative) "alien" figure, the conventional sites associated with state securitisation – including the government, police force and the army – are often shown to be inept, ill-equipped or corrupt. Such a depiction is used to invite closer scrutiny of the ways in which we construct the notions of "safe" and "threatening" identities, suggesting that a willingness to engage with those deemed to be "different" could prove to be transformative of the ways in which we conceptualise security: -

> 'By acknowledging insecurity is not external to the body politic of the state, *Doctor Who* acknowledges that the state (and individual) selves are actually *constituted* in relations with those considered different and alien. Reviewing self-other encounters from the perspective of the alien "others"… allows us to note different meanings of security and danger when seen from an alien (often marginalised) standpoint' (Dixit, 2012, p. 303)

The show also serves to undermine the externalisation of the "threat", through the transformation of everyday objects into sources of insecurity. These adversaries – which include robotic store Santa Clauses and animated store mannequins – serve to demonstrate 'how danger may be present in everyday life and not just during crises or exceptional situations, which is a view of (in)security that feminist and postcolonial IR scholars have emphasized' (Dixit, 2012, pp. 296-297). Such analyses of popular culture have not been limited to the marshalling of our understandings of difference. Salter (2012), for example, utilises the reality-television show *Survivor* in order to highlight the role of

emotion in the Prisoner's Dilemma. Deviating from the common preoccupation with supposedly rational decision-making processes, he suggests that IR – like *Survivor* – can be understood as a social game. He notes that the show's contestants 'voted in anger, frustration, upset, admiration, and love' (2012, p. 370), suggesting that the practice of IR ought to incorporate an analysis of such emotion in the pursuit of better critical practices.

Other analyses have emphasised the extent to which the otherwise marginalised role of gender in world politics can be exposed through the study of artefacts of popular culture, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Firefly* and *Game of Thrones* (see, for example, Clapton & Shepherd, 2017; Ruane & James, 2008). Clapton and Shepherd, for example, suggest that the *Game of Thrones* television series 'provides us with representations of the fundamental function of gendered logics in the processes by which authority and power are constituted, performed and reproduced' (2017, p. 14). These include the overt masculinisation of warfare through the violation of female and feminised bodies (pp. 11, 13-14), as well as the extent to which the acquisition of political power by women necessitates the internalisation of masculinising traits of confidence, ferocity and the willingness to utilise violence (pp. 12-13).

Ruane and James (2008, p. 388) meanwhile, suggest that a focus on *The Lord of the Rings* can be used to facilitate a closer exploration of the role of gender, race, sexuality, class or development in world politics, moving the focus away from a more conventional engagement with elite or bureaucratic interests: -

> '[M]ost IR approaches illustrated by male characters in *LOTR* (Elves, Orcs, Humans, Hobbits, and Dwarves) prioritise the problems of "states" as the most important, whereas feminist approaches represented by female characters in *LOTR* prioritise the individual and collective problems of women and other non-dominant groups as both most important and inadequately addressed by "state" security' (Ruane & James, 2008, p. 389)

These analyses serve to highlight the limitations of conventional theoretical approaches, exposing where the disciplining of knowledge may act to conceal specific groups or approaches. As Ruane and James note, 'the world is not always perfectly explained by our theories, and there are frequently ambiguities and rough edges that exist and must be studied' (2008, p. 388). Popular culture can be used to call attention to these inconsistencies, allowing us to learn from the ways in which different aspects of IR theory may conflict or fail to inform.

2.1.4   Popular Culture as Constitutive

Whilst artefacts of popular culture have often sought to represent the world in a plausible manner, these imaginaries have not always been accepted as a part of politics. Indeed, as Muller notes, 'the

pages of Tom Clancy's (1996) *Executive Orders* tell of civilian aircraft being used as weapons, and Edward Zwick's (1998) film *The Siege* places suicide bombers on the streets of New York City. These prescient accounts from 1990s popular culture were widely read, viewed – and dismissed, if regarded at all, as simply entertainment' (2008, p. 201). In conceptualising popular culture as constitutive of politics, however, we can relax the boundaries between the first and second order forms of representation, examining the 'role of shared understandings, rules, norms and codes of interpretation as constraining and enabling factors of international relations' (Kangas, 2009, p. 323; see also Muller, 2008, p.200; van Veeren, 2009, p.365). This perspective invites a focus on the intersections between our cultural fictions and the broader 'political myths' (Weber, 2005) or 'founding stories' (Kangas, 2009, p. 324) that influence our day-to-day conceptualisations of the world around us. Nexon and Neumann (2006, p. 17) highlight four particular ways in which popular culture can be seen to have a constitutive effect on international politics, detailing determining, informing, enabling and naturalising influences.

Popular culture is described as having had a *determining* influence when it is used by individuals to fill in the gaps in their own knowledge, acting as a referent for decision-making on the occasions when no other information about a given situation is available. Nexon and Neumann (2006, pp. 17-18) acknowledge that there is little real-world evidence of pure determining effects, offering only the apparent ties between elite decision-making practices during the 1960s Congo crisis and the representations of the region that are contained within cultural artefacts such as *Tarzan* and *Tintin*.

A focus on the *informing* influence of popular culture, meanwhile, suggests that these artefacts can have an 'effect on political thought or action, by priming societies to think in specific ways about social categories such as robots or space travel' (Carpenter, 2016, p. 56). Here, popular culture is understood to offer a particular frame through which the consumer can see the world. This approach has, for example, been particularly evident in discussions of the relationship between the NASA space programme and televised science-fiction series (see Chapter One). Although such representations are argued to be more widespread, it remains difficult to disaggregate the specific impact of popular culture from other potential influences (Carpenter, 2016, p. 57; Nexon & Neumann, 2006, p. 18).

The concept of *enabling effects* refers to the familiar narrative forms that are co-opted by politicians in order to generate a relatable narrative or provide strength for a political policy (Carpenter, 2016, p. 56; Nexon & Neumann, 2006, pp. 18-19). Van Zoonen, for example, reflects on the likening of politics to television soap operas, concluding that the metaphor has been deployed to signify scandal, conflict and incompetence (2005, pp. 25-28). Dodds (2008a), meanwhile, highlights

the prolific use of science-fiction and action film imagery by the former US-Presidents Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush: -

> 'One well-known example would be the so-called 'Top-Gun' moment when [George W. Bush] was a passenger on a plane that landed on the USS *Abraham Lincoln* in 2003... Bush's naval outfit and flying performance was interpreted as a deliberate attempt to align the President with the armed forces and to use his announcement that "major combat operations in Iraq have ended" to convey the impression that the USA was in control of its own destiny once again' (2008a, pp. 478-489)

The final constitutive model, which addresses *naturalising* effects, suggests that popular culture can be used in order to make 'a particular way of looking at the world appear to be a part of the natural order, just the way things are, and hence difficult to argue against' (Nexon & Neumann, 2006, p. 19). The television series *24* (2001-2010), for example, is argued to have had implications for the ways in which we perceive acts of terrorism and extra-legal force, evoking 'a Schmittian understanding of politics: that "authentic" politics is a fatal confrontation between friend and enemy, and is consequently beyond legal regulation. Though the packaging of *24* may be new and exciting, the underlying message remains the same – that America is open, innocent, and law-abiding, but that extra-legal force is needed to maintain these qualities when confronted by an existential threat' (van Veeren, 2009, pp. 362-362).

Other analyses have highlighted similar connections between popular culture and hegemonic political narratives. De Goede, for example, emphasises the inflated role of the "sleeper-cell" narrative within popular, political and legal discourse, describing this as 'a juridical fiction that enables unprecedented legal action to be taken' (2008, p. 162). Muller (2008), meanwhile, focusses on the film *Children of Men* (2006) and the novel *Surveillance*, arguing that these cultural artefacts act to engender particular perspectives on contemporary risk management and the emergence of the biometric state.

2.1.5   Importing IR Frameworks

Whilst the above frameworks provide a useful means by which to think about the interrelationship between popular culture and world politics, they also expose that there is no one, single "correct" way in which to interpret a popular cultural text and highlight that each individual analysis will utilise the study of popular culture for specific analytical ends (Carpenter, 2016; Shepherd, 2013, p. 5). To conclude this subsection, therefore, I focus on the consequences of the above approaches for my own engagement with video game space. Whilst an exhaustive analysis of video game space would necessitate an examination of *each* of these different interactions (Robinson, 2015a, p. 453; Weldes,

1999, p. 122), I offer a narrower focus that correlates with the objectives of this particular engagement. Building on the research questions that are outlined in Chapter One, this thesis will pay particular attention to the 'constitutive' (Nexon & Neumann, 2006, p. 17) and the reflective, 'mirroring' (Ruane & James, 2008, pp. 388-392) functions of popular culture.

As outlined earlier in this chapter, the foremost of these perspectives – the notion of popular culture as 'constitutive' of politics – focuses, in part, on the ways in which the production and dissemination of cultural artefacts can serve to normalise specific ideas about global spaces. Indeed, as Nexon argues, 'popular culture seldom has a direct effect on international politics. Instead, it supplies common referents that shape our understanding of events; its images, narratives and ideas intrude into the "common sense" of its consumers' (2011). This approach correlates with two of the research questions that are outline in Chapter One, which engage specifically with the production and organisation of supposedly commonsensical geo-spatial orders: -

Question One: In what ways does the simulation of space in console military video games serve to create specific geopolitical imaginaries?

Question Two: To what extent do these positions serve an ordering function of relevance to international geopolitics?

In this thesis, I argue that the simulation of political space within video games facilitates specific understandings of political identity and national geography that appear to be natural and authentic. As Neumann reflects, 'geography is not simply something that exists outside of the signs we use to communicate about it. The techniques we use to categorise space – maps being a key example – and the languages we use to discuss it – for example, dividing space into "regions" – are inseparable parts of our experience of space' (2006, pp. 157-158). The content of military-themed video games provides one key site, replete with visual, aural and ludic languages, at which political spaces are discursively constructed and reconstructed. This is achieved through the simulation of spaces that are instinctively familiar (see, for example, Chapter Five on the role of the suburban dwellingscapes) or a hazard (see, for example, Chapter Six on the role of the wilderness). Each of these acts of interpretation is a recirculation of familiar spatial tropes as "knowledge" of the nature of the world around us. In *Call of Duty: Ghosts* (2013), for example, entry into peripheral, rural space become analogous for the 'loss' of one's national identity and the commensurate sense of civilised Selfhood.

These research foci will also benefit from a consideration of the contribution of critical and popular forms of geopolitics, subfields of political geography which have sought to destabilise the formation of our taken-for-granted conceptualisations of space and place. Popular geopolitics, like the critical approaches to IR theory, offers an analytical perspective which decentres the role of the state

and points to the manifestation of political power within a range of banal, quotidian products and practices of consumption (see, for example, Sharp, 1993 on *The Reader's Digest* magazine). This literature is discussed in more detailed within the following subsection.

Within this analysis of popular culture, I also echo the suggestion that 'it is interesting to explore not only the specific lessons that can be learned from interrogating the form of representational practice that it employs, but also the more general possibilities that it can engender new ways of thinking about popular culture, global politics and the discipline of IR' (Clapton & Shepherd, 2017, pp. 5-6; see also Dixit, 2012; Hannah & Wilkinson, 2016). As such this analysis will also engage with some of the different ways in which video games can force "reflection" on the ways in which we theorise the nature of our surrounding political spaces: -

Question Three: How can video games be used to force 'reflection' on the ways in which we theorise political spaces?

As detailed within this chapter, the idea that popular culture is "reflective" of politics has two primary practical applications – its use as a "light" and its use as a "mirror" (Ruane & James, 2008). These ideas are influential in conceptualising the nature of the relationship between video games and popular culture within this thesis. In treating video games as a "light", this thesis will examine the ways in which the medium can be used, quite literally, in order to "illuminate" the player's understanding of particular forms of theory. Chapter Five for example, which centres on the representation of national spaces in video games, will use the medium to demonstrate the extent to which a sense of belonging is reproduced through the recreation of familiar urban landscapes.

The use of popular culture as a "mirror", meanwhile, centres on the use of these video games as a means by which to access hidden or subverted aspects of the surrounding theory. This has potential consequences for the ways in which we engage in the production of spatial and political knowledges, as concepts such as "national", "rural" and "temporal" can be shown to be culturally and politically constructed. These concepts are not merely the product of theory, but are also continually produced and reproduced in one's engagement with video games – through the characters that we play and encounter, through the places that we experience, and through the actions that we are expected to take.

As a result, this analysis of video game space does not simply isolate different forms of spatial representation, but also examines the ways in which these games may potentially influence the nature of our critical lens. Some pertinent critical approaches are discussed in Chapter Three, which engages with the literatures pertaining to the creation of urban, rural and temporal spatialities. In the following subsection, however, I focus on the contribution of geopolitics to this analytical process: -

2.2   Geopolitics

Since the mid-1970s, the terminologies that are associated with "geopolitics" have enjoyed a steady resurgence in use (Mamadouh, 1998, p. 137; Mamadouh & Dijkink, 2006, p. 350). These concepts have attained a particularly privileged status within the media, where they are used as a 'discursive resource [that is] able to generate insights into the geographical and resource dimensions of world politics' (Dittmer & Dodds, 2008, p. 498). For O'Tuathail, this is because the evocation of geopolitics 'promises uncanny clarity and insight in a complex world. It actively closes down an openness to the geographical diversity of the world and represses questioning and difference' (1999, p. 113). Dittmer offers a similar reflection, noting that the various terminologies of geopolitics offer a 'veneer of tremendous explanatory power… it sounds so helpful, so powerful – like a key opening a lock. It seems like understanding geopolitics could lead to understanding the world' (2010, p. 2). Despite this renewed popularity, it is notable there is no single definition of the concept of "geopolitics" that would be recognisable to the myriad of different disciplines that claim to engage in such research (Kelly, 2006, p. 26; Mamadouh, 2010, p. 320). Of a particular value here, however, is the distinction between the neoclassical and critical approaches to geopolitical analysis. As Bassin surmises, 'the two faces of contemporary geopolitics are clear. The renaissance of geopolitics has involved a return to the traditional modes and spirit of classical geopolitics, paradoxically at the very same time that it has produced a radically different alternative to them in the form of "critical" geopolitics' (2004, p. 624). Where a revived, neoclassical form of geopolitics aims to capture the 'reality' of the global political system, focussing on the analysis of high political discourse, an emergent "critical" form of analysis instead suggests that our understandings of spatiality are constructed. Whilst this thesis engages primarily with this later perspective, as it has created space for the analysis of popular culture, it must be acknowledged that this approach cannot be considered in isolation from that which it has sought to critique (Bassin, 2004, p. 625; Kelly, 2006, pp. 27-28). In order to properly introduce the role of critical and popular form of geopolitical analysis, it is necessary to begin by more broadly examining the roots of geopolitical analysis and the theoretical assumptions that have been associated with its different phases: -

2.2.1   Classical Geopolitics

The classical conceptualisation of 'geopolitics' – or 'Geopolitik' in its original Germanic form – saw formal inception in the late-1890s, discussed by Kjellén alongside the notions of demopolitik, ekonomipolitik, sociopolitik and kratopolitik (Dittmer, 2010, p. 3; Mamadouh, 1998, p. 237). The term was used to emphasise the key characteristics of the state, including its 'topopolitik' (the location of a state in relation to other states), 'morphopolitik' (the form of the territory within a state) and

'physiopolitik' (the surface and physical characteristics of this particular territory). The concept of 'Geopolitik' held an implied double-meaning, used to refer to both the existence of these characteristics *and* the act of studying these characteristics (Mamadouh, 1998, p. 237). Noting the subsequent interest in a biological theory of the state, key to German geography in the early 1900s, Mamadouh surmises that 'the basic elements of the classical geopolitical are resumed in a few words: the state is conceived of as a living organism, therefore borders are conceived as flexible (they change in the course of the 'life' of a state, in other words a state enlarges its territory when its strengths are growing at the expense of older states in decline); finally, following social Darwinism, the evolution of the political organism is determined by its environment' (1998, p. 238).

The proponents of this classical geopolitics take on a modernist approach, one which aims to objectively represent 'the world as it is, not being intent upon radical revision, but instead focussing upon simplifying reality by examining facts neutrally and assembling these where possible into theory as their method for facilitating reform' (Kelly, 2006, pp. 32-33). It does not aim to judge the prevailing institutions and power relations that characterise international politics, but seeks instead to resolve the problems that occur within them (Kelly, 2006, p. 34). To this end, it is assumed that there is a single, pre-existing world with fixed spatial parameters that exists 'out there', separate from the observer, which can be objectively captured and reported upon (Kelly, 2006, pp. 34-37). This approach has been evoked as an aid to the practice of statecraft, facilitating the division of the world into zones of innate identity and difference. It is an approach which allows for the creation of 'timeless truths' (O'Tuathail, 1999, p. 113) about the world around us, as part of a master narrative which 'contains not only details of who belongs to the nation, but also what belonging means and what the relationship is between those who belong and those who do not' (Dittmer, 2007, p. 405; see also Dittmer, 2005, p.626; 2010, p.16). It places a value on 'high' political discourses, offering 'the illusion that these 'high elite cultures provide a realistic, natural view of what is real' (Rech, 2012, p. 52). This process of spatialisation identifies a clear Other, facilitating the creation of policy responses that are rendered 'common-sense': -

> '[Geopolitics] takes the existing power structures for granted and works within these to provide conceptualisation and advice to foreign policy decision-makers. Its dominant modes of narrative are declarative ('this is how the world is') and then imperative ('this is what we must do'). 'Is' and 'we' mark its commitment to, on the one hand, a transparent and objectified world and, on the other hand, to a particular geographically bounded community and its cultural/political version of the truth of that world. Its enduring 'plot' is the global balance of power and the future of strategic advantage in an anarchic world' (O'Tuathail, 1999, p. 107; see also O'Tuathail & Agnew, 1992, p.192)

Epistemologically, the proponents of classical geopolitics offer a positivist approach. They begin from 'the premise that the methodologies of the natural sciences can be applied to social sciences, that value-free or objective results will derive from these and other methodologies, and that humans including our leaders will usually act according to the expected utility or reward in selecting the most appropriate policies and actions' (Kelly, 2006, p. 34). As it is believed to be rational to assume that leaders would act in the interests of the state, it is assumed that we can bypass the level of the individual decision-makers and instead focus upon the analysis of international and global "realities" (Kelly, 2006, p. 31). Such an approach rendered geopolitics prone to ideological capture, including an association with the radical ideologies of Nazism and National Socialism, as it allowed these extremist groups to advance their ideology as a natural, immutable truth (Bassin, 2004, p. 621; Dittmer, 2010, p. 4; Dittmer & Dodds, 2008, pp. 339-340). Because of this association, geopolitics largely disappeared from academic and public discourse following the end of the Second World War.

The eventual rehabilitation of geopolitics was prompted both by a strategic shift in NATO in the 1970s, which emphasised the importance of Europe taking an active role in the defence of its own border, as well as the sudden decline of the Soviet bloc and reunification of Germany (Bassin, 2004, pp. 621-624). The concept of geopolitics - perceived as vital to understanding this changing world - began to permeate back into academic and political parlance, resulting in the formation of the *International Institute of Geopolitics* in 1982 and the publication of the accompanying journal *Geopolitique*. This revived, neoclassical form of geopolitics marks a return to the conceptual categories of the prior, classical form and, as a result, can be seen to correspond to 'what the layman expects geopolitics to be. It is about the effects of geographical location and other geographical features on the foreign policy of a state and its relations with other states. It is also concerned with the strategic value of geographical factors (resources, access to the sea, etc.)' (Mamadouh, 1998, p. 238; see also Bassin, 2004, p. 625). Aligned with a right-leaning politics, this neoclassical geopolitics denies that space is a malleable or discursive subject and instead suggests that meaning 'inheres in it as an essential quality, and [that] the task of geopolitics is precisely to identify and analyse it' (Bassin, 2004, p. 621). This approach contrasts starkly with that of critical geopolitics, a poststructuralist intervention that began in the 1980s. Although it is to be acknowledged that 'there is not one meaning… that all advocates of a "new" or "critical" geopolitics would share' (Agnew, 2004, p. 637), the following section aims to highlight some common areas of critical concern within this competing approach: -

2.2.2   Critical Geopolitics

Whilst proponents of a classical form of geopolitics have sought to provide an objective mediation of political spatiality, critical geopolitics 'interrogates how and why we have come to think of the world (or parts of it) in a certain way' (Dittmer, 2010, p. 11). This approach contests the appearance of

objectivity, as well as the ascription of supposedly commonsensical spatial characteristics to particular places, proposing instead that the process of "geo-graphing" or "writing" global space should be considered to be an interpretative, subjective act of political power (Bassin, 2004, p.620; Dalby, 1991; Dittmer, 2010, p.11; Kelly, 2006, p.36; O'Loughlin et al. 2004, p.5; O'Tuathail, 1996, p.61). Geopolitics, understood in such a way, does not merely provide the setting within which international politics can occur, but is also considered to be a ubiquitous part of the international political process in its own right: -

> 'Geopolitical reasoning begins at a very simple level and is a pervasive part of the practice of international relations. It is an innately political process of representation by which the intellectuals of statecraft designate the world and 'fill' it with certain dramas, subjects, histories and dilemmas. All statespersons engage in the practice; it is one of the norms of the world political community' (O'Tuathail & Agnew, 1992, p. 194)

Political space is not perceived as a real and actually-existing entity within critical geopolitics, but instead 'becomes a discursive subject, and whatever meaning or significance it may possess is not inherent or a priori, but is projected onto it… by political or geopolitical discourse' (Bassin, 2004, p. 621; see also Bohland, 2013, p. 98; Sharp, 1993, p.492). Critical geopolitics has made this discourse the object of study, aiming to denaturalise the construction and projection of power that occurs within a variety of otherwise taken-for-granted framings of space and place (Sharp, 1993, pp. 492-493). Critical geopolitical analysis identifies a myriad of different sites at which our "knowledge" of the surrounding world can be seen to be produced, ranging 'from the classroom to the living-room, the newspaper office to the film studio, [and] the pulpit to the presidential office' (O'Tuathail & Agnew, 1992, pp. 194-195). Initially, critical forms of analyses focused primarily on two particular sites for the circulation of geopolitical logics, juxtaposing a "formal" form of geopolitics against a "practical" variety (see, for example, O'Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). The concept of a formal geopolitics is used in reference to 'the construction, production and circulation of geopolitical theories and perspectives produced by so-called intellectuals of statecraft' (Dittmer & Dodds, 2008, p. 441). The term is applied to both the classical forms of geopolitical analysis, discussed earlier in this chapter, as well as the work of other academics and government think tanks (Dittmer, 2010, p. 13). Practical geopolitics, in contrast, 'is concerned with the geographical politics involved in the everyday practices of foreign policy. It addresses how common geographical understandings and perceptions enframe foreign policy conceptualisation and decision-making' (O'Tuathail, 1999, p. 110; see also O'Tuathail & Agnew, 1992, p.194). This approach might, for example, consider the particular spatial assumptions that underpin the ways in which political leaders communicate information to the electorate. Dalby (2007), for

example, examines the spatial discourse of the War on Terror, highlighting the economic integration of peripheral global spaces.

Whilst the study of the geopolitics of popular culture met with some initial criticism (see, for example, O'Tuathail, 1996, p. 95), subsequent analyses have nonetheless begun to demonstrate a role for popular culture that extends beyond the simple, mimetic replication of the supposed "reality" of international politics. Whilst IR has focussed primarily on the intersections between popular culture and political theory, this "popular geopolitics" instead focuses on the role of popular culture in the spatialisation of political identity and our prevailing geopolitical imaginaries. Cultural products and practices are not perceived to be value-neutral in nature, but rather are assumed to embed specific presentations of social values and political ideas within a spatialized, oppositional framework.

One particularly important intervention within popular geopolitics is the work of Joanne Sharp (1993; 1996; 2000), whose analyses focus on the role of *The Reader's Digest* in the creation of a spatialized discourse of American Cold War identity. She suggests that the practices of spatial representation that are contained within the magazine 'should be regarded as part of a Gramscian notion of hegemony – which explains, legitimises and at times challenges the dominant understanding by pulling it through the lens of popular discourse' (Sharp, 1993, p. 493). Such an approach serves to challenge the prior exclusion of cultural institutions and practices, displacing the centrality of political elites and academics within meaning-making processes (Sharp, 1993, p. 493; 1996, pp. 557-558). She also challenges the suggestion that popular culture simply serves to reproduce the perspectives of the political elite, suggesting that these elite explanations must first appeal to the cultural values and discourses that are already in circulation if they are to connect with the lived realities of the consumer:-

> 'Geopolitics pulls out themes learned in school and reproduced in the media. The media
> gain acceptance and power because they are generally perceived as providing knowledge
> of the world: geopoliticians cannot ignore it. If geopolitics were to be created
> independently of the lived reality of its readership, it would face an insurmountable crisis
> of representation' (Sharp, 1993, p. 493)

The scope of popular geopolitics has now broadened, including analyses of a range of films (Dodds, 2008; Dodds & Kirby, 2014; Power & Crampton, 2007); comic books and cartoons (Dittmer, 2005; Dodds, 1998), and television series (Buzan, 2010; Glynn & Cupples, 2015). These analyses address a variety of different ways in which our understandings of political space are structured. Dittmer, for example, focusses on the *Captain America* comics, examining the ways in which the series engages in the construction of geopolitical "reality" through its description of the USA's role in the world. Here,

an insider/outsider dialectic is shown to create a global political order, which is split between a 'war-mongering' Europe and a 'peace-loving' America' (Dittmer, 2005, p. 629). Dodds and Kirby (2014), meanwhile, focus on the filmic resurgence of the figure of the paternal vigilante, evident in the *Taken* franchise, suggesting that this character is analogical for the contemporary role of the American nation in foreign affairs. Video games have also attracted the attention of geopolitical analyses (see, for example, Power, 2007; Salter, 2011). Power, for example, focuses on the extent to which military-themed video games are 'imbricated in wider military networks of materials, technologies, markets and geopolitical contexts' (2007, p. 274). Salter, similarly, suggests that an analysis of the medium can be used in order to reflect on 'social and cultural practices of militarism and the construction and contestation of the popular international geopolitical imaginary' (2011, p. 359). This approach is also useful for my own analysis of video games, which aims to examine the ways in which the representation of different forms of space acts to produce specific forms of political order (see Chapter One). It is, therefore, important to examine some of the key ideas pertaining to the formation of spatial imaginaries that are discussed within critical and popular forms of geopolitics. The following sections address the role of popular culture in the formation of spatial imaginaries, including the foundational notion of the imagined community (Anderson, 2006), as well as the role of popular culture as a form of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995): -

Forming Spatial Imaginaries

The critical approach to geopolitics suggests that there can be no single, objective mediation of the "reality" of the real world. The practices associated with classical geopolitics are, therefore, understood as an act of power, one which allows for the international arena to be 'actively spatialized, divided up, labelled, [and] sorted out into a hierarchy of places of greater or lesser importance. This process provides the geographical framing within which political elites and mass publics act in the world in pursuit of their own identities and interests' (Agnew, 2003, p. 3; see also Debrix, 2008, p. 9; Dittmer, 2010, pp. xxvii-xvii). One the most prominent of these frameworks is evident in the division of the world into 'discrete nation-states, each one ostensibly independent, sovereign, equal and occupied by a discrete culture or nation' (Dittmer, 2005, p. 626; see also Debrix, 2008, p.9; Dittmer, 2007, p. 403; Dittmer & Dodds, 2008, p. 441; Edensor, 2002, p. 65). Such structures have played a key role in the formation and maintainance of collective identity. Indeed, as Calhoun notes, an individual 'does not require the mediations of family, community, region or class to be a member of the nation. Nationality is understood precisely as an attribute of the individual... the trump card in the game of identity' (1997, p. 46; see also Edensor, 2002, p. 28). For Anderson (2006), meanwhile, the universaility of the national identity is best understood as a form of imagined community: -

'It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion… In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps not even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined' (Anderson, 2006, p. 6; emphasis in original)

Anderson emphasises the role of the newspaper in the formulation of this sense of shared selfhood, suggesting that the medium serves to provide *both* a shared set of interests *and* a common consumptive experience through which its readers are addressed as members of a collective (2006, p. 36; see also Dittmer, 2010, p.17). As Edensor highlights, however, this conceptualisation could meaningfully be extended beyond this initial focus on the role of the written word: -

'[The] excessive focus on literacy and printed media proffers a reductive view of culture. While the historical importance of print is important, it is curious that there is no reference to the multiple ways in which the nation is imagined in, for instance, music halls and theatre, popular music, festivities, architecture, fashion, spaces of congregation, and in a plenitude of embodied habits and performances, not to mention more parallel cultural forms such as film, television, radio and information technology' (2002, p. 7)

In acknowledging alternative sites for the formulation of nationalistic attachment, we can potentially generate a better understanding of the spatial frameworks that marshal our understandings of the world at a sub-state level. These are often experienced as a commonsensical script or shared imaginary - predicated on particular generalisations and assumptions - which 'appeals through the obviousness of its claims; it makes the world simple and manageable. This is facilitated through a silencing of complexity, of problems which do not produce "right or wrong", "true or false" conclusions' (Sharp, 1993, p. 494). This is a process of inclusion and exclusion, not mimetic recreation, which emphasises certain perspectives and forecloses upon others (Dodds, 2008a, p. 486; Sharp, 1993, p. 494). As Dittmer surmises, the generation of these geopolitical imaginaries offers 'a frame through which the world can be viewed, which then enables the reader (or viewer, or consumer) to adopt that frame and act based off it' (2005, p. 631; see also Dittmer, 2010; O'Tuathail, 1999). Such a framework can also change and evolve, taking into account new experiences and events (Herb, 2004, p. 141). It is possible to ascertain two specific ways in which these spatial discourses might function, refered to as *territorial bonding* and *territorial differentiation* (Dittmer, 2005, p. 633; Herb, 2004, p. 141).

The process of territorial bonding aims to create a collective sense of belonging, derived from one's sense of attachment to a particular national territory (Dittmer, 2005, p. 633; Herb, 2004, p. 144).

This is particularly evident within the Germanic concept of *Heimat* which, although lacking a single definition, can be understood as 'a deep-seated emotional attachment to the area of descent, which provides a feeling of womb-like security' (Herb, 2004, p. 153). One's own experience of the nation is understood to be both natural, and widely shared with one's fellow nationals, placing each individual person securely amidst a larger, territorially-bounded collective. This sense of belonging is shown to be widely reproduced in German culture, including the ways in which children are taught about the world around them: -

> 'When children learn about place names, historical events, folklore, and other "facts" of their local area, when they celebrate its splendour through activities such as hiking, painting and singing, they are taught to recognise (and love) its "German" essence. In other words, they are made aware that what they feel is not personal or local, but thoroughly German' (Herb, 2004, p. 153)

Whilst there is no direct English analogue for the concept of *Heimat*, some analyses of popular culture emphasise the mediation of a similarly mythicized national identity. Sharp, for example, highlights that our understandings of "Americanness" are more than simply a territorial referent, becoming 'an idea transcendent of national borders' (1993, p. 498). It is a concept, evocative of certain codes, morals and belief structures, which can be promoted, marketed and exported. "Americanness" becomes a universal measure, providing a shared fiction against which all encounters with "other" places and peoples can be judged: -

> '[B]y referring to its definition of morality as an apparently 'universal' measure, the *Digest* recreates America by continually comparing others to it. This morality and the transcendental knowledge of "common sense" structure the constant repetition of these others as places of simulacrum, referring to an original which does not exist, *The Reader's Digest*'s mythos of America' (Sharp, 1993, p. 501)

This sense of Self is not, however, purely a social measure and can also be tied to specific landscapes or territories (Herb, 2004, p. 142). This can lead to particular places or landscapes becoming privileged over others, ascribing these spaces a greater significance within the national narrative (Dittmer, 2005, p. 634). Edensor, meanwhile, reflects on the extent to which some specific forms of iconic rural landscapes are privileged in the construction of national identity: -

> 'Ireland has become synonymous with its West Coast… Argentina is inevitably linked with images of the pampas: gauchos riding across the grasslands. Morocco is associated with

palm trees, oases and shapely dunescapes, and the Netherlands with a flat patchwork of

polders and drainage ditches' (2002, p. 39)

Similar processes are evident in the construction of specific national spaces within popular culture. Dittmer, for example, suggests that the representation of the fictional town of Centerville – featured in the *Captain America* comics – serve to facilitate a close political identification with the American heartland (2005, p. 634)

The concept of territorial bonding can also be extended to encompass the different ways in which popular culture acts to produce the "national" citizen, sculpting the values that are associated with such a figure. Sharp, for example, notes that *The Reader's Digest* magazine would often 'present important questions and problems, which they answer by offering a factual account of how a group of individuals (either Western or disaffected Soviet) has overcome this problem by applying enduring American values such as honesty, family values and charity' (1993, p. 500). The reader, therefore, is taught what values one needs to hold in order to be a valuable member of the American citizenry. Dittmer (2005), similarly, highlights the extent to which the character of *Captain America* can be seen to "perform" the values of the American national citizen. He notes that whilst the character is shown to have benefitted from a chemical serum supplied by the US government, his successes in combat are attributed to individual values such as teamwork, strong leadership and hard work (2005, pp. 629-630). His analysis traces the differing representations of this character over time, noting that Captain America has, variously, been 'a tool of the establishment and a proxy for foreign policy' (2005, p. 631), has been the 'Commie Smasher' of the Cold War (2005, p. 631), and has battled poverty, racism and pollution (2005, p. 632). Each of these different forms functions 'as a truth claim regarding the characteristics that define America against a backdrop of otherness… Captain America has become a dynamic character over the last four decades, changing in time to the shifting politics of the question, what does "America" mean?' (Dittmer, 2005, p. 633). This again calls attention to the ways in which popular culture represents the values associated with the national citizenry.

Whilst this process of belonging is useful in accessing the construction of the political Self, it is also useful to reflect on the manner in which an internally cohesive national "Self" is produced through the estrangement of outsiders and "other" political spaces. This process, through which we are made able to distinguish the outermost parameters of the nation, is one of territorial differentiation – 'this defines who is included and who is excluded and makes the Us-Them distinction that is so fundamental to national identity visible' (Herb, 2004, p. 144). Such an approach suggests that one's own political identity is created through the comparison of one's own, shared characteristics against a perceived lack of such characteristics in the Other: -

"Their'' space is often seen as the inverse of ''our'' space: a sort of negative, in the photographic sense that ''they'' might ''develop'' into something like ''us,'' but also the site of an absence, because ''they'' are seen somehow to lack the positive tonalities that supposedly distinguish ''us'' (Gregory, 2004, p. 17)

Popular culture often utilises such a narrative in order to create identity positions. Young, for example, notes that the film *300* 'evokes familiar principles of right and wrong, good and bad. As Greeks, the Spartans represent all the straightforward values cherished by the West' (Young, cited in Dodds, 2008, p. 485). This is also evident in the *Star Wars* films, which contrast the values of the protagonist – and by extension the viewer – against those of the 'Dark Side' (Dodds, 2008a, p. 485). Popular culture, and the exaggerated binaries that often exist within it, can be therefore be used to highlight the specific values that we claim for ourselves and those that we ascribe to Others.

These different approaches demonstrate that popular culture offers an accessible, although often unremarkable, site at which we can explore the construction and proliferation of political identity. Dittmer, for example, reflects that 'if identity is a performance, then American identity has been performed monthly since 1964 in *Captain America* comic books' (2005, p. 629). Such an approach correlates with the notion of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995), which suggests that our national identities are perpetually bolstered at a variety of unnoticed everyday sites: -

Banal Nationalism

Billig coins the term *banal nationalism* in order 'to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced. It is argued that these habits are not removed from everyday life, as some observers have supposed. Daily, the nation is indicated or 'flagged' in the lives of its citizenry' (1995, p. 6). This process of 'flagging' nationalism can exist in a 'hot' (Hearn, 2007) or 'exotic' (Law, 2001) form, which refers to the overt, visible and easily identifiable manifestations of national identity and territorial belonging. The use of the metaphor of 'flagging' is useful here for, as Dittmer notes, 'if you see a crowd on television at a rally, all waving national flags, you recognise that as nationalism' (2010, p. 19). Such nationalistic sentiment is commonly invoked in support of national representatives, such as the competitors at the Olympics or the Euro 2016 football tournament. This overt 'flagging' of national identity has also become an increasingly common means by which to demonstrate a collective solidarity in times of trauma, during which the flags of the affected nations are now often projected onto iconic national landmarks. It is often these overt displays of nationalism that attract attention, at the expense of the more innocuous, 'cooler' (Hearn, 2007, p. 660) forms of nationalistic practice that commonly pervade our day-to-day lives: -

'People in established nations overlook the routine flagging of nationhood. The flags melt into the background, as 'our' particular world is experienced as *the* world. This routine absent-mindedness, involved in not noticing unwaved flags or other symbols of nationhood, has its reflection in academic theory' (Billig, 1995, pp. 49-50)

These sites are duly exposed by Billig (1995), whose work suggests that the 'traces left by banal signs, barely comprehensible and largely repressed from the national consciousness, perform the necessary and constant work of undergirding the nation' (Law, 2001, p. 300). They are the result of covert, unremarkable[2] performances that allow for the perpetuation of the nation and national identity when overt, flag-waving expression is less necessary (Dittmer, 2010, p. 20; Hearn, 2007, p. 660). As Hearn concludes, 'Billig's argument is not that banality reveals the true nature of nationalism, but rather that the explicit ideological form, the stirring call to die for one's country, is rendered more plausible by nationalism's banal presence' (Hearn, 2007, p. 660; see also Law, 2001, p.301). This cooler, banal presence can be as simple as the flags that are seen in daily life, but which go unnoticed because they are 'unwaved', including 'those on public buildings, postages stamps, used car lots, bumper stickers, t-shirts, politicians' lapels and television maps' (Dittmer, 2010, p. 19). These banal sites do not have to refer to the presence of flags however, but can reference 'any instance when citizens are encouraged to think of themselves using national categories' (Dittmer, 2007b, p. 20). It is particularly common for such nationalistic expression to be regarded as banal when it is 'articulated from outside the sphere of the formal politics of interest groups, parties and the state' (Hearn, 2007, p. 662). These are sites which are important 'because of, not despite, their rhetorical dullness' (Billig, 1995, p. 93). Hearn argues that 'nationalism abides in the little things, jokes, advertisements, street names, weather reports, and so on, which assume the presence of nations' (2007, p. 660). Other analyses offer further sites for the banal scripting of national identity, including car licence plates (Lieb, 2011), the architecture of state buildings (McNeil & Tewdwr-Jones, 2003), the language used by newspapers (Law, 2001), currency (Penrose, 2011) and stamps (Raento & Brunn, 2005; 2008).

These sites provide the opportunity for the concepts of national identity and nationhood to be embedded within everyday processes of thought, speech and action – they produce a form of common-sense, but one which will often evade conscious reflection or challenge. In the case of stamps, for example, the chosen image is a way in which 'the state visually presents (or misrepresents)

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[2] Although it is worthwhile to note that banality ought to be considered to be a matter of personal perception. As Lieb notes, 'just because one signifier of the nation may be mundane and unremarkable to some, does not mean that it is not controversial and a potential site of contestation to others' (2011, p. 39).

its history, culture, society, and their place in the world' (Raento & Brunn, 2005, p. 145). The use of currency provides a similar demarcation of territorial belonging and difference, establishing the boundaries between nations within the everyday context. It is one of the 'plethora of everyday, mundane signifiers which are noticeably not present when we go abroad' (Edensor, 2002, p. 51). These sites invite an unconscious reflection upon one's place within the state, which can inspire feelings of loyalty and unity: -

> '[B]y making these ideas so natural as to be unassailable, the process, practices and language of banal nationalism work to construct and reproduce specific nations and nation-states as indispensable corner-stones of international geopolitical order' (Penrose, 2011, p. 429)

We take on these national identities not because of an unfilled psychological need, but rather because we are adapting to a surrounding social environment that has rendered nationalism and national belonging as an imperative, objective reality (Hearn, 2007, pp. 600-661). In highlighting the existence of the more banal signs of nationalistic expression, we expose the myriad of different and interlinked ways in which national identity is constructed and maintained: -

> 'Part of grasping the ubiquity and tenacity of national identity, and how people are attached to such identities, lies in appreciating that it is not something sustained by a few key carriers – state discourse, political ideologies, the media – that can be knocked off their perches with the right argument. It is more like Velcro. Not one big hook and eye, but a multitude of small ones, tiny, daily points of attachment that together can bind very tightly' (Hearn, 2007, p. 672)

Popular culture is implicated in the production and reproduction of national space, as the centrality of the state-system 'remains an unchallenged premise of popular discourse' (Dittmer, 2005, p. 626). It is one of a number of different sources (alongside a myriad of formal discourses and political statements) that contributes to the creation of the broader discursive structures and scripts that, in turn, facilitate the construction of a narrative through which a region's place within the wider world is rendered understandable and legible. This has meant that the ways in which we are made able to understand the world around us are changing, as the 'traditional cultural forms and practices of the nation are supplemented, and increasingly replaced in their affective power, by meanings, images and activities drawn from popular culture' (Edensor, 2002, p. 12). We draw upon the representations that are offered within popular culture in order to augment our 'real-world' knowledge and experience, meaning that it can sometimes be difficult to separate our understanding of 'real' places and people from their various mediations within the cultural products that we consume. One example of this is

identified by Watkins (2015), who highlights the way in which the film *Skyfall* manipulates the way in which we conceive of Chinese city spaces: -

> '[W]hile most people have never visited a Chinesse city, most probably have an idea of what Chinese cities are like. Spatial imaginaries aid the formation of such 'non-firsthand' conceptions of places and spaces. Take the 2012 James Bond film *Skyfall*. It depicts Shanghai as a metallic wonder. The audience barely sees a Chinese person, only impressive architecture. A spatial imaginary of Chinese cities exists, essentialising them as a specific kind of built environment representing the city of the future. The film reproduces this story through how it depicts Shanghai. Some aspect of the city are emphazised while others, like the city's colonial legacy of aging brick buildings, are avoided' (2015, p. 509)

Our national identity is *not* imposed on us, whether by formal or political discourse, *nor* is it the product of some timeless, territorially linked 'essence'. It is, however, representative of a broader struggle to control the perception of space. This is, as Said highlights, a struggle which affects us all, as 'the earth is in effect one world, in which empty, uninhabited spaces do not exist. Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings' (2003, p. 7). This thesis aims to trace some of the ways in which the representations of space within video games can be seen to be contributory to this process.

Conclusion

The preceding sections have examined the analytical contribution of geopolitics, charting the emergence of 'critical' and 'popular' modes of analysis. These approaches – which seek to destabilise the creation of supposedly 'commonsensical' forms of knowledge about the world around us – are of an increasing saliency, as contemporary global issues are 'frequently framed and explained within the media and polity through seductive, yet often troubling, spatial registers' (Jones & Sage, 2010, p. 315; see also Dittmer, 2005, p.630; Newman, 2004, p.628). This representation of political spatiality is shown to be an attempt to police social boundaries – usually through the identification of the types of peoples and behaviour that "belong" within a given locale - allowing for the promotion of specific ideas of the Self and the Other. As Sharp surmises, geopolitical representation is 'not… simply a manipulative tool, although it can have a similar effect. Instead, it is a historically constructed way of understanding the world. By imposing narrative closure, in the form of reference to commonly accepted truisms, the complexities of life are presented in easy to manage chucks, the conceptual

apparatus for their interpretation already having social existence' (Sharp, 1993, p.494). Whilst critical geopolitics initially focussed on the proliferation of spatial discourse within academic ('formal') and political ('practical') sites, popular geopolitics centres on the formation of such imaginaries within artefacts of popular culture. Such an approach has been shown to decentre the role of political elites, allowing for the examination of the production of political meaning at more everyday sites. Whilst such analyses have more commonly focussed on film and television, these spatial rhetorics are also evident within military-themed video games – the medium often utilises a spatialized, geopolitical framework as a means by which to interpolate the player into its core conflict. For example, in *Homefront: the Revolution* (2016) – which is discussed in detail in Chapter Seven – the core narrative is centred on the innate resiliency of an occupied America: -

> '[I]n the badlands of the Red Zone, in the bombed out street and abandoned subways, a Resistance is forming. A guerrilla force, determined to fight for their freedoms despite overwhelming odds and ignite the second American Revolution' (Deep Silver, 2017)

In this thesis, I argue that our understandings of this framework – and others like it – depend on the recreation and mediation of different forms of spatiality and 'common-sense' spatial narrative. I aim to explore the ways in which these are used within video games to engender naturalised, authentic-feeling forms of engagement that are predicated on the sense that particular values and ideals can be 'rightly' associated with different parts of the world and specific types of space. As outlined in Chapter Three, this is achieved with reference to three of the common ways in which we are invited to think about space within these games – as the urban "national" core, as the rural hinterland, and as a plausible future temporality. In Chapter Five, for example, I examine some of the ways in which the representation of particular forms of urban and built spaces acts to mediate a sense of either territorial attachment or estrangement. In addition to focussing on the mythologisation of monumental spaces, I also examine the representation of more familiar-feeling, everyday environments. Such an approach suggests that these games are not merely themselves *forms* of banal nationalism, but also suggests that the medium often depends on the *recreation* of banal spaces to serve as the connective tissues for the games' narrative structures. They serve to reinforce the broader geopolitical imaginary, showing us the places and peoples that are either at risk or already lost – they serve to establish the 'way of life' and political order that we are invited to identify with and defend. Other chapters address comparable spatialized structures, including the conflict between modernity and rurality (Chapter Six) and the mediation of the 'post-event' national identity (Chapter Seven).

It should, however, be highlighted that this approach is not an attempt to capture a singular, 'correct' interpretation of the cultural artefacts that are considered herein. As Dittmer surmises,

'critical geopolitical scholars try to avoid grand, sweeping statements about the way the world works. Instead these scholars try to show how the world looks differently from these different perspectives, and how those with greater cultural power shape the overall geopolitical order' (2010, p. 12; see also Dittmer, 2005, p. 12). In examining the representations of space with video games, I *do not* attempt to ascribe any direct cause-and-effect to the relationship between the representations contained with cultural fictions and the behaviours of the end consumer. Rather, this analysis will aim to demonstrate prevailing imaginaries and key themes with the video games, suggesting that these provide a fluid, changeable site at which political identity can be created, undermined and contested.

As detailed in the preceding sections, my own analysis focusses specifically on the "constitutive" and "reflective" potential of popular culture. I examine not only the representation of political spatiality and identity within these games, together with their consequences for the ways in which we perceive the geo-spatial order, but also the extent to which such an analysis might prompt critical self-reflection. We can use the analysis of popular culture – here, video games – as a means by which to examine the extent to which the ways in which we interpret the world are reliant on familiar, yet often unchallenged, assumptions, biases, and tropes. The following chapter introduces three forms of spatiality that will serve as the basis for this thesis, examining the ways in which notions of urban, rural and temporal spaces are commonly theorised.

Chapter Three: Making Space

Introduction

The opening chapter of this thesis provided a broad rationale for a focus on the representation of space within the video game medium, outlining an analysis which engages with the different ways in which these virtual environments can act to promote or subvert specific forms of geopolitical order. This approach was developed further within Chapter Two, which explored the varied theoretical interest in the relationship between popular culture and the study of political phenomena. Drawing from amongst a range of approaches developed within both International Relations (IR) and popular geopolitics, this prior analysis was used to highlight my own focus upon the 'constitutive' and 'reflective' potentials of the video game medium (see Nexon and Neumann, 2006, pp.9-17). This chapter, meanwhile, provides an overview of the different theoretical literatures that are used in support of this undertaking, differentiating between urban, rural and temporal emphases. Whilst these are not the only theoretical frameworks through which the representational of political spatiality could potentially be addressed, these aspects will serve as accessible examples of some of the different ways in which the video game medium can be operationalised within political and geopolitical research. In support of this objective, the remainder of this chapter is divided into a further three subsections, as well as a conclusion.

The first of these subsections examines the formation of the urban imaginary, distinguishing between the role of an overtly symbolic "monumental" form of spatiality and that of the more mundane or "vernacular" urban environment. As Stangl emphasises, these different forms of spatiality 'address very different aspects of urbanism. The vernacular centres on the relation of spatial forms to everyday life, with representation playing a supporting role. The monumental sustains collective values, linking the past and the present, which is traditionally achieved through representation' (2008, p. 245). The literature surrounding this distinction, which will form the basis for Chapter Five, is used to demonstrate how different forms of urban spatiality (including even fictionalised representations of urban spaces) can create a sense of nationalistic attachment or estrangement in very different ways.

The following subsection then examines the notion of rural space, outlining the process by which the term has become detached from its material, real-world referent and is made accessible for use in the analysis of popular culture. Guided by some of the attempts to classify the study of rural geographies (Cloke, 2006; Halfacree, 1993; 2006), this subsection advances a post-structuralist conceptualisation of rurality as a fluid and contingent cultural imaginary. Such an approach suggests that the notion of rurality is not merely a simple spatial designation, but rather that it can be understood as a manifestation of cultural and political power – one which can be examined and

exposed through its representation within different cultural artefacts (see, for example, Murphy, 2013 on film; Robinson, J. 2016 on theatre; Horton, 2008a on children's fiction). This subsection – which forms the basis for Chapter Six – also outlines some of the different ways in which rural spaces are commonly understood, focussing specifically on the concepts of the rural idyll, the backwoods and the wilderness (see, for example, Murphy, 2013; Short, 1991).

The final section of this literature review chapter focuses on the role of temporality, engaging with some of the ways in which the mediation of the traumatic and/or terroristic "Event" can serve to discipline political identity. This section begins by offering an overview of some of the different theoretical perspectives that have emerged from within the field of terrorism studies, noting the development of a more critical perspective which seeks to examine the construction of the "terrorism" discourse (see, for example, Gunning, 2007; Holland & Jarvis, 2014; Jarvis, 2009). This review subsequently highlights two specific forms of cultural mediation – 'remediation' (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) and 'premediation' (Grusin, 2004; 2010; 2011; 2014) – which are used to frame an engagement with the temporalities of video game space in Chapter Seven. These ideas facilitate an examination of the ways in which our imaginaries of future space are constructed and consumed within video games, including the extent to which such representations act to premediate specific responses to shared trauma.

Following the completion of this final theoretical section, a short conclusion is then used to introduce the focus on method and methodology in Chapter Four. This subsequent chapter explores the role of narrative and ludic approaches to the analysis of the video game medium, aiming to provide a framework which reconciles these disparate aspects.

3.1 Producing National Space: Monuments and the Mundane

This subsection examines the role of different forms of urban spatiality in the creation of our broader geopolitical identity, emphasising the different roles of "monumental" and "mundane" environments in the formation and maintenance of collective memory. Such a framework differentiates between the forms of space which function as an overt appeal to one's membership of a collective and those which draw their strength from a more unreflexive evocation of self-identity and spatial situatedness (Edensor, 1997, p. 175; 2004, p. 108; Mitchell, 2003, p. 444; Stangl, 2008, p. 245). This subsection outlines the prevalent theoretical characterisation of each of these different forms of space, which are then used as a framework through which to conduct an analysis of the representation of similar environments within military-themed video games (see Chapter Five). Whilst these varying spatial practices are only a few of the 'seething mass of cultural elements' (Edensor, 2002, p. vii) which contribute to the formation of the broader geopolitical imaginary, the examination of such spaces

nonetheless provide a means by which it can be made possible to expose and interrogate some of the taken-for-granted ways in we conceive of the world around us and our place within it.

3.1.1 Monuments and Collective National Identity

As Atkinson highlights, the production and maintenance of collective memory was once considered to be a 'serious, formal, scholarly affair… [O]fficial, state-sanctioned memory was often dictated to us in the public realm; it was encapsulated in figurative statuary and monuments, and in the names and titles of streets and squares that told us who to commemorate and what we should remember about them' (2008, p. 382). Many of these official, curated expressions of collective memory can be seen to share familiar physical and formal properties that are 'universal and enduring, typically great size, durability and decoration' (Stangl, 2008, p. 246). In some cases, these characteristics are also read as representative of either particular social movements or forms of national identity. Mitchell, for example, notes the apparent reliance of Soviet-era architecture upon 'a grandness of scale, and on spars, abstract and highly symbolic forms' (2003, p. 448). Analyses of Central and Eastern European spatiality, meanwhile, have focussed on the various forms of architecture that correspond to prevailing political expectations, including castles, industrial sites, and Soviet-style monuments (Alpenc, 2005, p.2).

The contemporary significance of monumental spatiality has grown, however, as the various different local authorities, regions and nations – each facing global competition – must devise increasingly creative ways in which to 'mark each locale as a distinctive, characterful candidate for inward-investment, leisure-spending, and high-earning migrants' (Atkinson, 2008, p. 384). As a result the form and utility of monumental spatiality has become increasingly diverse, in order to appeal to the wide range of different values and motivations of modern-day migrants, travellers and tourists. Edensor, for example, notes that such individuals might potentially be drawn to 'former homes or birth places, sites of romantic trysts, sporting venues… grand festivals, sites of celebrity death… and fan worship… world wonders, and a host of others that shape the composition of the modern bucket-list' (2015, p. 201). There are a number of different ways in which this place-promotion is achieved through the use of monumental forms of spatiality.

One particularly distinctive form of place-promotion has aimed to achieve a sense of spatial distinctiveness through the creation of a connection to past history, providing visitors with tangible "evidence" of the enduring and primordial nature of the nation-state and a connection to their national, ethnic or cultural ancestors (Atkinson, 2008, p. 384; English, 2002, p. 1). These historical and heritage sites have often served as visual representations of the values and ideals that are deemed to be particularly important within a particular nation, creating a connection between a shared national

or historical narrative and a particular place (Edensor, 1997, p. 175; 2002, p. 45; Mitchell, 2003, p. 445). The site of Stonehenge, for example, is marketed as a key part of English heritage: -

> 'Walk in the footsteps of your Neolithic ancestors at Stonehenge – one of the wonders of the world and the best-known prehistoric monument in Europe. Explore the ancient landscape on foot and step inside the Neolithic Houses to discover the tools and objects of everyday Neolithic life. Visit the world-class exhibition and visitor centre with 250 ancient objects and come face to face with a 5,500 year-old man' (English Heritage, 2018)

The site has become a popular tourist destination, attracting 1.58 million visitors in 2017 (Statista, 2018). It is also a site of considerable religious significance within the Druidic and Pagan traditions, as well as providing a meeting point for the members of the traveller community (English, 2002, p. 4). The associated sense of heritage and ancestry that surrounds Stonehenge, as well as other similar ancestral sites, has also permeated into popular culture, within which it is commonly used as either a form of spatial shorthand for the primordial British identity (see, for example, Dittmer, 2011 on the genesis of the Captain Britain comic book character) or in order to evoke the sense of mysticism associated with paganism and the occult (see, for example, Saunders, 2014 on the representation of polytheistic religion in *Game of Thrones* and *Vikings*).

The label of "monument" can also be applied to those spaces which are specifically created to aid in the construction and reconstruction of national history and identity. Whilst some sites are used to commemorate aspects of a nation's history (for example, the Statue of Liberty or Nelson's Column) others serve to provide a more forward-looking celebration of a nation's contemporary political power, modernity, culture or future aspirations (for example, the Empire State Building or the Sydney Opera House). These sites are often experienced as part of broader regional or national spatial networks, which are used to symbolically present the national identity to both residents and foreign visitors. Edensor, for example, notes that a tourist's visit to Paris might incorporate 'a number of emblematic places, including the Eiffel Tower, the Place de Concord, Notre Dame Cathedral, the Arc de Triomphe, the Champs Élysées and the Louvre. These are significant both as signifiers of France for outsiders and as ideological statements about Frenchness and the republic within France' (2002, p. 46). The representation or evocation of these symbolic sites can, as a result, be seen to play a role within the broader processes of signification that are used within both politics and popular culture, serving as a form of visual shorthand for both a particular region or country and its associated way of life. It is this symbolic connection between particular forms of spatiality and the hegemonic national identity that can serve to provide terrorist attacks with their broader potency. The 9-11 attacks, for example, were not simply experienced as attacks against a series of buildings – the Twin Towers and

the Pentagon – but were described as an attack on "our" assorted freedoms: 'our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble, and [to] agree and disagree with each other' (Bush, 2001).

Within popular culture, meanwhile the representation of a national landmark can serve to simply establish the setting for the narrative, or can be used in order to show a tangible threat to the prevailing political and cultural norms. The action film *Olympus Has Fallen* (2013), for example, represents the White House in order to convey both the physical location of America *and* an attack on American values (Figure 3).

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Figure 3: Olympus Has Fallen Official Trailer (YouTube, 2013)

A further connection between monumental spatiality and national memory is evident in the use of such spaces in the practices of commemoration that have accompanied acts of warfare or high-profile disasters. There can be some architectural variations between these different sites. The forms of monument that are used to denote shared victories (including those which mark both moments of triumph and the associated, venerated individuals) are often placed in areas of high visibility, whilst those which act as sites of mourning are more likely to be afforded a level of spatial seclusion or separation (Donohoe, 2002, p. 235; Mitchell, 2003, p. 445; Stangl, 2008, pp. 246-247). Each of these commemorative sites works to obscure the more personal sense of death and individual loss that would force the recognition of our own human mortality. This is achieved through the imposition of a nationalistic rhetoric, which obscures personal mortality throught the veneration of national identity and its associated value systems. This is, for example, reflected in the level of nationalistic sentimentality that is extended to the tombs of Unknown Soldiers. These are a form of commemorative monument that has come to represent ***all*** national subjects that fall in battle, to the exclusion of specific individual fighters: -

'The public ceremonial reverence accorded these moments, precisely *because* they are either deliberately empty or no one knows who lies inside them, has no true precedents in earlier times. To feel the force of this modernity, one only has to imagine the general reaction to the busy-body who "discovered" the Unknown Soldier's name or insisted on filling the tomb with some real bones. Sacrilege of a strange, contemporary kind' (Anderson, 2006, p. 9; see also Donohoe, 2002, p. 237)

A similar process is also evident in the integration of monumental spatialities into the broader process of commemoration and lamentation that follows terrorist attacks. As Heath-Kelly notes, this commemorative practice is 'almost exclusively a human pursuit. The tree and animals which perish in disaster events are not commemorated. Memorials enact the presence of lost *human* lives upon public space so that the dead are not forgotten' (2018, p. 63; emphasis in original). This use of monumental spatiality is also a relatively recent practice, tied to both the high-profile nature of the 9-11 terrorist attacks and the loss of the Cold War "Other" that had previously served to discipline American notions of national identity and spatial situatedness (Heath-Kelly & Jarvis, 2017, pp. 247-248). The creation of public monuments serves as a form of spatial control and organisation, restoring a sense of rationality and order to a place that would otherwise be defined by memories of chaos and trauma: -

'By remaking a site of death and tragedy as a sacred place of memory… it is cleansed of the more horrific and alienating memories of human loss and finitude. It instead takes on national and civic "lessons" about sacrifice, heroism and resilience' (Heath-Kelly, 2018b, p. 69)

Such a process is particularly evident in the contemporary use of survivor trees, artificially-created natural monuments which are often 'anthropomorphised, provided individual ability and given the ability to speak' (2018b, p. 64). One such tree was "rescued" from under the wreckage of the World Trade Center and, following its recovery and replanting was heralded as a symbol of America resilience, strength and recovery[3]. Saplings from this particular tree were sent to other regions that were subsequently stricken by disasters and attacks as a symbol of solidarity, with the direct genetic replication of the "resilient" tree serving a symbol of the collective national identity deployed by "attacked" peoples and places (Heath-Kelly, 2018b, p. 67). The inclusion of a natural aesthetic in acts

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[3] Heath-Kelly (2018b, p. 66), for example, notes that this particular survivor tree was given the voice of Whoopi Goldberg during a televised poetry performance.

of post-terror memorialisation[4] serves other, broader forms of symbolism. At the one level, the use of both survivor trees and memorial groves can serve to mark a particular site as removed from the banal, everyday environment, signifying to future generations that this is a place where something of a particular significance has happened. This is a form of commemorative practice which shares a system of signification with the process of burial: -

> '[T]he past is made passed by depositing it underground; the present is made present through place-making above ground; and the future is anticipated through the positioning of markers for future generations to consider and admire' (Heath-Kelly, 2018b, p. 71)

As this suggests, however, the inclusion of natural forms can also provide a means by which to mark the passage of time, allowing for the collective consciousness to heal and – in some cases – for the afflicted spatial site to be reclaimed for everyday use: -

> '[M]emorial trees make both a figurative representation of the individuals lost, and a collective simulation of resilience and recovery. They represent the past event, and the time passed thereafter' (Heath-Kelly, 2018b, p. 64)

The use of a more natural form of monumentalisation allows for the symbolic recovery of a site, transforming the trauma and immediacy experienced during the attacks into a more fleeting and transitory moment of darkness (Heath-Kelly, 2018b, p. 67).

There are, however, a range of issues that problematize the use of these different forms of "monumental" spatiality in the process of commemoration and the formation of collective memory. Such a process can, for example, be seen to create a tension between the desire to protect a site for the future and the demand for continued public access to it in the present day. As English surmises, 'preservation does indeed secure sites for the future, but it also takes them out of use in the present… [T]herefore a balancing act has to take place between preservation and access' (2002, p. 12). This is particularly common in the case of historical and heritage sites, which are often legally designated as

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[4] Other forms of commemorative practice have also relied upon natural symbols. The Poppy, for example, is instantly recognisable for its role in the commemoration of wartime losses. As Iles observes, 'its association with battlefield deaths arose during the First World War when wild red poppies flourished in the churned up mud of the Western Front battlefields of Northern France and Belgium' (2008, p. 201). Such a symbol, however, is rarely confined to a single static space, in the way that one might experience the survivor trees that are discussed here.

places of particular national or global interest that cannot be either significantly altered or destroyed. For example, the 1972 UNESCO Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage calls upon national authorities to 'integrate the protection of the cultural and natural heritage into regional planning programmes, set up staff and services at their sites, undertake scientific and technical conservation research and adopt measures which give this heritage a function in the day-to-day life of the community' (UNESCO, 2018). Stonehenge, for example, has historically served as the site for a wide variety of different forms of religious, social and banal practices, hosting everything from family picnics through to fairs, concerts and sports events (English, 2002, p. 6). The implementation of protective measures, however, places restrictions on the individuals and groups that can be afforded the right of access to this monumental spatial site, as well as restricting the uses to which they might reasonable expect to put the space. For example, whilst some allowances were made in order to accommodate the Pagan and Druidic traditions, which were perceived as harmless and eccentric, the use of the site by the traveller community in the 1980s led to significant levels of policing and protection (English, 2002, p. 11). Whilst the ancient religious practices were viewed as being in keeping with the values and heritage of the site, including one group in the site, the experience of intrusion and disorder necessitated the use of physical and legal restrictions in order to exclude another.

Other analyses have focussed specifically upon the apparent role of monumental spatiality in the narration of a singular form of memory or identity. As Schmidt notes, these are sites which can often 'seem to possess a finality of meaning. They might be understood as pure representation, manifesting a single point of view in such a way that they prevent any other use or interpretation' (2010, p. 283). As a result, these different spaces can seem to be responsible for the creation, recreation and conveyance of a series of static and fixed understandings, which function by 'carrying the past to the present in order to "remind" people to remember and prevent them [from] changing historical facts and events' (Erbas Gurler & Ozer, 2013, pp. 858-859). These representations are, however, more productively viewed as an attempt to distil down and control the conveyance of national history, as 'the identity of places is very much bound up with the *histories* which are told of them, *how* those histories are told, and which history turns out to be dominant' (Massey, 1995, p.186; see also Osbourne, 1998, p. 432; Schmidt, 2010, p.283). Such a practice has been particularly commonplace within the representation of history and identity within heritage sites, such as stately homes, which can obscure the commensurate practices of class oppression, exploitation and exclusion that accompanied the initial construction of such structures (Atkinson, 2008, p. 383). Bender, meanwhile, reflects on the extent to which the limitations that were placed on the level of public access to Stonehenge also served to limit the available interpretations of this particular historical site:-

'While the stones remained "open" right through to the beginning of this century and people could come to them with their different understandings, they are now "closed" and Stonehenge has become a museum which attempts to "sell", not always successfully, a particular sort of experience, a particular interpretation of the past' (Bender, quoted in English, 2002, p.4; see also Atkinson, 2008, p.382; Edensor, 2005, p.831)

The formation of collective accounts of identity or memory - whether at historical or more contemporary sites – is a practice of inclusion and exclusion, which can be seen to 'focus on the positive, the distinctive and the heroic, while eliding the unpopular, the dirty and the unsavoury' (Atkinson, 2008, p.384). This can mean that one's engagement with particular forms of collective remembrance or shared heritage can act to obscure conflicting practices of memorialisation and alternative potential sites of memory formation, as well as the perspectives, practices and narratives that are associated with marginalised, powerless, or otherwise subaltern groups (Edensor, 1997, p. 176; 2005, pp. 832-833; Schmidt, 2010, p. 284; Stangl, 2008, p. 245). The constructed nature of these sites is particularly apparent on those instances at which the formation of an "official" version of a local or national identity through monumental, shared acts of commemoration is challenged or subverted by a shift in the prevailing identity, politics, culture or morality (Edensor, 2005, p. 832; Krzyżanowska, 2016, p. 468; Osbourne, 1998, p. 433; Osbourne, 2017, p. 164). Edensor (1998, p. 38), for example, notes that many Eastern European countries have removed statuary that commemorated communist leaders, reasoning that this form of monumentality conflicts with more contemporary values. Atkinson (2008, pp. 384-385), meanwhile notes the example of the 1996

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Figure 4: Damaged Confederate Statuary - West Palm Beach, USA (Chavez, 2017)

Festival of the Sea, which was held in Bristol, UK. He observes that the festival's primary narrative of a proud and sea-faring past, which centred upon a large replica ship, was widely critiqued for its elision of black history and the role of the port in the slave trade. A similar process is also evident in the more recent counter-monumental movement that has opposed the continued public display of Confederate statuary within the USA. These monuments - which had been a somewhat normalised part of American culture (see, for example, Johnson, 1995, p.55) – had offered a revisionist understanding of the role of the key members of the confederacy, which 'transformed the advocates of treason into chivalrous aristocrats from a romantic antebellum era and converted its military leaders into American heroes' (Osbourne, 2017, p. 169). Reinterpreted in the wake of contemporary racial violence, however, the statues instead became the target of sustained protests and acts of vandalism (see Figure 4).

Other sites have failed to retain their "monumental" status as the result of a more basic neglect and a lack of public engagement. This is, for example, particularly evident in the case of the Millennium Dome. This large event space - which was completed in 1999 - was used to mark the turn of the century, containing a series of attractions referred to as the "Millennium Experience". The various different zones, which centred on the themes of *Who We Are*, *What We Do* and *Where We Live*, were intended to be a bold and declarative statement of British identity. Tony Blair, for example, argued that the Millennium Dome project 'embodies at once the spirit of confidence and adventure in Britain and the spirit of the future in the world… [We] will say to ourselves with pride: this is *our* Dome, *Britain's* Dome. And believe me, it *will be* the envy of the world' (Blair, quoted in McGuigan, 2003; p.671). The cost of the Millennium Dome, however, reportedly ran to £789million over its lifetime (including £28million of costs incurred after the project's eventual closure at the end of 2000), and the project attracted just 5.5million of the expected 12million visitors (Hencke, 2002). As these figures suggest, the wide range of sponsored exhibits failed to connect with the public, meaning that the project was rendered unable to properly disseminate its celebratory narrative of identity and national values. Even before its opening, one commentator concluded that 'it's impractical, extravagant, and useless – a great European monument' (Goldberger, 1998). The project also became the focus of intense political discussion, serving as the focus for 'more than 1,200 parliamentary Questions, eight debates… five Select Committee inquiries, a National Audit Office report and a PAC inquiry' (UK Government, 2000). Though responsible for the germination of the original project, the subsequent Conservative Party manifesto described the project as having been 'banal, anonymous and rootless. It lacked a sense of Britain's history or culture' (Tempest, 2001). In 2005, some years after the closure of the Millennium Dome, the site was redeveloped as the 'O2 Arena' – a process which completed the transition from a widely ridiculed monument to national identity into a site for

vernacular, quotidian congregation. With such a transformation came a change in perception, with the site serving as a successful outlet for cultural and artistic expression.

Whilst we are often most conscious of the formalised, regulated sites of national remembrance, including landmarks and memorials, it is important to acknowledge that the continued maintenance of such spaces 'requires the removal of clutter, which might generate a profusion of matter and meaning' (Edensor, 2005, p. 832; see also Johnson, 1995). Not all appeals to collective memory and identity require the presence of physical monumentality (see, for example, Raento & Brunn, 2005; 2008 on the representational role of postage stamps; Penrose, 2011, on the representational role of national currency), whilst even sites which do display recognisably "monumental" physical characteristics may be either devoid of any broader cultural or political significance (Stangl, 2008, p. 246) or else will serve as the site for a myriad of different forms of banal spatial practice. To focus exclusively upon monumental sites would exclude the broader regions in which these structures sit, spaces which form the banal sites for social gatherings, commuting to work, journeys to school and so on. In seeking to account for the ways in which one's political sensibilities are produced by the surrounding environment, it is also important to account for the role of every day "clutter". The following literature, therefore, examines the ways in which we can create an individual and imaginative connection to the nation through the representation of a series of other-than-monumental forms of spatiality.

3.1.2   Hunting Ghosts? Everyday Encounters with the Mundane Landscape

As already noted, the broader aim of this subsection is to examine the extent to which memory and identity is produced through our encounters with different forms of space. The previous section focussed specifically on sites at which identity and memory can be seen to be regimented and ordered for collective consumption, referring to these as "monumental" spatial sites. A number of different forms of monumental space were considered, including historical sites, national monuments and the creation of post-terrorist sites of memorialisation and lamentation. Such sites were seen to be moulded by political, social and intellectual elites, producing normalised modes of shared perception and interaction that are not dissimilar to our engagement with conventional[5] forms of museum space (Atkinson, 2008, p. 382; Edensor, 2005, p. 832). This is, however, also shown to be a contested and controversial process, which 'evokes a broader tension between contradictory modern desires: the

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[5] Although, as Edensor acknowledges, some forms of "post-modern" museum space offer 'wider scope for interpretative licence, decentring traditional, authoritative, and expert narratives' (2005, p. 832).

uneven conflict between the yearning for order and the simultaneous longing for disorder or transgression' (Edensor, 2005, p. 829). Whilst this can reinforce the idea that there are specific sites where the national memory is made, there has been a broad diversification of both the sites and the practices that are associated with the formation of memory and identity. Atkinson, for example, suggests that 'increasing numbers of Britons are identifying, consuming and producing articulations of history and heritage themselves… [T]hey are also shifting their gaze from the great stories of traditional historiography towards more commonplace social, industrial and cultural histories and learning to see and identify heritages all around them in their mundane, ordinary, everyday space' (2008, p. 381). Such an approach serves to problematize the potential privileging of the production of collective memory and identity at "monumental" sites, as it is made apparent that the formal processes that are deployed within such spaces necessitate the removal of the everyday "clutter" that would otherwise allow for the creation of a multiplicity of different individual interpretations (see, for example, Edensor, 2005).

This section, as a result, engages with the formation of identity and memory through an engagement with these "mundane" spaces. This type of space can be conceptualised in a number of different ways. Stangl, for example, refers to the existence of 'a historically-evolved, regionally-based tradition that stands in contrast to the homogenising powers of global modernity' (2008, p. 246). Such a perspective emphasises the instances upon which different types of urbanity are afforded a particular territorial specificity, drawing upon the way of life that is believed to be characteristic of such areas. Some such spaces might include, for example, our conceptualisation of 'New England villages, Main Street of American and California suburbs' (Edensor, 2002, p. 63; see also Dittmer, 2005, pp. 639-641). Our shared understandings of these particular, regional form of space can be seen to have influenced urban development elsewhere in the world, which have attempted to recapture these characteristics. Edensor (2002, p.62), for example, reflects on attempts to recreate forms of "British" spatiality in India.

These urban imaginaries are also commonly used as a form of visual shorthand within film and television programmes, including locations such as the fictional regions of 'Cabot Cove, Maine' (*Murder She Wrote,* 1984-1996) and 'Midsummer County, UK' (*Midsummer Murders*, 1997 – Present). Dittmer, meanwhile, highlights the representation of specific forms of urban spatiality within the *Captain America* comics, arguing that these 'invocations of "all-American" quotidian landscapes (urban centre, small town, Fourth of July celebration) serve to construct an American form of Heimat through which individuals come to understand their common connection to the nation' (2005, p. 634). Mundane urban spaces are, however, also experienced as static and taken-for-granted parts of our

everyday lives, consisting of the various modes of habituation that are both familiar and yet unremarkable. This is apparent, for example, in the ways in which we conceive of the "home".

Many Westernised conceptualisations of the home can be seen to privilege the role of the "house" – the physical structure which represents the juxtaposition between the private and personal interior and the more public, political exterior. The inside of the house is usually regarded as a safe and comfortable space, which offers its occupant a sense of freedom, control and security, as well as scope for creativity, relaxation and regeneration (Edensor, 2002, pp. 57-58; Mallett, 2004, pp. 71-72). This becomes the location for everyday actions and routines, which are shaped by our shared understandings of 'what particular activities should be carried out in which spaces – where we should eat, cook, watch television – and where the inhabitants of the house should be located in terms of bedrooms and so on' (Edensor, 2002, p. 58). Our understandings of the nature of such a space are not static, however, and are produced by a number of different personal and familial experiences, including 'shifts in the distribution of wealth, transformations in people's ideas about community, family [and] even the good life' (Mallett, 2004, pp. 67-68). These spaces are also produced through an engagement with different forms of popular culture, including the wide variety of different magazines and trade shows that are devoted to the notion of the "ideal" home (Mallett, 2004, p. 67).

The creation of the house serves as a process of inclusion and exclusion, keeping perceived dangers at a distance. Indeed, as Edensor reflects, 'the erection of domestic walls against potential external terror inadvertently produced a home that might subsequently be invaded by the apparently excluded abject and disruptive' (2005, p. 835). The house cannot, however, always be thought of as a safe and secure place, and may instead by experienced as a site of fear, estrangement or isolation (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998; Giddens, 1984; Giddens, 1990). Such a concern is made particularly evident within the production of horror fiction, within which the ghosts that "haunt" the home space are literal rather than figurative. Murphy (2009), for example, reflects on the disruption of the sanctity of the "home" in the production of a 'Suburban Gothic' narrative form, evident within films such as *The Last House on the Left* (1972) and *Fido* (2006): -

> '[T]he Suburban Gothic is a sub-genre concerned, first and foremost, with playing on the lingering suspicion that even the most ordinary-looking neighbourhood, or house, or family, has something to hide, and that no matter how calm and settled a place looks, it is only ever a moment away from a dramatic (and generally sinister incident. The trope of the peaceful-looking suburban house with a TERRIBLE SECRET within is one so familiar as to have passed into cliché' (Murphy, 2009, p. 2)

As this suggests, the space outside the boundaries of the house can also be 'perceived as an imposing, if not threatening or dangerous space. It is more diffuse, less defined. Different performative expectations exist for people in this outside space. There are different rules of engagement with people, places and things' (Mallett, 2004, p. 71). One's encounter with this space is, however, seen as a both a masculine and nationalistic imperative, 'as it is to preserve and enrich the home that men go out to confront monsters, raw nature and other perils' (Edensor, 2002, p. 61). This relationship between the interior and exterior zones is further codified in popular culture, within which it forms a key stage of the 'hero's journey'. Here, the first stage of this mythical voyage - described as the 'call to adventure' - necessitates the abandonment of the safety of one's home, as 'destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual centre from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown. This fateful region of treasure and danger may be variously represented: as a distant land, a forest, a kingdom underground, beneath the waves, or above the sky, a secret island, lofty mountaintop, or profound dreamscape; but it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delight' (Campbell, 2008, p. 48). Within these narratives - whether cultural or national - this departure is shown as an undeniable part of one's responsibilities and a necessary stage in personal fulfilment.

Not all exterior zones, of course, take on such dramatic forms and the space outside of the home often simply provides the backdrop to our individual lives and routines. As this everyday form of space is commonly experienced unreflexively, it is often implied that it 'apparently does not contain the exciting moments in which decisions are made [and] identities are enacted and displayed. Because the everyday tends to be contrasted with the time of celebrity, of holidays, of exceptional and symbolic events, it is believed to be static' (Edensor, 2002, p.54; see also Stangl, 2008, p.247). The importance of these dwellingscapes is, however, constructed through a myriad of different objects, institutional and infrastructural systems, and spatial practices – each of which can contribute to the various familiar-feeling, common-sense form of spatial interaction that constitute a broader sense of individual "belonging". These environments may, for example, include spaces such as coffee shops, restaurants and bars, where we meet to talk and share stories. They may also provide the sites for more individual rituals, such as the early-morning dog-walk or the commute to work. As Stangl surmises, these are landscapes which 'exist to provide a complex array of spatial forms to support everyday life, and the world of lived experience, with representation in a supporting role' (2008, p.251; see also Alpenc, 2005, p.3; Edensor, 2002, p.54). It is a form of space which is more commonly felt, rather than consciously apprehended, unless specific aspects of it are threatened or changed.

Memory and identity can also be produced through a variety of other unremarkable and marginalised spaces, including areas such as 'the unadorned backsides of the city, the alleys, culverts,

service areas and other microspaces, along with wastelands railway sidings, spaces behind billboards, and unofficial rubbish tips' (Edensor, 2005, p.833). These are experienced as sites of uncontrolled and unregulated urban excess which, through their creation of a multiplicity of individual meanings and uses, call into question the level of discursive closure that is often imposed upon more formal, "monumental" spatial sites (Edensor, 2005, pp. 833-834; Holloway & Kneale, 2008, p. 303). This disruption of otherwise normalised spaces and their commensurate forms of spatial practice is experienced as a ghostly haunting (Edensor, 2005, pp. 835-837; Holloway & Kneale, 2008, pp. 303-306). These are not, however, the wailing phantoms or malevolent spirits that are evoked within horror films. Instead, as Edensor surmises, we might think of the "ghost" as being 'a disembodied entity which can provoke memories that are strangely familiar through the empathic contact it makes' (2005, p. 835). These ghosts, and the traces that they leave upon our present, generate 'instances wherein the habitual and the seeming mundanity of the everyday becomes marvellous, strange and uncanny' (Holloway, 2010, p.618; see also Edensor, 2005, p.835). Whilst the experience of these ghosts can be sought out[6], the memories are also unconsciously stimulated by our encounters with a range of familiar sights, sensations or patterns of movement.

One particularly productive site for the analysis of such "ghostly" encounters has been the ruins of former industrial sites (see, for example, Edensor, 2005; DeSilvey & Edensor, 2012). Through a series of encounters with non-specific[7] ruined spatial sites, it is made possible to examine how these forms of mundane space can still discipline our modes of interaction and create a personal, yet often unreflexive sense of belonging. In encountering everyday environments, such as places of work, our 'habits and habituation reproduce space and render it comfortable, as the unquestioned backdrop to daily tasks, pleasures and routine movement. Bodily dispositions become embedded over time through routine industrial procedures and the use of particular objects in particular places at particular times' (Edensor, 2005, p.840). The memory of these routine forms of interaction is not limited to the former inhabitants of these spaces, however, as it remains evident in the space that is left behind. Different forms of space are arranged in different ways, having served different purposes, and can cause the visitor to recall aspects of other similar spaces and routines encountered over the course of

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[6] Holloway (2010), for example, highlights the increased popularity of organised ghost walks and paranormal investigations.

[7] As Atkinson notes, Edensor's examination of industrial ruins 'fails to name or locate any of the derelict industrial sites he photographs or describes; his point is that these are ubiquitous features of post-industrial societies… [T]hey are haunted by the ghosts of their past occupations, as well as providing a liminal space for invention, play, excitement and other activities' (2008, p. 388).

a lifetime. We can, for example, instinctively differentiate between the car park, canteen and locker room environments, because we instinctively "remember" what these different forms of space look like and how we are expected to behave within each. Within the urban ruins, each of these different spaces – although now stripped of their prior banal and everyday uses – still seek to impose particular forms of spatial performance upon visiting bodies, 'cajoling them into particular manoeuvres and conveying a sense of corporeal empathy about what it was like to dwell and work within such a space' (Edensor, 2005, p.840; see also DeSilvey & Edensor, 2012, p.476). This association between the visiting body and the surrounding space may be deepened by our encounter with the residual environmental clutter, including familiar clothing, tools or furniture. We can, for example, imagine what is must have been like to make and receive calls in *a specific* office environment, as the arrangement of the desks and phones serves to call to mind what it is like to make calls in *any* office. The connection may also be strengthened through the existence of more personal ephemera – such as posters, photographs or stickers – or through the common forms of social interaction that are evident in scribbled jokes, discarded notes and scrawled obscenities (Edensor, 2005, pp. 842-843). These allow for the otherwise ruined environment to be at least partly reenergised, animating environments and bodies that have not been fully disposed of by the passage of time (Edensor, 2005, p. 842; Holloway & Kneale, 2008, p. 303).

Both structured monumental sites and everyday environments can be seen to rely on a pervasive and powerful process of spatial regulation, which defines which forms of action and interaction are considered to be appropriate within a given locality. One's movement through urban

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Figure 5: Looters target the Packard Automotive Plant in Detroit, USA (Requiem for Detriot, 2010)

ruins, however, also allows for the transgression of these broader social or cultural norms. These can, for example, become the sites of childish games and experimentation, spaces within which it is possible to 'clamber over machines, slide down chutes, climb up ladders, [or] lounge on the boardroom table' (Edensor, 2005, p. 838). They can also become the site for more adult forms of "play", including alcohol and drug use, sexual encounters and a range of other illicit events (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2012, p. 476). They may also be targeted by those who seek commercial gain, stripping these locations of anything of value (see Figure 5).

Whilst active urban sites are haunted by the possibility of their eventual closure and subsequent environmental decline, the inherent disorder of the urban ruin heightens one's awareness of the systems that would once have sought to delay this eventuality. Although the imprint of these former process of spatial regulation, segregation or securitisation may remain evident within these environments, 'these regulatory forms... are deconstructed by decay as walls erode and rooms belong to formless labyrinths' (Edensor, 2005, p. 841). These spaces can often seem abandoned, as though their former occupants simply left. In Detroit, for example, which experienced significant levels of urban decay, one resident reflected that it was as though there 'was a mass exodus – as if a phone call was made, a warning was thrown out – and everyone left what they were doing at that moment and walked away for good' (Requiem for Detriot, 2010). These are no longer spaces that are structured around human systems, often generating the abiding sensation they have been the target of a malevolent and inhuman force that has 'gleefully violated the order of things. Water and heating pipes are stripped of cladding and broken, electric wiring is severed, sewers are blocked with detritus, telephones are detached from connections, roads and rail lines disappear under banks of earth, radiators and lights are smashed and disconnected' (Edensor, 2005, p. 842).

3.1.3   Examining Urban Space in Video Games

The preceding analyses have explored the role of different forms of urban space, examining the process by which a sense of identity and belonging can be mediated through different aspects of the surrounding environment. This has been shown to be a varied social, political and cultural process, as the formation of national memory is grounded in our interactions with both monumental and everyday forms of space (Edensor, 2005, p. 830; Stangl, 2008, p. 245).

Section 3.1.1 examined the production of national identity through one's engagement with regimented spaces of collective memory, including the sites of monuments, memorials and museums. The section first examined the role of such spaces, examining the connection between "monumental" spaces and the formation of common understandings of national values and histories. The

representation of these symbolic structures within video games is the focus of Chapter Five, which examines how the process of spatial encounter is used both to situate the player and to justify the deployment of specific forms of violence. It should, however, be highlighted that this section also problematizes the prevailing focus on memorial sites, emphasising that 'sites of reified memory, like other overcoded spaces, are haunted by ambiguity and multiplicity' (Edensor, 2005, p. 835). These sites are not a benign mediation of past histories and events, but rather serve as an active and evolving index of changing values and ideologies. As a result, it is also important to consider the creation of a space at the more individual, everyday scale.

As a result, therefore, Section 3.1.2 focussed specifically on mundane sites. Here, the connection to the surrounding environment is generated through one's interaction with familiar spaces. This chapter began by exploring the interrelated notions of "house" and "home", before broadening to include the local environment. Such a focus provides a valuable means by which to highlight the more unreflexively apprehended spaces and routines that generate a more personal sense of spatial situatedness. Chapter Five examines the representation of these different forms of mundane, domestic spaces within video games, examining the ways in which these environments are used to privilege specific nations and national citizenries.

This section also addressed the presence of spatial "ghosts" and explored the extent to which national identities and a sense of territorial connection can be evoked through one's encounter with the environments and assorted ephemera that are encountered within our everyday lives. Such a focus resonates with the earlier discussion of banal nationalism (see Chapter Two), which suggests that 'nationalism abides in the little things, jokes, advertisements, street names, weather reports, and so on, which assume the presence of nations' (Hearn, 2007, p. 660). This analysis engaged specifically with ruined sites, examining the ways in which the structure of these environments may imprint upon visiting bodies. Whilst this work has often focussed upon industrial sites (see, for example, Edensor, 2005), such a framework can also be applied to representations of mundane landscapes that have been similarly stripped of their associated civilian bodies and everyday flows.

It is also important to acknowledge that this encounter with urban spatiality is not the only site at which it is possible to examine the scripting of influential forms of political spatiality. Our understandings of the world are also connected to the ways in which we encounter peripheral rural sites. The following section, as a result, addresses the manner in which "rural space" is commonly theorised, ahead of a discussion of the representation of such spaces within Chapter Six.

3.2   Representing Rural Space

The term "rural" has long been utilised in a process of territorial differentiation, used to signify the material existence of an open and peripheral form of spatiality that lies beyond the borders and protections that are associated with the city (Edensor, 2002, p. 49; Perkins, 2006, p. 243). Whilst this broad distinction remains familiar and intuitive today, it is notable that we often still struggle to consciously articulate our understandings of the precise distinction between urban and rural forms of space. As Woods surmises, 'we could probably all instinctively say whether any given place was rural to use, rather than urban, but explaining why it was rural, not urban, and drawing a boundary line between urban and rural spaces are altogether more difficult tasks' (2011, p. 2). Whilst this has also been a problematic theoretical issue, resulting in a notable lack of overall critical unity (see, for example, Halfacree, 2006, p. 45; Hoggart, 1990, p. 246; Woods, 2011, p. 1), the study of rural geographies can be divided into a series of broad critical emphases: descriptive or functional approaches, a political-economic approach, and the notion of an "imagined" rurality (see Cloke, 2006; Halfacree, 1993; 2006). The distinction between these different approaches provides a means by which it is possible to situate my own analysis.

Much of the early research into rural geographies sought to identify the specific spatial characteristics that constituted the designation of rurality. One of the most wide-ranging engagements of this nature sought to develop 'an index of rurality for England and Wales' (Cloke, 1977; 1978; Cloke & Edwards, 1986), calculating a region's perceived level of rurality from characteristics such as population density, housing conditions and land use patterns. Such approaches often suggested that rural settlements were smaller in size and lower-order in nature (Cloke, 2006, p. 20).

Other similar research sought to ascertain the specific socio-cultural characteristics that are associated with rural space, engaging with the extent to which different spatial characteristics can be seen to affect the behaviours, attitudes and way of life that is associated with the various different individuals and communities that are found in these areas (see, for example, Heley & Jones, 2012). As Halfacree reflects, such research suggested that urbanism could be characterised as 'dynamic, unstable, mobile in stratification and impersonal, with contacts being determined by one's precise situation at the time (work, home, leisure)' (1993, p. 25). Rural spaces, in contrast, were argued to engender a way of living which facilitates the formation of a cohesive group identity – one which was believed to be characterised by both shared values (such as a respect for the environment) and common forms of spatial practice (Cloke, 2006, p.20). The nature of the rural space was, as a result,

often believed to be closely tied to the practices of agriculture, horticulture, forestry or environmental conservation (Cloke, 2003, p. 2; 2006, p. 20; Perkins, 2006, p. 243).

Whilst the close examination of the descriptive or socio-cultural characteristics that are associated with an individual region may provide a useful means by which to examine the structure of that *specific* rural space, the associated claims to have accessed the characteristics of a distinctive and separate material "rurality" are more problematic. These attempts to provide a "definition" of rural space imply a fundamental homogeneity, obfuscating the role of some such areas in a varied range of different entrepreneurial, capitalist and consumptive activities (Cloke, 2006, p. 18; Hoggart, 1990, p. 245; Perkins, 2006, p. 244; Woods, 2011, p. 7). These attempts to define "rurality" can, as a result, often be seen to have reproduced prior assumptions about the nature of "urban" and "rural" regions and do little to develop our broader critical comprehension: -

> 'The "definitions" are better seen as research tools for the articulation of specific aspects of the rural than as ways of defining the rural. Their methods involve trying to fit a definition to *what we already intuitively consider to be rural*, in the absence of any other justification as to why they should be regarded as representing the rural. In other words, they are trying to put the cart before the horse, the rural having already been "defined" by those doing the classifying' (Halfacree, 1993, p. 24; see also Cloke, 2006, p.20)

This means that they serve to simply reproduce existing and commonly-held spatial dichotomies, without either demonstrating that there are specific characteristics that are intrinsically and exclusively "rural" in nature, or explaining how such characteristics have shaped the lived realities of rural life (Cloke, 2006, p. 20; Woods, 2011, p. 7).

Whilst these descriptive and socio-cultural approaches were initially bolstered by a romanticist defence of "rural" cultures and traditions – which suggested that such spaces were emblematic of a 'stable harmonious community [including] everything "positive" that urban life seems to lack' (Halfacree, 1993, pp.25-26) – subsequent "political-economic" forms of analysis have sought to deemphasise the supposed material specificity of rural space. Unlike descriptive or socio-cultural approaches, which aimed to uncover the specific characteristics of rural spaces and societies, the political-economic approaches highlight the role of external, extra-rural influences upon such regions (see, for example, Buttel & Newby, 1980; Cloke, 1989; 2006; Perkins, 2006, p.243). These may take the form of specific regional or national pressures, resulting from the influence of specific practices of economic regulation or governance, or may be the result of globalised practices of deindustrialisation, free-trade, corporatisation, or privatisation (Cloke, 2006, p. 20; Perkins, 2006, pp. 243-244). This conceptualisation suggests that the nature of rural space will inevitably be varied in form and function,

as a result of the different forces that act upon it, and that it will always frustrate attempts to provide a singular definition (Newby, 1986, p. 209). This prompted some calls to entirely abandon the concept of "rurality" as an analytical term: -

> 'Failure to do so is like putting together a football team whose players are drawn from Australian rules, gridiron, rugby and soccer, and not telling any of them which set of rules apply on the field' (Hoggart, 1990, p. 246)

Such analyses were not, however, sufficient to entirely eliminate the focus on a material rurality. Whilst some political-economic analyses emphasise the changing conditions of production and consumption, suggesting that these prohibit the possibility of a distinctive material rurality (see, for example, Hoggart, 1990), other analyses suggest that these influences act to produce specific structural coherences – identifiable as "rurality" – that exist within particular places and at particular moments in time (Cloke & Goodwin, 1992; 1993; Harvey, 1985). Rather than seeking to identify uniform characteristics, such analyses argue for the formation of a "rural dimension" that is defined by broader traits: -

> '(1) A pleasant environment which will attract the willing or unwilling unemployed; (2) A "spaced-out" geographical structure which leads to accessibility problems and costly public services; (3) A distinctive local political ideology which favours the market, the volunteer and the self-helper rather than public sector intervention' (Cloke, 2006, p. 21)

It is also notable that, despite the attempts to 'do away with [the] rural' (Hoggart, 1988; 1990) as an analytical concept, the term has nonetheless retained a clear cultural traction (Cloke, 2006, p. 18; Woods, 2011, p. 8). Recent research has, as a result, acknowledged the extent to which our understandings of "rural" spaces are produced through their continued manufacture and (re)presentation within different forms of cultural discourse (see, for example, Robinson, J. 2016 on theatre; Horton, 2008a; 2008b on children's fiction; Fish, 2007; Murphy, 2013 on film). Such an emphasis is representative of the extent to which the *sign* of rurality has become increasingly disconnected from its meanings (or processes of *signification*), partly due to the variety of different meanings that circulate within political and popular discourse (Cloke, 2006, pp. 21-22; Halfacree, 1993, pp. 31-34). These different imaginaries can also be used in order to highlight the extent to which both the *sign* and the *signification* have become detached from their original referent, meaning that the notion of "rurality" can be detached from real-world, actually-existing spaces and can instead be understood as a 'category of thought' (Mormont, 1990, p.40; see also Cloke, 2006, p.22; Halfacree, 1993, pp.29-31; Woods, 2011, p.16). The notion of "rurality", conceived of in such a way, is understood to refer to the fluid, constructed and imaginative notions of rural space that act to produce and

reproduce the values, objects, practices and places that we have come to associate with the experience of non-urban, peripheral regions (Cloke, 2006, p. 21; Woods, 2011, p. 9). The nature of the rural imaginary can thus take a wide variety of different forms, with no single representational practice necessarily dominant either within a given society or at a particular moment in time (Casstree & Braun, 2006, p. 161; Murphy, 2013; Robinson, 2016; Woods, 2011). As Halfacree notes, a list of "rural" spatial imaginaries 'could include [the] countryside, wilderness, outback, periphery, farm belt, village, hamlet, bush, peasant society, pastoral, garden, unincorporated territory [and] open space' (2006, p.45; see also Bunce, 1994; Fish, 2007; Short, 1991). This analysis will engage with three of the constructed conceptualisations of rural space that are particularly common within Western culture: the rural idyll, the backwoods, and the wilderness (see Murphy, 2013, p.6; Woods, 2011, p.18). Each of these imaginaries offers a specific conceptualisation of both rural space and the peoples that live in rural regions, providing a descriptive framework through which it is possible to analyse the representation of rural spatialities within video games. The following subsections examine how each of these imaginaries are commonly constructed, as well as the different aspects of rural life that they might deny or exclude.

3.2.1.   The Rural Idyll and the Backwoods: Opposing Imaginaries of Rural Life

Each rural imaginary is temporally and culturally-specific, as 'each generation of country-dwellers and observers sees what it wants to see in the land: romantic beauty, nostalgic traces of the rustic past, peace, tranquillity, despoiled landscapes, brutal intrusions of modernisation, hurry, noise [and] pollution' (Mingay, 1989, p.6; see also Bell, 2006, p.150; Bunce, 1994, pp.5-35; Short, 2006, pp.133-142). The "idyllic" imaginary envisages rural spaces to be 'simple, innocent and virtuous' (Woods, 2011, p.17), offering a more authentic and wholesome way of life than one could hope to enjoy within the confines of the city (Cloke, 2003, p. 1; Perkins, 2006, p. 244; Short, 1991, p. 31). Such an imaginary holds the "rural" space to be representative of the various social and cultural values that have been lost to urbanism, as each generation views their own histories as 'unsettled and subject to disruptive change. They will compare this with the past, sometimes only a generation before, when things were stable and ordered or, in the more glowing accounts, an Eden or a golden age' (Eldridge & Eldridge, 1994, p.178; see also Edensor, 2002, p.43; Short, 1991, p.31). Our understandings of these "idyllic" rural imaginaries are continually disciplined by the production and reproduction of a series of different visual and linguistic signifiers. Bunce, for example, suggests that the idyllic imaginary is evoked through 'the aesthetics of pastoral landscapes, of humans working in harmony with nature and the land and with each other, of a whole scene of contentment and plenty' (2004, p.14; see also Bell, 2006, p.149 on the Catalonian countryside; Edensor, 2002, p.41 on the British countryside). These precepts serve to create a powerful association between national values and rurality, creating a space which serves

as a 'repository of [the] norms, values and treasures which both illustrate and shape what is precious in a nation, a region, or a locality' (Cloke, 2003, p. 1; see also Short, 1991, p.35). Whilst there has been no single universal or static conceptualisation of the rural idyll, different variations on these precepts can be seen to be produced and maintained within the content of popular cultural artefacts. Bunce refers to this cultural evocation of the idyllic rural imaginary as the development of an 'armchair countryside' (1994, pp. 37-76), highlighting the role of different groups of middle-class urban dwellers in establishing the values that are to be associated with rurality and rural space. Bell offers a similar observation, arguing that 'the genealogy of the rural idyll shows it to be an urban construction, the country cannot exist without the city to be its "not-a". So the place to find the rural idyll is in the city, since that is where it is made' (2006, p. 150). This is, for example, evident in the widespread role of natural imaginaries within the different forms of literature, poetry and painting that were in circulation at the end of the eighteenth century. This widespread creation and distribution of images of a natural, aesthetically-pleasing environment to a mass market provided an effective contrast to the industrial lifestyle, functioning as an escapist and aspirational ideal: -

> 'Poetry and art combined to foster an enthusiasm for scenic landscapes. Painting or picturesque scenes became the dominant fashion for patrons of art, who rushed to buy landscapes of Claude, Reynolds, Gainsborough and Gilpin to decorate the walls of their country houses and urban villas' (Bunce, 1994, p. 37)

This contrast between rural and urban spaces remains evident within a number of different forms of contemporary popular culture and mass media, which draw upon the "idyllic" rural precepts and their associated cultural or social values. There are, for example, a range of rural-themed magazines that market the rural lifestyle as a commercially-available, aspirational lifestyle goal for the urban dwelling individual. These releases include, but are not limited to, titles such as *Country Life*, *Country Living*, *Country Homes & Interiors*, and *This England*. These magazines showcase a wide-range of commercial products that are designed to appeal to a broader sense of rural nostalgia, including 'William Morris prints, pine furniture, dried flowers, wicker baskets, patchwork quilts and earthen pottery' (Bunce, 1994, p. 59). These depictions create the sense that, through their potential purchase of such items, the would-be consumer 'buys (into) the countryside' (Short, 2006, p. 143) and the values and life-style that are associated with such regions.

This vicarious, urban-based consumption of rural life is also evident within the 'geography-genre' (Thompson, 2010) of television programming, which includes series such as *Countryfile*, *River Cottage* and *Countrywise*. These different, country-themed forms of programming can take a range of different forms, incorporating formats such magazine-style reporting, travelogues, or wildlife

programming (Thompson, 2010, pp. 58-61). These forms of programming, as Thompson (2010) highlights, have a two-fold role in creating our conceptualisations of the "idyllic" rural periphery. Firstly, such programming offers its audience 'immediately available images of a countryside, its produce, the livestock and wildlife that are not otherwise visible in a suburban life, and its open spaces where such things as swimming in rivers can be tried out' (Thompson, 2010, p. 62). At the time of writing, for example, recent episodes of the BBC series *Countryfile* – which aims to access 'the people, places and stories making news in the British countryside' (BBC, 2018) – have highlighted rural crafts (such as reed cutting), have taken the viewer on coastal walks, and have gone on the hunt for the Easter bunny. These programmes also serve to highlight rural issues, mediating some of the challenges to our conventionally-held imaginaries of idyllic rurality. In the *Countryfile* episode dedicated to rural crafts, for example, the programme emphasised the contemporary fragility of the various different traditional pursuits that it featured.

The idyllic rural imaginary also serves a broader role as the backdrop for a range of both radio and television programmes, as well as films. These include both classic fictions such as *All Creatures Great and Small* (1978-1990), *The Archers* (1950-) and *Heartbeat* (1992-2010), and more recent fare such as *Happy Valley* (2014-) and *Father Brown* (2013-). Such dramatizations also serve to relay different aspects of the mythology that surrounds rural life. Bunce, for example, reflects on the extent to which the television series *All Creatures Great and Small* (which was based on the books of the veterinary surgeon Alf Wright) can be seen to reinforce a sense of shared nostalgia, through its inclusion of idyllic signifiers ranging from 'rustic farm characters and earthy agricultural customs to eccentric squirearchy and the parochial village community' (1994, p. 49). This level of idyllic sentimentality was particularly evident in the level of tourist traffic driven to visit the locations of these dramas, including regions such as the North York Moors (so-called "Heartbeat country") and Holmfirth (the setting for *Last of the Summer Wine*). Following the death of Peter Walker, the author behind the *Heartbeat* series, one Goathland resident reflected that 'people would have moved… if it weren't for the jobs in tourism he created with the books and the series. He kept quite a few youngsters here – the hotels are a lot busier because of Heartbeat' (Flanagan, 2017).

A similar level of rural nostalgia is evident in children's fictions, through which 'we are brainwashed from birth by representational values which present a cumulative foundation for both reflexive and instinctive reactions to rurality' (Cloke, 2003, p.1; see also Bunce, 1994, pp.51-56; Horton, 2008b, p.390; Jones, 2007, pp.179-183). In many such fictions, including particularly those that are targeted at very young readers, the "idyllic" rural regions are almost entirely stripped of human life. Instead, as Bunce notes, such narratives suggest that the 'animals *are* the country folk – the real inhabitants of villages, woods, fields, and river banks' (1994, p.53; emphasis in original). This

anthropomorphism is evident within a number of enduring examples of children's fiction, including works such as *Winnie the Pooh,* The *Wind in the Willows*, and *The Animals of Farthing Wood*. Where adults and urban activities collide with these harmonious worlds, however, they are represented as a source of danger and disruption:-

> 'Never mind that in the wild the weasel would kill the rabbit and the fox would gobble
>
> the mole. The moral message is clear. Man has a monopoly of cruelty. Wild animals left
>
> to themselves form a peaceful, harmonious, caring community' (Ridley, 1998, p. 142)

In other forms of children's fiction, meanwhile, rural spaces are represented as "idyllic" human communities, often through the inclusion of a series of stereotypical characters and visual cues. Horton, for example, reflects that that the village of Greendale (the setting for the *Postman Pat* series) is represented as a 'picturesque and evocative countryscape of (traffic-free) winding country lanes, ivy-clad stone cottages (inhabited by "locals", not commuters), hedgerows, dry stone walls, stone bridges over gentle streams, farmhouses, and free-range livestock, set against an (unindustrialised) backdrop of rolling hills, patchwork fields, and distant mountain scenery' (Horton, 2008a, p. 390; see also Horton, 2008b, p. 400). This representation of the rural idyll provided a straightforward and formative narration of the "realities" of rural life, devoid of any of broader social, cultural or political issues, rendering its associated imagery a normalised, taken-for-granted part of what the rural is and looks like (Horton, 2008b, pp. 396-397).

In other forms of children's fictions, directed at an older audience, the representation of the countryside offers 'a familiar and yet at the same time imaginary world which serves as a retreat from adult-dominated everyday experience' (Bunce, 1994, p.51; see also Jones, 2007, p.178). In such works, the rural periphery is represented as a space of freedom, adventure and exploration. Examples of such fictions include the enduring Enid Blyton series *The Famous Five* and the *Secret Seven*, which offer their young readers 'a place where children can still feel secure within a modern version of the old social order, yet at the same time roam free across an accessible countryside' (Bunce, 1994, pp. 55-56). This has the effect of tying the "natural" freedoms associated with childhood – including play, exploration and encounter – to the heart of the national identity, represented through the "natural" imagery associated with the rural countryside.

In each of the above examples, the evocation of the rural idyll provides a *representation* of the rural countryside that is designed to fulfil specific narrative or commercial objectives through the evocation of specific values and attributes. Indeed, as Jones notes, 'the countryside can easily be reconstructed to provide suitable setting for these stories. There is a kind of spiralling logic at work here in which these discourses build up momentum' (2007, p.181; see also Horton, 2008b, p.396). The

various different forms of "idyllic" cultural narrative draw their strength from the continued circulation and recirculation of the values, images and ideals that are already prominent within the broader cultural consciousness. Whilst this means that the rural idyll can be afforded potency as a cultural mythology, insofar as it acts in opposition to the broader processes of urbanisation and social change, it means that it is also often reductive in its characterisation of rural regions and the lived realities within such spaces. The countryside, as Bunce notes, risks becoming 'no more than a series of distorted impressions of nature and country life which only serve to perpetuate the mythology of the countryside ideal' (1994, p. 62). Whilst the valorisation of the rural life can serve to elevate it above everyday urban life, it can also – for example – cause us to overlook the frequency with which its associated pursuits are experienced as being suffocating and ritualistic: -

> 'The idealised view of the countryside… originally developed from the depiction of shepherd life, a rural pursuit closer to hunter-gathering and less connected with the backbreaking labour of ploughing, sowing and harvesting. Shepherds can more easily be shown as standing around watching the wool grow on the back of sheep. Nature does most of the work' (Short, 1991, p. 38)

The image of a virtuous and spiritually-filling rural life can also be used to obfuscate the connections between rural and urban areas, as well as any associated consequences. Such an imaginary can, for example, be seen to have masked 'the exploitation and oppression of the countryside, first through the brutality of feudalism and later through the appropriation of the rural life for capitalist production in the agrarian revolution' (Woods, 2011, p. 18). More recently, this representation of the rural as "idyll" has served to mask the pace and scale of contemporary rural change, with such areas now serving as multifunctional spaces with a role in *both* productive activities (such as forestry or agriculture) *and* consumptive activities (such as the tourism and outdoor leisure industries) (da Silva, et al., 2016, p. 78; Woods, 2011).

Whilst the idyllic imaginary has helped to draw urban peoples to the countryside, integrating them into such practices, an increase in both tourist activity and counter-urban migration has meant that the needs of rural communities are brought into conflict with both the expectations of their visitors and the stresses that are associated with an increased population. The idyllic imaginaries held by tourists, for example, may be destabilised by the realities of rural practice, including the noises and smells associated with machines and farm animals, the use of fences and pesticides, and the environmental degradation associated with the demands of agribusiness (Bell, 2006, p. 149; Short, 2006, p. 143). An influx of new rural residents, meanwhile, may also necessitate the creation of new buildings or roadways in order to cope with the increased demand, which may act to undermine the

tranquillity that brought these people into such regions in the first place (Bell, 2006, p. 149). These new rural "residents" may also only be present for a part of the year - treating their countryside properties as holiday homes - meaning that some buildings may stand empty and that local economies may suffer[8].

Whilst the "idyllic" rural may have only a limited relationship to the realities of rural life, an examination of this imaginary provides a valuable means by which to identify and interrogate culturally-specific nations of "rural space" and "rural values". In examining the *Postman Pat* series, for example, it is possible to detect some groups and behaviours that are excluded from the "idyllic" rural imaginary: -

> '[An attentive viewer] might notice an *absence* of non-white, non-Christian, homosexual, homeless, poor, disabled, criminal or unhappy characters in the village. Moreover, industrialisation, unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, inequality, consumerism, and other than patriarchal nuclear family life might be identified as *not* part of life in Greendale' (Horton, 2008b, p. 390)

Whilst "idyllic" rural imaginaries will often simply exclude the negative aspects of rural life, other forms of popular "rural" discourse have sought to amplify both the sense of idyll-disturbance and the disconnection between the "imagined" rural and the contemporary lived experience of rural regions. One example of this is evident in the folk music album *The Imagined Village* (The Imagined Village, 2007). During the song *Hard Times of Old England Retold* – an adaptation of the original *Hard Times of Old England* (Steeleye Span, 1975) – the artists reflect on the often-unseen issues that accompany the practices of farming and the supposedly "idyllic" rural lifestyle. One verse, for example, reflects on the extent to which the acceleration of counter-urban migration has impacted upon the character of rural communities: -

> 'More and more of our village gets sold every day, to folks from the city who are happy
>
> to pay, for their holiday cottage to stand empty all day. Singing oh the hard times of Old
>
> England - In Old England very hard times' (The Imagined Village, 2007)

The accompanying album cover (Figure 6) also serves to problematize our understandings of "idyllic" rurality, utilising a distinctive visual style – one that is normally seen in porcelain depictions of conventional idyllic images – to show the encroachment of the city upon the "natural" rural space.

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[8] For a broader overview of the debate surrounding the role of second homes in rural areas, see Rye 2011.

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 6: The Imagined Village Album Cover (2007)

Jones, meanwhile, reflects on the subversion of the "idyllic" discourse with film. Drawing upon the example of the French film *Will It Snow at Christmas?* (1996), he argues that 'the idea of the idyll is overshadowed by the oppression of poverty and child labour, the corrosive patriarchal power, and the predatory sexual aggression of the father' (2007, p. 183). Within such narratives, one's position within the countryside – and enjoyment of its freedoms – serves only to compensate its residents for the drudgery and dangers of everyday life. Woodward and Winter, offer a similar reflection on the extent to which 'British cinema in the post-war period still manages to sneak rural suggestions under the wire, to help consolidate links between Britishness, "character", wartime endurance and (ultimately) military victory' (2007, p. 100). The evocation of conventional "British" rurality, evident in films such as *A Town Like Alice* and *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, is made synonymous with the experience of personal strengths, even whilst the surrounding environment may actually be dangerous or degrading.

Other examples of critical or counter-idyllic discourse are, however, much more extreme in their depiction of rural regions, which are shown to be 'dangerous locations, places where urban people are at high risk of being savagely killed and tortured by demented, in-bred locals without conscience or constraint' (DeKeseredy et al, 2014, p.179; see also Bell, 1997, p.93**;** Murphy, 2013, p.11; Woods, 2011, p.18). Contrasting his own approach to the 'twee pastoralisms' that are associated with Bunce's notion of the armchair countryside, Bell advances his own notion of 'the *behind the sofa countryside*, a place far, far from idyllic' (1997, p.95; emphasis in original). This form of counter-idyllic imaginary, which can also be referred to as the 'backwoods' (Murphy, 2013), is also produced by the

contrast between rural and urban spaces, as well as their associated values. This is commonly a realm in which the "normal" and "civilised" values that are associated with urban spaces and peoples are shown to be invalidated by the hostility and violence of the rural world and rural people (Bell, 1997, p. 96; DeKeseredy, et al., 2014, p. 183). This representational practice is particularly common within the horror genre, within which this juxtaposition is established through the representation of 'deserted mansions (in countless vampire films); the cottage in the country which urban travellers (lost, or let down by their car) take futile refuge… whole villages in which evil runs amok, and into which witless urbanites stumble or are ensnared… and endless permeations of city folk transplanted to the country on camping trips, or out hiking, touring or exploring, or at summer camps' (Bell, 1997, p.96). Within the long-running *Wrong Turn* franchise, for example, the various groups of travellers all encounter the archetypal hillbilly cannibals due to one single poor decision, whether a poorly chosen travel route, an ill-chosen sanctuary, by hosting an event in the wrong place, or simply by venturing too far from the city. This notion of the lost or displaced urban traveller has become a familiar genre trope, to the extent that it is openly parodied within films such as *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012)[9]. The website TV Tropes, for example, which tracks the recurrence of different genre mechanisms across multiple cultural artefacts, refers to this as the 'Don't Go into the Woods' trope: -

> 'Two or more people, often a group of teenagers, go for a casual hike or a vacation at a secluded retreat… Horrible things ensue. The soon-to-be-not-so-happy campers get stalked through the trees by psychotic killers; they run afoul of tribes of inbred hillbillies; ghosts, werewolves, witches, druids, fairies and other such beings toy with them; malevolent eyes gaze at them from every shadow; perhaps even the trees themselves attack them; they hear strange noises in the night; people disappear; people go insane' (Tv Tropes, 2018)

This collision between urban and rural spaces is often disciplined by the representation of particular gender norms (Bell, 1997, pp. 98-99; Clover, 1992, pp. 124-127; DeKeseredy, et al., 2014, p. 180; Murphy, 2013, p. 8). The rural locations in which these films are set are, for example, often shown to be occupied by a particular caricature of rural masculinity, variously referred to as the hillbilly, redneck or mountain man (Bell, 1997, p. 96). The characterisation of these figures, such as those depicted in

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[9] In *The Cabin in the Woods*, the group of teenage travellers encounter the "Harbinger" – a seemingly mad old man, who offers a vague warning about proceeding on their journey to the titular "cabin". Later, when it transpires that the group have been chosen as human sacrifices for an all-powerful God figure (implied to be the viewer), it is revealed that the group had to have chosen to ignore a warning not to leave civilisation in order to fulfil their assigned roles.

Two Thousand Maniacs (1964), *Deliverance* (1972) and the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* franchise (1974-2017), portrays them as a group 'who do not observe the civilised rules of hygiene or personal habit… Country people snort when they breathe, snore when they sleep [and] drool when they eat' (Clover, 1992, pp.125-126). These rural men are depicted as emblematic of a counter-modern and backwards culture, and are often shown to be 'carrying muzzle-loaded rifles and drinking moonshine or some other intoxicant. The men… often have names that imply that they are illiterate or nearly so, like Clem, Zeke, or Jethro' (DeKeseredy et al., 2014, p.180; see also Murphy, 2013, p.8). In some instances, it is implied that urban spaces and values are the causal factors in the acts of aggression that are perpetrated by rural men. Sharrett, for example, suggests that the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* film serves to show 'the violent disruption of the security and stability of rural and suburban life' (Sharrett, cited in Bell, 1997, p.97; see also Clover, 1992, p.129 on the role of capitalism in *The Hill Have Eyes;* DeKeseredy et al, 2014, p.185 on the role of capitalism in *Shark Night 3D*). More commonly, however, such behaviours are linked to the *choice* of rural men to dwell in rural regions, where it is implied that they can indulge broader behavioural tendencies 'of inbreeding, insularity, backwardness [and] sexual perversion (especially incest and bestiality)' (Bell, 1997, p.182).

Rural women, in contrast, are represented – if at all – as 'either hardened, asexual grandmothers, or sexual objects with large breasts, curvaceous hips, halter tops, and skimpy, frayed denim short-shorts' (DeKeseredy, et al., 2014, p. 180). In the latter of these two archetypes, rural women are transformed into the object of the urban fetish: the highly sexualised, scantily-clad, promiscuous caricature that is common in so-called "gonzo" pornographic videos and cartoons (DeKeseredy, et al., 2014, p. 179). This gendered social structure is also evident in the ways in which rural horror films depict the interaction between the urban dweller and the rural environment, as this genre will 'often show as female victims those more likely to have had sexual relations, and as survivors those females who abstained from sex' (DeKeseredy, et al., 2014, p. 183; see also Clover, 1992, p.34). This depiction of rural gender roles seems to validate a patriarchal social structure, within which rural women – or women who enter into rural regions - are controlled and used by men.

The representation of the so-called "final girl"[10], meanwhile, offers a direct subversion of these implied patriarchal norms. Clover, for example, notes the frequency with which the patriarchal male rescuer is 'blown away for their troubles, leaving the girl to fight her own fight. Policemen, fathers, and sheriffs appear only long enough to demonstrate risible incomprehension and incompetence' (1992, p. 44). The character of the final girl is shown to have the characteristics that

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[10] The representational trope of the 'final girl', which is common in horror fictions, refers to those instances when a would-be victim (usually the last such character left alive) turns on her assailant.

the urban dweller would seek for themselves, which are denied to both the peripheral Other and the other, usually more morally-ambiguous characters: '[t]he practiced viewer distinguishes her from her friends minutes into the film. She is the Girl Scout, the bookworm, the mechanic' (Clover, 1992, p. 39). The audience, who might root for the killer for much of the movie, are expected to root for the return of this specific character to the civilised urban core, in order that she might leave the violence of the rural regions both literally **and** figuratively behind.

Whilst the representation of the "backwoods" can therefore serve a symbolic value, pointing to the dangers of going beyond the civilised urban core, the associated imaginary can also be used in order to structure what civilised behaviours *actually are*. Such a process allows for a particular group or region, whilst still technically a part of the broader national whole, to be excluded from the default protections that are extended by the state-system. Eriksson, for example, examines the representational practices evident in *The Hunters*, arguing that the film plays a key role in the construction of Norrland (northern Sweden) through continued 'modifications to themes such as not only rurality, out-migration and regional subsidies, but also backwardness and xenophobia' (2010, p. 95). In showing the Norrland regions to be occupied by violent, animal-killing rapists and murders, the film is shown to maintain "our" values by showing "us" what we cannot allow ourselves to be – the national space becomes fundamentally 'gendered, racialized and classified' (Eriksson, 2010, p. 95).

3.2.2. The Wilderness

The final formulation of rurality that is offered in this chapter is that of the wilderness, an imaginary that is rooted in the transition from a hunter-gather economy to an agricultural society. As Short highlights, the term wilderness 'emerges then, because it is only with settled agriculture that a distinction is made between cultivated and uncultivated land, savage and settled, domesticated and wild animals' (1991, p. 5; see also Woods, 2011, p. 18). The notion of the wilderness is used to faciliate a distinction between managed space, whether these are urban centres or productive agricultural lands, and the untamed areas that lie outside of this human control. Such a distinction is evident in the way in which these external zones are described with political legislation. In the USA, for example, the 1964 Wilderness Act states that the 'wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognised as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a vistor who does not remain' (cited in Murphy, 2013, p.6). Whilst the UK government does not operationalise the term "wilderness" in this way, the charitable organisation 'The Wilderness Foundation UK' (2016) argues that 'the wilderness is an irreplaceable catalyst for personal transformation and growth. In the wild, people experience a deep sense of belonging, centredness and peace'. Understood in this way, the "wilderness" is to be

regarded as an exterior zone that is somehow beyond the "civilising" effects of urban life – it is somewhere where humans are either absent, or else are present only on a transitional basis.

As an analytical measure, however, the concept of the wilderness is more problematic. As Cronon highlights, 'the trouble is that our cultural traditions and our very language encourage us to think that wilderness and nature are, well, *natural*' (1996a). We are encouraged to think of the existence of the wilderness as somehow self-evident – as an actually-existing zone that can be defined and characterised through critical investigation. It is this that means that the concept of the wilderness 'has a deceptive concretness at first glance. The difficulty is that while the word is a noun, it acts like an adjective. There is no specific material object that is wilderness' (Nash, 2014, p. 1). Like the broader notion of "rurality", the "wilderness" can usefully be thought of as a social and cultural construction. It is not a space that is somehow separate from urbanised society, but rather is a manifestation of such a society and its associated value systems (Cloke, 2006, pp. 7-8). The wilderness is the product of our individual, subjective interpretations of the landscapes that surround us, and our relationships with them, and does not exist in a single broad form: -

> 'One man's wilderness may be another's roadside picnic ground. The Yukon trapper would consider a trip to northern Minnesota a return to civilisation, while for the vacationer from Chicago it is a wilderness adventure indeed… Wilderness, in short, is so heavily freighted with meaning of a personal, symbolic, and changing kind as to resist easy definition' (Nash, 2014, p. 1)

Mindful of this, this chapter does not aim to offer a singular definition of the wilderness, but instead argues that our understandings of this form of space are the product of a variety of competing and contradictory social and spatial mythologies. Short (1991, p. 10) offers one useful example of this perceptual dualism, differentiating between the 'classical' and 'romantic' approaches to wilderness spatialities. These understandings, together with their manifestations in contemporary culture, are explored below: -

The Classical Conceptualisation of the Wilderness

Until the eighteenth century the wilderness was perceived in a primarily negative manner, as a place of danger which provoked only fear and anxiety. At a most primal level this sense of fear paralleled that of the early settlers, who 'could hear the call of the wild beasts, the sound of the wind in the trees, or the thunderstorms circling around the mountain tops. These were not reassuring noises to an agrarian population with limited knowledge of nature and an even more limited ability to control it. The fear of the wilderness was a rational response' (Short, 1991, p. 9). The construction and representation of the notion of the wilderness was less about the assignation of specific, measurable

characteristics, but rather reflected both the perceived productive value of a particular place and the level of control that humanity was perceived to have over that environment. As the wilderness was viewed as a desolate place, without value to civilisation and civilised people, the classical perspective suggested that progress could be achieved through the creation of a usable space and the implementation of agrarian norms of land management (Short, 1991, p. 7; Woods, 2011, p.18).

Despite an ever-increasing control over the rural periphery, this fear-laden imaginary has remained an enduring part of our cultural narratives. Murphy, for example, notes the tendency of American horror and gothic narratives to return modern audiences to the wilderness environments that so troubled the early settlers: -

'It is no coincidence that when American authors and film-makers fantasise about the end of civilisation as they know it, they so often produce narratives which unconsciously evoke the beginnings of European settlement. In their imaginings of an American end… they return to where it all began' (Murphy, 2013, p. 2)

Short offers one potential explanation for this, noting that the fear of becoming "lost" in wilderness is notably more pronounced in societies that have moved away from the worship of earth-bound god figures: -

'When gods and spirits are in the earth and on the bough and all around, wilderness as a place to fear cannot exist. But when there is tamed and untamed nature and when gods are shifted from the earth to the sky… then uncultivated places become the wilderness beyond human control, a place to fear' (Short, 1991, p. 8)

We can see early examples of this form of wilderness imaginary in biblical accounts of both the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, as well as the trials of Jesus. The wilderness space takes on a symbolic role in such accounts, standing for one's distance from the divine and the loss of a spiritually pure sense of Self (Short, 1991, p. 8; Cronon, 1996a, pp. 8-9). The encounter with the wilderness spaces represents a spiritual lacking, a de-civilising or be**wilder**ing experience that exposes the true, primal human. Represented in such a way, the concept of the wilderness serves as a spatial metaphor that symbolically sets the civilised (urbanised) human against those who live in the wilderness, outside of our acknowledged social order. Further examples of such a narrative are legion, evident in the many 'tales of evil spirits, monsters and savages resident in the forest, marshes and mountains' (Woods, 2011, p.18). Although one's refusal of the constraining effects of society has the potential to be presented in a positive manner, as is evident in 'the myth of Robin Hood and his merry (oppositional) band in Sherwood Forest' (Short, 1991, p. 9), we are more commonly told of the dangers that result

from one's interaction with these unconstrained and uncivilised Others. Enduring tales such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, which tells the story of a vulnerable girl encountering a literal predator in the woodland wilderness, may even be updated in order to more directly appeal to the fears and vulnerabilities of a modern audience: -

> 'Consider Red Riding Hood, who strikes off into the wilderness only to be captured and eaten by a wolf (whom she foolishly trusts), though she is saved by a passing woodsman. Multiply and humanise the wolf, read "rape" for eat, skip the woodsman (let Red save herself), and you have *I Spit on Your Grave*' (Clover, 1992, p. 124)

This form of popular culture, which includes films such as *Lord of the Flies* (1954), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *YellowBrickRoad* (2010), suggests that we should fear the influence of wilderness on the people that enter into such regions (Murphy, 2013, p. 1; Short, 1991, p. 9). As well as containing a dangerous and peripheral Other, who does not share our values and renders us vulnerable, the wilderness also exposes the potential impermanence of civilisation, the worry that our civilised selves can somehow be 'burned off by contact with the wilderness to reveal the dark underside of the human condition. Wilderness becomes an environmental metaphor for the dark side of the psyche' (Short, 1991, p. 9). It is represented as a place on the margins, freed from the constraints of civilisation, where the individual is free to connect with their wild and primal unconsciousness (Cronon, 1996a, p. 8).

The Romantic Conceptualisation of the Wilderness

Whilst the classical conceptualisation suggests that one's encounter with the undeveloped and untamed wilderness will engender only fear and bewilderment, the romantic conceptualisation suggests that such encounters offer 'a rejection of imposed social values and a return to the moral authority of a Self [that is] closer to God' (Short, 1991, p.10; see also Cloke, 2006, p.10). This romanticised notion of wilderness spatiality is particularly evident in the characterisation of the American frontier. Here, the wilderness is both a site of religious and spiritual renewal, as well as a place for personal growth and nationalist revival. Whilst the urban, industrialised society came to be regarded as a unnatural and feminising space, one's entry into the wilderness or "frontier" allowed for the recovery of a conventional, unconstrained masculinity through participation in activities such as hunting, foraging and camping (Cloke, 2006, pp. 14-15; Cronon, 1996a, p. 20; Woods, 2011, p. 20) This meant that the destruction of the wilderness – which would once have been viewed as a form of cultural progress – was instead reframed as an act of civic vandalism (Cloke, 2006, p. 13; Short, 1991, p. 39). The protection and preservation of the wilderness became a national imperative, with areas of natural beauty that were deemed to be particularly emblematic of the "wilderness experience" subsequently designated as national parks. Our encounter with this form of rural wilderness often still

shows the imprint of a masculinised perceptual framework, however, as these are imagined as "female" spaces that are to be controlled, explored and enjoyed by strong men: -

> '[T]he enjoyment of rural recreation has been equated with sexual pleasure, the aesthetic appreciation of rural landscape with the voyeuristic objectification of female beauty, and the exploitation of the countryside by walkers, or cyclists, or motorists with sexual discovery' (Woods, 2011, p. 20)

In being reshaped as these natural sites, offering past masculine freedoms, the notion of the "wilderness" risks becoming as false and unnatural as the "urban" society from which people are seeking to separate themselves. In dividing the "divine" rural from the "human" urban, we risk leaving no space for people as a part of "natural" landscapes and also exclude the imprint of nature upon our day-to-day urban environments. The wilderness becomes little more than the fetishisation of rurality and divine experience, perpetuating the broader illusion that humanity can escape from the consequences of modern life and our shared history and can flee out into the periphery (Cronon, 1996a, p. 22). Wilderness spaces are not therefore natural, but rather are warped to fit the wilderness imaginary that is demanded by the various urban-centric practices of consumption – including those of both tourism and rural recreation – manifesting an urban vision of what these peripheral spaces ought to look like. This means, as Cronon highlights, that 'there is nothing natural about the concept of the wilderness. It is entirely a creation of the culture that holds it dear, a product of the very history it seeks to deny' (1996a, p. 16). This is particularly evident in the characterisation of the American frontier as a place of unaltered, unspoilt natural wilderness, which obscures the displacement of the Native American peoples: -

> 'The myth of the wilderness as 'virgin', uninhabited land has always been especially cruel when seen from the perspective of the Indians who had once called that land home. Now they were forced to move elsewhere, with the result that tourists could safely enjoy the illusion that they were seeing their nation in its pristine, original state, in the new morning of God's own creation' (Cronon, 1996a, p. 15; see also Woods, 2011, p. 23)

One's experience of the wilderness is a state of mind – a representation of the prevailing construction of the natural landscape – and is not limited to a fixed, territorially-bounded locale. If we recognise this, then we can draw upon the wilderness in our experience of the urban "home" space (Cronon, 1996b, p. 50). This is not an abandonment of the role of emotive natural spaces, but rather serves as a recognition of the conceptual limitations that are imposed when we evoke the notion of the wilderness (Cronon, 1996a, p. 17; Cronon, 1996b, p. 55). The contemporary reverence for the wilderness, including the American frontier, is not the result of some reversion to a bygone age, but

rather serves as the romantic valorisation of a masculinised and supposedly "natural" state of being that has never actually existed within the real world.

3.2.3. Analysing Rural Space through Military-Themed Video Games

The preceding literature review has explored the extent to which the notion of "rurality" can be seen as a social construction, offering a postmodern and poststructuralist form of analysis that seeks to collapse the distinction between material rurality and the fictional representations of rural spatiality that are contained within popular culture. Such an perspective resonates with prevailing approaches to political spatiality within both International Relations and critical geopolitics which, as discussed in Chapter Two, suggest that both politics and national identity are constructed with reference to both real *and* imagined forms of space. Applied to the analysis of military-themed video games, the underlying question is therefore not how we ought to define "rurality". Instead, I focus upon how we construct the "meaning" of rurality through our engagement with the various different framing mechanism that are used in popular culture, examining the consequences of these representations for broader geopolitical structures. Whilst the "reality" of different forms of rural spaces cannot simply be "read" from the virtual environments that are contained within video games, the medium can nonethless be seen to manifest specific values and ideals as either integral to, or apart from, the accepted values of the nation. The literature in the preceding subsections has highlighted some of the conceptual frameworks that are particularly salient for this engagement, examining the notions of the rural idyll, the anti-idyll or backwoods, and the wilderness. These understandings of rural space are used in order to structure the analyses of video games undertaken in Chapter Six.

Section 3.2.1 addresses the formation of contrasting versions of the iydllic rural imaginary. The "idyllic" imaginary is shown to valorise rural regions, holding them as representative of the collective values and ideals that have been undermined by the increasingly urbanised nature of our every day lives. This is shown to reinforced by the ciruclative of affirmative representational precepts within a range of different forms of popular culture, including print media, painting, films, and televison programmes. These different imaginaries, in whatever form, are shown to 'all converge around a normative nostalgic ideal which is embedded in social and economic structures' (2003, p. 25). The idyllic rural periphery is not an external reality, but a marketable nostalgic commodity. As highlighted in Chapter Six, this is a representational pattern that is uncommon with video games – idyllic values of harmonious community, where they are depicted at all, tend to be implied, rather than overly shown. This is a medium which more closely corresponds to the backwoods or anti-idyllic imaginary, prevalent within the horror genre, within which rural regions are portrayed as sources of fear and danger. Like the rural idyll, the representation of the "backwoods" is also achieved through

the representation of a series of spatial stereotypes that are unlikely to correspond directly to any recognisable peoples or real-world locations. The rural backwoods has been shown to be a gendered framework, placing the civilised (and thus feminised) Self in juxtaposition to the violent and animalistic Other that is shown to occupy rural regions. Indeed in many cases, as Bell notes, 'the horror is already there [and] waiting for the city folk to arrive' (1997, p. 99). In military-themed video games, as in horror, the sense of fear that is created by peripheral regions is instilled both through the possibility of encounter and, more broadly, through the possibility that one might not survive to return to the urban home.

Section 3.2.2, meanwhile, examines some of the prevailing perspectives on "wilderness" rurality, contrasting classical and romantic conceptualisations of untamed space. Whilst the former conceptualisation suggests that this is a place to be feared, the latter treats the rural periphery as both a divine space – in which one can find God – and a space for the restoration of one's national identity. These themes are particularly salient for the analysis of military-themed video gaming, in which the untamed peripheral spaces often provide both the source of danger *and* the crucible in which the identity of the soldier becomes fully formed. Such spaces, as Chapter Six will show, allow for freedoms of individual action – taken against a universally hostile periphery – whilst also necessitating perpetual movement and one's eventual department for the safety of the civilised urban core.

3.3   Making Time? Understanding the "Event"

The final section of this literature review chapter focusses on the role of temporality and mediation in the construction of the violent "Event", engaging with some of the key issues which animate the discussion of 'revisionist' and 'proleptic' spatialities in Chapter Seven[11]. Until comparatively recently, much of the academic research conducted into terroristic violences had taken a problem-solving and actor-centric approach that 'was animated by three intimately-related and long-standing questions: how to define terrorism, how to explain terrorism and how to prevent it' (Jarvis, 2009, p. 12). Whilst this approach to the analysis of terrorism can offer potential practical insights, functioning as a form of risk identification and management, it is also argued to have a number of associated methodological and conceptual shortcomings. The majority of the primary research into terroristic violences has been

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[11] Smicker outlines the notions of 'revisionism' and 'prolepsis' as a part of a framework for the analysis of video games, in order to account for 'the differences in gameplay narration, gameplay design, markets of authenticity' and [the] performance of military history' (2010, p. 113). These concepts are discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven, where they are used to justify the video games that are chosen for analysis in that chapter.

carried out by so-called "one-timers" – rather than by an established body of researchers – meaning that the field lacks an overall theoretical coherance (Gunning, 2007, p. 371). This has also created a tendency for the views, interpellations and inferences that are expressed within this limited primary research to be reproduced as unchallenged and unchecked "facts" within secondary analyses (Gunning, 2007, pp. 365-367; Hulsse & Spencer, 2008, p. 573). This conventional analytical approach has also been challenged by the development of a more "critical" subfield of terrorism studies, focussed on the extent to which the different meanings that are ascribed to the key concepts – such as "terrorist" or "terrorism" – are the product of the different acts of construction, mediation and interpretation that occur within popular and political discourse (Gunning, 2007, pp. 376-378; Hulsse & Spencer, 2008, p. 572; Jarvis, 2008, p. 245; Stump & Dixit, 2012, p. 207). Such an approach does not deny the existence of terrorism or terroristic violence per say, but suggests that the critical examination of different discursive formulations can allow for the 'exposure of moments of bias, selectivity, exclusion, aporia, or inaccuracy within terrorism discourse' (Holland & Jarvis, 2014, pp. 189-190; see also Jarvis, 2009, p.11). This process has, amongst other critical emphases, begun to acknowledge the important role of time and temporality in the formation of the broader discursive frameworks that are used in the construction of "terrorism" and one's understandings of the terroristic "Event": -

> '[R]epresentations of terrorist violence and groups, and likewise representations of counter-terrorism campaigns, are dependent on and filled with claims to particular pasts, presents and futures, and the relations between them' (Holland & Jarvis, 2014, p. 190)

Such an emphasis is particularly notable within examinations of the various different forms of political, cultural and academic discourses that sought to mediate the terrorist hijackings of September 11 2001. These attacks represented a significant challenge to previously prevalent conceptualisations of the act of warfare, as a sub-state group without either conventional weapons or significant financial resources was able to succesfully bypass extensive systems of national defence in its targeting of key symbols of American economic, military and governmental power. The prevalent political discouse subsequently became one of a 'War on Terror' which, rather than signifying resistance to a conventional and spatially-definable foe, denoted a more general opposition to both a tactic and a state of being. This response to the attacks, which were framed as a 'new kind of warfare' (Bush, 2001), necessitated that they be represented within broader political discourse as a 'singularity' (Ouellette, 2008) – a defining moment of temporal rupture occurring outside of the bounds of history and the discursive context of relatable socio-cultural experiences (Der Derian, 2009, p. 230; Holland & Jarvis, 2014; Spigel, 2004, p. 239; Weber, 2006, pp. 2-3). This became a moment which individuals were invited to map onto the temporalities of their own lives, serving as 'a sacred moment in time

among the individual and collective memories of the American public' (Grusin, 2010, p. ix). Whilst September 11 2001 came to be perceived as the day on which 'night fell on a different world' (Bush, 2001) there were, however, multiple intepretations of this "Event" in circulation within the political, academic and cultural discourses of this period: -

> 'First, the notion that 9-11 was a date on which everything changed, and second, the notion that 9-11 was a date on which nothing changed at all. Time then seems to be central to thinking and talking about 9-11, even when temporal conceptualisations are left implicit' (Holland, 2009, p. 275)

The exposure of these conflicting narratives invites a closer examination of the mediation of the "Event", through an examination of some of the different mechanisms by which some understandings come to be privileged over others. As already highlighted, the critical perspective on acts of unconventional and terroristic violences suggests that what actually happens might be of a lesser importance that the processes by which we come to understand what happens, thus imbuing the events with meaning. Indeed, as Feldman surmises, it would seem that 'the event is not what happens. The event is that which can be narrated. The event is organised by culturally situated meanings' (Felman, cited in Smicker, 2010, p.106). The remainder of this subsection examines some of the logics that structure the mediation of the "Event", tracing a transition from an established logic of 'remediation' (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) to one of 'premediation' (Grusin, 2004; 2010; 2011): -

3.3.1   Popular Culture and Remediation

The process of "remediation", which was prevalent at the end of the twentieth century, centres on the extent to which one form of mediation can be seen to be appropriated within another (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 45). This is a visually-orientated process, which calls attention to the various ways in which different forms of new media – including computer graphics, video games, virtual reality and the internet – can be seen to 'define themselves by borrowing from, paying homage to, critiquing and refashioning their predecessors, principally television, film, photography and painting, but also print' (Grusin, 2004, p. 17). Such a process also emphasises the extent to which the conventions of emergent media forms can be integrated into existent practices. As Weber highlights, 'television news broadcasts that are transformed into other media like documents, documentaries or feature films are examples of remediation. So too are feature films that recycle actual television broadcasts or use digital media effects' (2008, p. 139; see also Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p.48). Such practices can, however, be seen to rely upon conflicting processes of mediatisation. On the one hand, we have become more aware of the role of signs and signification in the processes of cultural mediation and the artificial creation of "meaning". At the other extreme, however, we can still be seen to treat the process of

mediation as a "real" and effective presence with 'the same claim to reality as more tangible artefacts; photographs, films and computer applications are as real as airplanes and buildings' (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 19). This conceptualisation suggests that there are two contradictory, yet interdependent logics that are at work in the process of mediation, which can be seen to 'oscillate between immediacy and hypermediacy, between transparency and opacity' (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 19). Whilst Bolter and Grusin (2000, p. 21) focus specifically on the manifestation of these logics within new media, they emphasise that these are enduring logics which may have manifested in different ways, within a variety of media forms, and over a long period of time. Although this places a full review of the different manifestations of such logics beyond the scope of this enquiry, it remains useful to provide both an overview of each of these concepts: -

The Logic of Transparent Immediacy

The desire for immediacy refers to the attempted subversion of the process of mediation, which has the effect of offering an apparently unrestricted and unfiltered level of access to the "reality" of that which is being represented (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, pp. 5-6). The form of the mediation is made to be something that is transparent – something that is "seen through" rather than "seen" – meaning that the phenomenon is encountered as though it were seen live. As Weber surmises, such representations 'feel live to viewers because viewers are so interfaced with events and characters that viewers seem to be experiencing these events at the same time and in the same place as the characters on the screen. As such, viewers cease to be mere observers *and become virtual participants in the event*' (2008, p. 139; emphasis added). This is a particularly common objective within popular culture, evident in the wide-range of different television shows which place the viewer alongside police officers (e.g. *Road Wars*, *Police Interceptors*), inside failing businesses (e.g. *The Hotel inspector*; *Kitchen Nightmares*) or amongst groups of "celebrities" (e.g. *I'm a Celebrity… Get Me Out of Here!; Big Brother*). Whilst the desire to achieve a sense of immediacy is particularly evident in the content of new media, this process relies upon the techniques of linear perspective, erasure and automaticity that are also common within older and more established forms of mediation such as painting and photography (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 24). The use of perspective refers to the aim to create a continuity between the world of the viewer and the depicted space that is represented within, for example, a work of art (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 25). The process of erasure, meanwhile, refers to the obliteration of the physical space of a canvas. The term is used to denote the subversion of the creative process (such as the act of painting) in favour of the final finished product (in this case, the painting itself) (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, pp. 24-25). Finally, the process of automaticity – which is commonly associated with photography – references the ways in which a particular medium may reproduce its subject in the ways in which our eyes are accustomed to seeing it. This promotes a sense of realism

by rendering both the creator **and** the process of creation absent, whilst acting to integrate the viewer into the consumption of the represented image (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 28).

Although aiming to subvert the experience of mediation, the logic of transparent immediacy does not demand that the viewer (or player) actually be fooled by the content of the represented image. Whilst this remains an ultimately desirable outcome, each form of mediation – though offering a claim to be an unfiltered representation of "reality" – unavoidably still draws attention to the different ways in which it makes and relays such claims (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 19). We become accustomed to, for example, the role of editing, computer graphics and special effects, and more aware of what these might mean for our interpretative processes. As such, the pursuit of transparent immediacy is paradoxically both responsible for, and dependent upon, both an increased awareness of the practices of mediation and the ongoing multiplication of its different forms (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, pp. 33-34; Weber, 2008, p. 139). This is referred to as the logic of hypermediacy: -

The Logic of Hypermediacy

Whilst the ultimate aim of immediacy is to bypass the experience of mediation entirely, the logic of hypermediacy instead calls attention to the fragmented nature of this representational process (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, pp. 327-328). Different forms of mediation draw upon different combinations of words, images and sounds to offer multiple representations of a subject within a single space. Many websites, for example, contain text, photographs and digital graphics, whilst television news reports can be seen to have adopted a distinctive visual style which combines 'ribbons of text, photographs, and even audio without a video signal' (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, pp. 6-9; see, for example, Figure 7). These technologies are used to grant their viewers a level of immediacy and access to the "real world", even as that same viewer is also confronted with the artificial nature of that process of mediation. This dualism is illustrated with reference to the windows and icons that are used in computing (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, pp. 23-24). Although aiming to achieve a "transparent" form of interaction, experienced as unnoticed and automatic, text windows cannot offer the singular point of view that facilitates the subversion of mediation. This form of representation is *not* a window onto the real world, but rather is "windowed" – offering a multiplicity of views of other forms of mediation (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 34). The prevailing logic could be thought of not as one of immediate access, but rather as a form of replacement – for example, the clicking of a link can replace one tab with another, which is then the form of mediation which take our attention (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 44). Moreover,

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 7: CNN News Report (CNN, 2018)

through the action of interaction with the apparatus that governs this encounter (i.e. the physical process of interacting with the interface) the user is forced to return to and confront the constructed nature of such software. This is true of the representative icons associated with computing, such as those which are used to represent word processing software or graphics editing tools. As Bolter and Grusin highlight, these icons and folders 'function in two spaces: the pictorial space of the desktop and the informational space of the computer and the internet' (2000, p. 35). They both identify that certain spaces exist, in which particular actions can and cannot be performed, whilst highlighting the artificiality of such spaces and that they are not "present" in the real world. Such a process is also evident in non-digital forms of mediation, including the practices of woodworking, painting and photography (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, pp. 35-38). We are, for example, encouraged to recognise the role of hypermediacy in the creation of a cabinet on which physical space is masked by images of rural landscapes. Such an artefact is shown to be both real, physical space and representative, conceptual space in combination. Whilst the conceptual space depicted on the cabinet drawer might evoke rural sentimentality, the user is brought back to the "real" experience by opening the drawer in order to behold the physical space that lies within. A similar form of hypermediacy is also identified in modernist artworks, including collage and photomontage (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, pp. 38-39). Whilst such productions call upon the viewer to regard the image that is represented by, for example, pieces of different photographs or magazines, they also call attention to the fact that the artwork is "not real" and is comprised of pieces of something else.

In engaging in an examination of hypermediacy, we are invited to consider the process that underpins the act of "vision" – together with *how* and *why* one form of mediation may be privileged over another. This is of a particular saliency to an analysis of post-9/11 forms of mediation, as this was not experienced as a single "Event" – but rather as the experiential, hypermediated amalgamation of both the various precursor forms of discourse *and* the multiplicity of remediations of the event itself. Indeed, as Grusin highlights, the coverage of the 9-11 attacks could be seen to demonstrate *both* of the logics of remediation, 'simultaneously multiplying mediation in the familiar collage-like look pioneered by CNN… and erasing the evidence of mediation in presenting the immediacy of the extreme close-up of the Twin Towers in flames' (2010, p. 11). The following section examines the role of remediation, examining the extent to which the familiar mechanisms and motifs of popular culture were influential in shaping the post-9/11 discourse.

3.3.2   Popular Culture, Remediation and the 9-11 Attacks

Prior to the 9-11 attacks, the prevalent American security discourse centred upon a presumption of invulnerability, as it was believed that the country was protected by the surrounding oceans (Holland, 2009, p. 281). The attacks, occurring at the heart of a major American city, were not only experienced as a dramatic violation of this perception, but also lacked coherent mediation in elite discourse. This was not because the events themselves lacked meaning, but rather because this was a moment at which 'language failed to adequately or consistently regulate the meaning of the surrounding events' (Holland, 2009, p. 275; see also Holland, 2011, p. 89). Both during and immediately following the 9-11 attacks, the surrounding media coverage could be seen to draw upon a wide range of different technologies and techniques, including the use of split-screen images, radio feeds, and a variety of amateur footage (Grusin, 2010, p. 11). Although a fragmented, hypermediated form of discourse, such coverage sought to deny that this was anything other than the direct and unmediated reality of an act of incomprehensible terroristic violence. Such a framework precluded the possibility of analysis or interpretation, with any such attempts dismissed as futile or attacked as unpatriotic (Holland, 2009, p. 278). Whilst such coverage was largely successful in relating **what** had happened, this did little to account for precisely what that event had actually **meant** for the general public. As a result of this absence of mediation, the attacks were experienced as the 'first live global media event' (Grusin, 2010, p. 11). It is in such profoundly traumatic circumstances that the cultural industries can be seen to take on a more significant role in the creation and recreation of the national political narrative, as 'musical and artistic representation may capture certain emotional dimensions that remain out of reach for prevalent forms of communication and analysis. They are an essential element of how tragic events are viewed, interpreted and remembered' (Bleiker, 2005, p. 189). In the period following the 9-11 attacks, the general public could be seen to draw from an amalgamation of personal knowledge,

unofficial sources and "lower" levels of cultural discourse. There was, however, some notable initial discomfort surrounding the "proper" role of popular culture in the post-9/11 space, which resulted in an initial drive towards tastefulness in the production and promotion of cultural content and the exclusion of any potentially insensitive themes (Ouellette, 2008; Spigel, 2004, p. 235). This was evident, for example, in the palpable nervousness that surrounded the use of comedy and satire as political commentary, as 'the weekly late-night comedians hewed closely to the patriotic frame of the events as tragic [which] circulated in official discourse [and] which, for the time, required comic restraint or silence about the attacks' (Achter, 2008, p. 275). This heightened sense of political morality also resulted in changes to the scheduled release dates of terrorism-themed films, including *Collateral Damage* (2002), whilst heroic war films such as *Black Hawk Down* (2001) and *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001) were accelerated through the pre-production phase (Dodds, 2008b, p. 1625).

Despite such attempts to protect consumer sensibilities, however, it is notable that many still sought out terrorist-themed entertainment, such as The Towering Inferno (1974), Die Hard (1988), The Peacemaker (1997) and The Siege (1998). Others sought to trademark both prominent phrases, including "shock and awe" and "let's roll" and also more tasteless terms (Giroux, 2004, p. 218; Spigel, 2004, p. 234; Stahl, 2006, p. 120). This may, at least to some extent, represent the attempt to recover comfortable narrative conventions from the disorder of the political world. Through our consumption of popular culture (whether video games, films, television programmes or something else entirely), we are able to restructure political phenomena around the frameworks, conventions and storied structures that we use when we tell each other, and ourselves, about the world and our place within it (Shepherd, 2013, pp. 4-5). A reliance upon popular culture permitted a reassertion of narrative control, offering a familiar shared language and imagery through which a traumatised populous could begin to make sense of the attacks and articulate its experiences (Power & Crampton, 2007; van Veeren, 2009, p. 368).

Popular culture offered a means by which it was made possible to confront and combat shared fears (Power, 2007, p. 284), albeit by the naturalisation of a violent response to the violation of American territoriality and identity. Within these narratives, catastrophe is shown to fuel acts of patriotism and heroism, but as a part of the quest for revenge – a goal that is portrayed as the rightful response of 'a wounded, vengeful, but still very imperialistic nation prepared to set the world straight' (Boggs & Pollard, 2008, p. 566). The official narration of terrorism could also be seen to lean on the remediation of conventional tropes, drawing upon the stories that we have already told, whether in history, politics or popular fiction. Devetak, for example, argues that the Bush administration borrowed from the conventions of the gothic narrative form, associated with Edgar Allan Poe,

observing that 'in both cases, ineffable and potentially violent and cruel forces haunt and terrorise the civilised, human world' (2005, p. 621).

It is also worthwhile to consider what this fragmented process of cultural mediation may have acted to obscure. Payne, for example, suggests that the continued remediation of a hero narrative was representative of a broader reluctance to engage with the underlying cause of the attacks: -

> 'Rather than asking questions about *why* America's technology might be turned against it by well-funded, non-state terrorists, the response was to laud 'cultural' artefacts from a "simpler time" that reproduced ideas from supposedly halcyon days gone by. Americans quickly embraced fantastic entertainment that promised Manichean moral universes and frontiersman heroes, which could reaffirm our national mythology as the world's lone and righteous superpower' (Payne, 2016, p. 27)

Whilst the critical analysis of the role of time and temporality has often focussed on the temporal logics that underpinned the 9-11 attacks and the subsequent undertaking of the 'War on Terror', it is also important to acknowledge that these frameworks convey 'rather more about the politics of identity, security and violence more broadly… [P]erceptions of who we are, what we are – be that 'Americans', 'civilised', 'freedom-loving', or whatever – are necessarily, inherently rooted in specific understandings of temporality. Perceptions of whom and what we fear – be that 'new terrorism', 'evildoers', 'barbarians', and so forth – emerge, similarly, from particular engagements and writings of time' (Jarvis, 2009, p. 16).

Whilst the conceptualisation of 9-11 as a moment of rupture suggests that the attacks ought to be regarded as something new and different, this was not the first occasion on which America has experienced a profound disturbance to both its hegemonic sense of national identity and its prevailing security culture. It is for, example, notable that the loss of Soviet Russia as an antithetical "Other" compounded the pressure on an American security identity that was already reeling from the declining utility of Total War as a security strategy (Engelhardt, 2007, p. 10). These attacks were, however, particularly notable for their influence upon the prevailing conceptualisations of security **and** the commensurate logics of mediation, prompting the intensification of a logic of premediation[12].

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[12] Whilst this commodification of the uncertain future may have *intensified* in the period following the 9-11 attacks, it is nonetheless worthwhile to note that such a logic is *not* assumed to have emerged at this point (de Goede, 2008, pp. 160-161; Grusin, 2010, p. 13). Instead Grusin (2010, p. 13) suggests,

3.3.3 Premediation: Managing Risk after 9-11

As de Goede (2008, pp. 161-162) highlights, the subject of contemporary security concerns is not a rational and evaluative individual, but rather a "neurotic" citizen that seeks a zero-risk mode of being in the world. This need to control even the so-called "unknown unknowns" is a response to the sense of trauma and helplessness that accompanied the lack of a coherent post-Event discourse. Grusin suggests that this has prompted the contemporary prevalence of a media logic of premediation, which 'works to prevent citizens of the global mediasphere from experiencing again the kind of systematic of traumatic shock produced by the events of 9/11 by perpetuating an almost constant, low level of fear or anxiety about another terrorist attack' (2010, p. 1). Such a logic is representative of a broad shift in temporal emphasis, from the past and near-present into the future, prompted by a desire to reduce the potential for there to be any further unforeseen and unmediated traumatic events. Indeed, as de Goede highlights, 'it is not so much the catastrophe that is to be avoided at all costs, but the immediacy that accompanies the *unexpected* catastrophe' (2008, p. 171; Grusin, 2010, p. 12; 2014, p. 56). Such a logic shares some of the preemptive language associated with the risk management practices employed by the financial sector and the military, bodies which aim 'to "securitize" the future and empty it of contingency and potentiality' (Ash, 2015, p. 293; see also de Goede, 2008, p. 159). Each envisages potential future events, whilst decrying the success of past terrorist attacks as representative of a 'failure of imagination' (The 9/11 Commision , 2004, p. 339). Such a focus is particularly evident in the extent to which simulations of future, imagined terrorist atrocities continue to feature prominently within contemporary political policy structures. This includes the development of simulations, which 'test the "preparedness" of emergency services… [and] entail the detailed imagination of, for example, "dirty" bomb attacks, the explosion of radiological devices or anthrax spreads' (de Goede, 2008, p. 160). Whilst the practice of premediation is distinct from that of risk management, this imaginative premediation of risk can be seen to create the specific social conditions through which a potential risk can be envisaged and mediated. De Goede (2008, p. 168), for example, reflects on the production of risk management documentation that indicates the perceived level of "risk" that is faced in different types of urban areas, noting that these predictions would be invaluable to both terrorists (as a guide for their actions) and to governments (as guides for investment and the implementation of preventative measures). This mediation of "potential" futures not only creates anxieties - by identifying the potential vulnerabilities that exist within real-world locations - but can also be seen to prescribe action. Unlike the practice of risk management however, the logic of

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with the benefit of hindsight, that a logic of premediation was evident in the 1990s and may even have served as a structural counterpart to the logic of remediation.

premediation is not dependent upon one's ability to **correctly** forecast or predict the occurrence of specific future events: -

> '[B]y trying to premediate as many of the possible worlds, or possible paths, as the future could be imagined to take, premediation works something like the logic of designing a video game; it is not necessarily about getting the future right as much as it is about trying to imagine or map out as many possible futures as could plausibly be imagined' (Grusin, 2004, p. 28; see also Grusin, 2010, p. 47)

Whilst the practice of risk management attempts to prevent the occurrence of future trauma by preventing the occurrence of traumatic future events, the logic of premediation aims to create the sense that such events *have already occurred*. Premediation facilitates the creation of a conceptual framework within which a series of actions, reactions or interactions can emerge pre-mediated, visualising a multiplicity of futures in a way that would be indistinguishable from the manner in which such futures would be mediated upon their appearance in the present day: -

> 'Premediation deploys multiple modes of mediation and remediation in shaping the affectivity of the public, in preparing people for some field of possible future action, in producing a mood or a structure of feeling that makes possible certain kinds of actions, thoughts, speech, affectivities, feelings, or moods, that might not have seemed possible before or that might have fallen flat or died on the vine or not produced echoes and reverberations in the public or media sphere' (Grusin, 2011, p. 47; see also de Goede, 2008, p.159)

Reflecting on the coverage of the so-called "Amerithrax" attacks on US senators and media outlets in 2001, for example, Grusin observes that the scare 'became an obsession of the media not for the damage it had done (which was minimal) but for the damage it might do, for the extreme threat of what it might become in the future' (2010, p. 41). The news media sought to outline the worst possible potential future – depicting a series of increasingly apocalyptic attacks – with the intention of stimulating action and reflection within the present day. A similar process is also noted with the media coverage of the then-future Iraq War, as the mediation of multiple potential futures served to constrain the path of political discourse. The war in Iraq had been premediated so many times, and in so many different ways, that it became impossible to conceive of a future in which the conflict did not actually occur (de Goede, 2008, p. 171; Grusin, 2010, p. 4). A further example of premediation is also evident in the early successes of the *#occupywallstreet* movement, which demonstrated the potential for sites such as Wall Street and Times Square to be taken over: -

'While some veterans of earlier protest movements have argued that occupation involves going inside buildings and taking possession… it is the potentiality of these occupations… their premediation of greater and more numerous and powerful occupations in the future, that vitalises the Occupy movement and marks its continued success' (Grusin, 2011)

In the absence of (and continued refusal to formulate) a list of specific demands, the movement was made able to explore both a wide range of potential economic futures *and* the specific circumstances that would shape those futures and facilitate their coming into being. The movement aimed to disrupt the sense of "business-as-usual", together with the inevitable future that a continued and unchallenged sense of normalcy would create. Instead, it aimed to 'change the mood or collective affective tone in the media, in public discourse, in social networks, and in the public sphere so that talking about amnesty for college or mortgage debt or demanding increased taxes on the wealthiest individuals and corporations or thinking about restructuring property relations and economics becomes not only possible, but indeed begins to appear as common sense or received wisdom' (Grusin, 2011). Such concerns aimed to facilitate the public vocalisation of shared concerns, with the aim of making action to address such concerns appear not only possible but *likely*. Indeed, Grusin concludes that the movement 'made it possible for mainstream media figures and politicians to take positions they could not have taken before, by providing cover or clearing the ground, by means of the shaping of collective moods or structures of feeling out of which more intense feelings about economic injustice are generated' (2011). This process of premediation can also be seen to function through the content of popular culture. One example of this process is evident in the cultural discourse that surrounds the threat of the terroristic "sleeper-cell" and the resultant impact of this imaginary upon contemporary security culture. It is, for example, argued to have had implications for the ways in which we conceive of the value of torture within US policy, resulting from the perceived ties between its supposed real-world efficacy and the *mediation* of such efficacy through the character of *24*'s Jack Bauer: -

'Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia suggested that no court in the US would convict Jack Bauer for torturing; Rush Limbaugh described 24 as "pro-America"; even staunch torture opponent, Senator and Presidential candidate McCain described himself as "a Jack Bauer kind of guy' (van Veeren, 2009, p. 371; see also de Goede, 2008, p. 162)

It is, however, also worthwhile to consider some of the limitations of this process of premediation. Although the logic of premediation aims to articulate as many potential futures as possible, in order to limit our exposure to future trauma, it is necessarily a process of inclusion and exclusion. An

adherence to a logic of premediation can result in a form of temporal myopia, encouraging action against the insecurities of the future whilst also discarding the victims of everyday, current societal failings (de Goede, 2008, pp. 172-173). As a consequence, any analysis of such mediation must acknowledge that the practice of premediation 'includes some things into the symbolic order whilst leaving others out. In this sense, premediation draws "lines of sight" that are necessarily incomplete and insufficient in themselves' (de Goede, 2008, p. 167). If left undetected then these may exacerbate current vulnerabilities and social divides, feeding an inflated, illusionary sense of insecurity in the present day.

3.3.3   Analysing the Production of the "Event" through Military-Themed Video Games

The preceding subsection began by exploring the extent to which the imaginative (re)construction of the "Event" – whether past or future, fictional or factual – can be remediated in apparently familiar terms, allowing a viewer, reader or player to make sense of the political present and the apparently perpetual state of insecurity that afflicts the contemporary Western security discourse (Heath-Kelly, 2018a, p. 1). In Chapter Seven, such a process is shown to be underpinned by the familiar logics of immediacy and hypermediacy. Military-themed video games seek hypermediacy as a part of their attempts to 'transport the gamer into immersive, gut-wrenching virtual battlefields. They persuade the gamer that, in a echo of WWII era journalism, "you are there" – on the beaches of Normandy, in the jungles of Vietnam, in modern military hotspots [like the deserts of Iraq]' (Cowlishaw, cited in Power, 2007, p. 272). Such a representation is produced through several familiar forms of mediation, including first and third person representation, text and the ludic apparatus.

The representation of the "Event" is, however, also tied to a broader logic of premediation, which suggests that popular culture functions as a part of a future-orientated process of mediation that aims to guard against all sources of potential future trauma (Grusin, 2004, p. 28). Video games are well positioned to create a similarly low-level sense of risk through their mediation of the future. This is evident in the player's engagement with the temporal logics of the military video game genre, which 'immerses the player into an environment of combat, competition, looming threats and recurring catastrophes, and the player's engagement with the screen events is primarily anticipatory and pre-emptive by nature (Where is the enemy? How can I catch them before they catch me? How can I prevent them from getting ahead of my step?)' (Ash, 2015, p. 293). In viewing risk management through the lens of premediation, it is possible to identify that there exists both an economy of anxiety – centred on one's desire to achieve a zero-risk mode of being in the world – and an economy of desire in which this demand acts as a key commercial premise (de Goede, 2008, pp. 161-162). It is this economy of desire that has created a continued market for these militaristic games, which allow the

player the pleasures of a near-active participation in the process of pre-emptive securitisation. Such games are not just backwards looking, however, but look to the potential for future catastrophes. As Chapter Seven will show, video games rely upon specific constructions of temporal futures in order to premediate and prescribe the behaviours that will prevent or mitigate the damage that world be caused by forthcoming, but as yet unforeseen, traumatic events. In doing so, they facilitate the continued construction and reconstruction of the national identity, including the redefinition of what it may "mean" to be a national subject in the aftermath of a shared traumatic event. They allow the player the possibility of a pleasurable, performative response to the underlying sense of anxiety that is unavailable in the viewership of television and film, offering the impression that the "next" 9-11 might end differently than it did this time (Payne, 2016, p. 29).

Conclusion

This chapter has offered an examination of a number of different literatures pertaining to the ways in which we understand the spaces around us, engaging with the construction of the urban core, the rural periphery, and a broader temporally-driven process of mediation. This chapter has also sought to link this material to the various chapters, exploring the ways in which the arguments within each section have emerged from an engagement with existing theoretical perspectives.

In actually undertaking an analysis of the video game medium, however, a level of methodological rigour is required in order to combat the vagaries that have often accompanied such research. The following chapter, therefore, outlines my own perspective, which aims to address the concerns of both ludological and narratological analyses. In so doing, I also acknowledge the inherently personal, subjective nature of such research, as is highlighted in Rose's salient observation that a successful engagement with visual images can 'depend on the pleasure, thrills, fascination, wonder, fear or revulsion of the person looking at the images and writing about them. Successful interpretation depends on a passionate engagement with what you see' (2016, p. xxiii). The analysis of video games should not lose sight of the fact that these games are a popular, engaging media form that is enjoyed by players in all parts of the world. Each of these different players will be influenced by a plethora of social, cultural and political factors, all of which will influence the ways in which they each engage with the games and the various iterations of meaning that are contained within them. Although this analysis is grounded within both IR theory and popular geopolitics, any proposed method should not obfuscate the varied experience of video game play that makes this medium so engaging for so many.

Chapter Four: Playing Games? Towards Method

Introduction

Chapter Two highlighted the increasing critical importance that is afforded to popular cultural imaginaries, emphasising their ability to influence the ways in which we are able to conceptualise the "reality" of international politics. These imaginaries were shown to be a pervasive aspect of our modern lives, meaning that a potentially persuasive form of political discourse can be seen to emanate from within a wide variety of both formal *and* informal sites: -

> '[R]ecently, images from Abu Ghraib, Islamic State's beheadings, cartoons of the prophet Muhammad, the protests in Ferguson, and the young Syrian refugee who drowned on a Turkish beach in September 2015 have all been seen as decisive in reframing political and social debates' (Robinson & Schulzke, 2016, p. 1)

In its focus upon the practices of spatial representation that are evident within video games, this analysis was shown to share a critical focus with both International Relations (IR) and popular geopolitics. Such approaches can be seen to have engaged with the ways in which deterministic and prescriptive approaches to political spaces may be formed by, and circulate within, the content of popular cultural artefacts. However, whilst these fields have offered fruitful explorations of the practices of spatial representation that are utilised within mediums such as film (Dodds, 2008a; 2015), comics (Dittmer, 2005; 2007a), and magazines (Sharp, 1993; 1996), it is notable that the spatialities of video games have remained comparatively under-explored. Such an absence feels somewhat myopic, particular when mindful of the clear onus that the medium places on the twin practices of spatial representation and exploration:-

> 'More than time (which in most games can be stopped), more than actions, events and goals (which are tediously similar from game to game) and unquestionably more than characterisation (which is usually non-existent) the games celebrate and explore spatial representation as their central motif and raison d'être (Aarseth, 2012, p. 161)

Video games have long relied on the generation of compelling and authentic-feeling locations, ranging from the mysterious building where *Donkey Kong* takes place (full of jumps and stairs and barrels and dangers for our little Mario) to the terrifying village of *Silent Hill*' (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2016, p. 205; see also von Borries, et al., 2007, p.11). Of a particular interest here, however, is the simulation of "real world" environments as a setting for current or near-future conflicts. As discussed in Chapter Three, this analysis will centre on the ways in which military-themed video games manipulate urban, rural and temporal forms of spatiality in order to both engage in, and foreclose upon, different forms

of political discourse and geospatial ordering practices. Whilst the analysis of such sites will necessitate the formation of a clear method, it is notable that there has been a long-standing rejection of the utility of prescriptive approaches in the analysis of other popular cultural artefacts: -

> 'Popular culture can be considered as a point at which the investigative techniques of the social sciences and the humanities may converge… There is, then, no single, approved methodology for the study of popular culture, but several… We should be able to choose that method of investigation which allows us to find out what we want to know. What works best is the best methodology' (Nye, 1971, p. 1036)

The analysis of video games has been correspondingly diverse in nature, drawing upon insights from within fields such as psychoanalysis (Kirkland, 2005; Tew, 2001) and architecture (Nitsche, 2008; Von Borries, et al., 2007). Whilst this range of different approaches can create the sense that the medium is being 'analysed willy-nilly, with tools that happen to be at hand' (Aarseth, 2003, p. 1), this methodological pluralism has proven to be desirable for the continuing health of this field of study: -

> 'It is incomprehensible that any single theory could do justice to a form as rich and vivid as the video game. The variety of these games calls for a diversity of analytical approaches: no one approach is sufficient, but many offer different yet interconnected perspectives. The more this analytical spectrum grows in width and depth, the richer our picture of the video game becomes' (Nitsche, 2008, p. 1; see also Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2016; Lammes, 2007, pp. 24-26; Mäyrä, 2008)

This methodological pluralism has also provided a means by which to address the complex nature of the video game form. As Jennings (2015) highlights, video games 'are wildly tangled amalgamations of features that appear (or not) in varying degree: code, software, hardware, rules, visuals, sounds, narrative, gameplay mechanics, player activity (both physical and in-game), and experience and interpretation'. A similar range of features are identified by Konzack, who organised the complexities of the medium into a series of interrelated layers: 'hardware, program code, functionality, meaning, referentiality, and socio-culture' (2002, p. 90). Rather than treating these numerous different features as a step-by-step guide to the analysis of video games - as Konzack does in his analysis of the *Soul Calibur* video game – these are instead 'best used as an open framework, where the analyst can choose any 2-4 of the seven layers to work with, and ignore the rest' (Aarseth, 2003, p. 2). Approached in such a way, these layers provide a multiplicity of different ways in which to "read" video games, depending on the ways in which one chooses to engage, or indeed not to engage, in the analysis of these different factors.

As the choice to focus on specific aspects of a video game will necessarily create 'only a limited and incomplete understanding of the text as a comprehensive whole' (Jennings, 2015), such an approach can be thought of as the decision to operate within a particular analytical site. Rose offers a useful means of categorisation here, as she suggests 'thinking about visual material in terms of four sites: the site of *production*, which is where an image is made; the site of the *image* itself, which is its visual content; the site(s) of its *circulation*, which is where it travels; and the site where the image encounters its spectators or users' (2016, p. 24). This chapter will outline a specifically object-focussed approach to video game analysis, which prioritises the study of a game's narrative and ludic content above the analysis of its production, marketing or audience reception. In doing so I echo the perspective outlined by Pötzsch and Šisler, in that I 'do not argue for a determinate impact of games on players or historicopolitical discourse, but describe the textual features through which certain responses and particular subject positions are systematically invited and certain understandings encouraged, before these are actively negotiated in situated practices of reception' (2016, p. 2; see also Dittmer, 2007, p. 401). Mindful of the emphasis that is placed upon the need for a personal, hands-on engagement with the video game text (see, for example, Aarseth, 2003, p. 3) – as this is an approach which respects the centrality of play to the medium – this analysis will utilise a process of qualitative close reading. This approach has a familiar broad form, similar in nature to that which is outlined by Robinson: -

> 'Best practice involves playing the respective game several times while taking notes and screenshots in order to capture relevant visual signifiers, record the story and narrative, and analyse the structure of the gameplay. The first playthrough is designed to capture the broad meaning and feel of the game, with subsequent playthroughs focused on specific levels/incidents in order to consider the alternative narratives, examine the visual and aural signifiers, and explore the scope of the gameplay options available to the player' (Robinson, 2015b, p.93; see also Šisler, 2008, p. 206)

Whilst such an approach is commonplace in the examination of video game texts, such analyses are often 'broadly divided into the ludic dimension, or the elements of gameplay, game design, and game mechanics, and the narrative dimensions, where story, character design and other thematic elements are key' (Harper, 2011, p. 4). This has been a complex and often polarising discussion, with the conflicting perspectives on the value of narrative theory perceived to have resulted in a 'war' (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2016, p. 22), or a 'blood feud' (Jenkins, 2004, p. 118) between the proponents of the so-called 'ludological' and 'narratological' perspectives. Whether the apparent controversy that has surrounded the role of narrative in video games has been real or imagined (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2016, p. 224; Frasca, 2003; Pearce, 2005), it should be acknowledged that

this methodological debate has reflected a broad desire to critically engage with the medium's increasing capabilities and influence (Aarseth, 2012, p. 129; Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2016, p. 224; Schut, 2003, p. 1). It has also served to highlight some of the potential issues that result from the importation of familiar concepts, such as interaction and narration, suggesting that there is a need to rehabilitate conventional notions of narrative analysis for use in the examination of video game space (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2016, p. 226). These arguments are discussed in the following section, forming a basis for the subsequent formulation of my own analytical approach: -

4.1   Telling Stories? Insights from the "Ludology-Narratology" Debate

The creation and consumption of narrative is widely regarded to be a ubiquitous part of human behaviour, alongside our use of language. Barthes, for example, argues that 'there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes, all human groups have their stories, and very often these stories are enjoyed by men of different and even opposite cultural backgrounds' (1977, p. 79). Similarly, Abbott describes our participation in narrative formation as a shared and intuitive practice, one in which we can be seen to engage 'many times a day, every day of our lives. And we start to do so almost from the moment we begin putting words together' (2015, p. 1). Whilst some analyses have sought to identify narrative structures within video games – borrowing terms such as "text", "narrative" and "story" from within literary theory (Kücklich, 2006, p. 92) – this has not been an uncontested practice. As a result, the analysis of video games can be divided into two broad methodological camps with different and distinctive emphases: -

> '[L]udologists foreground formal gaming qualities, characterising video games as abstract
> rule-based systems or interactive simulations; whilst narratologists emphasize more
> static storytelling aspects, regarding video games as texts to be read, often in relation to
> other media forms' (Kirkland, 2005, p. 167)

The narratologists express concern that 'the idea that games are first and foremost games – an argument bordering on the tautological – can be taken to mean that the formal properties of video games are important, more *intrinsic*, than the stories in the games (or the graphics, or the social activity that games promote' (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2016, p. 23). They, like other critiques of ludology (see, for example, Consalvo, 2003, p. 325; Jenkins, 2004, p. 118), express concern that the approach would dispense with the insights that are offered by narrative theory.

The proponents of ludological forms of analysis, however, argue that the importation of narrative theory is a form of theoretical imperialism (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2016, p. 223; Kücklich, 2006, p. 92), one which is perceived to have resulted in the imposition of imported and unquestioned terminologies and approaches at the expense of appropriate levels of theoretical innovation (Aarseth,

2012, p. 129; Frasca, 2003, p. 6; Juul, 2001). They suggest that the field of ludology was a necessary 'reaction to sloppy scholarship (in which key terms are not defined), one-sided focus and poor theorising' (Aarseth, 2012, p. 130) and refute the notion that it is necessarily hostile to the practice of storytelling: -

> '[G]ames and narratives do not live in different worlds, but in some ways can work together: a narrative may be used for telling the player what to do or as rewards for playing. Games may spawn narratives that a player can use to tell others of what went on in a game session. Games and narratives can on some points be said to have similar traits. This does mean that the strong position of claiming games and narratives to be *completely* unrelated… is untenable' (Juul, 2001; see also Aarseth, 2012, p. 130; Frasca, 2003, p. 7; Schut, 2003, p. 2)

Some of the issues surrounding the perceived utility of narrative theory are the result of the conflation of the concept of "narrative" with that of the "story". Whilst these two terms are often used somewhat interchangeably within popular parlance (Sicart, 2011, p. 3), they are separated within literary analysis. As Abbott highlights, a conventional narrative is to be regarded as 'the representation of events, consisting of *story* and *narrative discourse*; [the] story is an *event* or sequences of events (the *action*); and narrative discourse is those events as represented' (2015, p. 19; emphases in original). Each of these different aspects has a different relationship with time and the temporal order, necessitating a distinction between 'the *story time*, denoting the time of the events told, in their chronological order, and the *discourse time*, denoting the time of the telling of the events (in the order in which they are told)' (Juul, 2001; emphases in original). This distinction can allow for the distortion of temporality, with years of "story" occurring within just a short period of "narrative discourse". A scene in a book, for example, may jump backwards and forwards over hundreds of years, but unfold over the course of just a few paragraphs of written prose. As Abbott surmises, this means narrative discourse 'can expand and contract, leap backward and forward, but as we take in from the discourse we sort it out in our minds, reconstructing events so that we can see the story. The story can take a day, a minute, a lifetime, or eons. It can be true or false, historical or fictional. But insofar as it is a story, it has its own length of time and an order of events that proceeds chronologically from the earliest to the latest' (2015, p. 17). Conventional notions of narrative, therefore, assumed the existence of a continually forward-moving trajectory, as the representation of events forms 'a continuous line that plays with a reader's (or viewer's) expectations and orchestrates their emotional trip from beginning to end, controlling important points' (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2016, p. 211). Each stage of this process is assumed to be carefully scripted by the author, with a distinctive function as a part of a broader whole, necessitating 'tight control over the design and implementation of details'

(Bizzocchi, 2007, p. 3). This would, however, be a problematic approach to the creation of a video game, as this level of experiential control would necessarily limit the overall agency that is enjoyed by the player. Video games must, by their nature, be interactive and involve the input of the player, but the varied nature of this input undermines the potential construction of a single, "narrative" text and diminishes the level of control an "author" could expect to have over the progression of the narrative arc. Whilst conventional notions of narrative assume the existence of a crafted, perpetually forward-moving form of storytelling, periods of gameplay are instead often defined by periods of 'interruption, repetition and redundant wandering, as players, die, retrace their steps, and search for illusive doors, keys and objects' (Kirkland, 2005, p. 170; see also Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et el., 2016, p.21; Schut, 2003, p. 7). This means that video games cannot offer the same structured forms of narrative that we have come to expect in our consumption of other media forms: -

> 'No matter how many times a book is read, by no matter how many different people, the text is always the same; but in a video game, no two game sessions will be exactly the same' (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2016, p. 203)

This loss of authorial control can also be seen to impact on the ways in which we perceive temporal structures in games, as the agency that is afforded to the player collapses the distinction between the story and the narrative discourse: -

> 'It is clear that the events represented cannot be *past* or *prior*, since we as players can influence them… In this way, the game constructs the story time as *synchronous* with narrative time and reading/viewing time: the story time is *now*. Now, not just in the sense that the viewer witnesses events now, but in the sense that the events are *happening* now, and that what comes next is not yet determined' (Juul, 2001)

Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al, however, have suggested that a level of 'reconciliation is possible through a re-examination of our terminology… [T]he idea that narrative and interactivity oppose each other springs from a definition of narrative as a linear unfolding of events; whilst this is true in many instances, it is not very interesting' (2016, p. 226). Indeed, this contested focus on the role of the event is evident with Abbott's analysis, as he argues that 'without an event or action, you may have a 'description', an 'exposition, an 'argument', a 'lyric', some combination of these or something else altogether, but you won't have a narrative. 'My dog has fleas' is a description of my dog, but is not a narrative because nothing happens. 'My dog was bitten by a flea' is a narrative. It tells of an event' (2015, p. 13). Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al, however, offer a different conceptualisation of the non-linear nature of gameplay, predicated upon Tosca's engagement with the *Resident Evil: Code − Veronica* video game: -

> '[T]he player is simply using the information that she has at that moment, as she tries to fill in the gaps. The player will eventually fill the gaps in the right way and find the right sequence of actions to perform (alone or with help of a walkthrough); or, perhaps, she will quit the game in frustration. And here is a remarkable feature of narrative in video games: it is perpetually unfolding, constantly folding back on itself, full of false starts and restarts, as the player contributes to the story's creation with each action' (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2016, p. 220).

Like Bizzocchi (2007) and Jenkins (2004, pp. 120-121; 2007), they suggest that the more linear model of narrative prioritises the rules and conventions of classic linear storytelling at the expense of the consideration of the other potential forms of narrative meaning. This forms the basis on which to renegotiate the meaning of key terms, defining the "story" as the fictional worlds that the game creates and the "plot" or "narrative" as the 'scripted succession of events that the player has to perform in a specific order' (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2016, p. 203). This approach suggests that there are fixed moments of narrative that occur within video games, despite the fluid forms of the player's overall engagement. These 'narrative moments' may be contained in un-interactive, movie-like cutscenes, or enforced through tasks that must be completed in order to facilitate player progression. In his analysis of *Escape from Monkey Island*, for example, Schut reflects that 'the plot points are not alterable: this is not a game with multiple endings. In other words, within a chapter, the player might be able to wander around and solve puzzles in whatever order he or she wants, but all of the puzzles must be complete before the next chapter can start. In this way, the player unveils the plot rather than creates it' (2003, p. 7). This approach correlates with an alternative theoretical formulation of the distinction between the concepts of narrative and story: -

> 'The narrative text is a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee ('tells' the reader) a story in a particular 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: the fabula is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors' (Bal, 2009, p. 5)

Such an approach suggests that whilst a narrative can reasonably be said to have a storied form, the study of such stories cannot be reduced to the occurance of choreographed "events" and must acknowledge a raft of other representational practices. This has opened up a variety of sites for potential narrative analysis. Roland Barthes, for example, famously argued that narratives are 'able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all of these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella,

epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting… stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news items [and] conversation' (1977, p. 79). To such sites, Catherine Riessman adds 'memoir, bibliography, autobiography, diaries, archival documents, social science and health documents, other organisational documents, scientific theories, folk ballads, photographs, and other art work' (2008, p. 4). We can also identify narrative aspects to political discourse. Klinke for example, notes that German geopolitics is structured around narratives that 'have the characteristics of stories and therefore include protagonists and a tripartite plot, made up of beginning, middle and end' (2011, p. 720). This is also reflected in the growing tendency to speak of a 'narrative turn' in the study of international relations (Jackson, 2015). Here, the implication is that the theories of international relations can be understood as a form of narrative, rather than as the provision of the objective 'truths' about the world around us. In placing video games amongst these other forms of representational practice, it becomes necessary to examine the ways in which the label of 'narrative medium' is made meaningful. Indeed, as Pearce has noted, 'the more interesting question is not *Are they/are they not narrative?* but *In what ways are they narrative?'* (2005). Like Egenfeldt-Nielson et al, I argue that 'many video games are stories as well as games. Some games contained more narrative than others, but even the most abstract usually contain the sketched elements of a fictional world' (2016, p. 234). Schut, for example, reflects on the commonalities that are shared between the *Escape from Monkey Island* video game and more conventional forms of narrative media: -

> '[Escape from Monkey Island] has characters and a clash between a protagonist (with his allies) and his antagonists, a conflict that escalates to a climax and then gets resolved. It has a timeline of events or plot points that the game presents as belonging to chapters. *Escape from Monkey Island* also relies heavily on a set of stock characters from popular narratives: the mysterious voodoo prophetess, the evil old heartless capitalist Scrooge-type, the airheaded receptionist, etc.' (Schut, 2003, p. 6)

It is, however, notable that analyses of video games which do not demonstrate these same elements as clearly, have been subject to criticism for their subjective nature and their apparent imposition of a favoured interpretation onto a subject artefact. Poole, for example, argued that we can read the classic video game *Pac-Man* as a satirical representation of 'a different kind of consumption… For Pac-Man, consumption cannot end; no conceivable quantity of dots is enough. He will continue to search them out and eat them until he dies' (2004, pp. 312-313). Similarly Murray argued that *Tetris* ought to be regarded as 'a perfect enactment of the overtasked lives of Americans in the 1990s – of the constant bombardment of tasks that demand our attention and that we must somehow fit into our overcrowded schedules and clear off our desks in order to make room for the next onslaught' (1999,

p. 144). For ludologists, such as Eskelinen, this approach to the act of "reading" a video game is an act of interpretative violence, rather than a meaningful act of critical analysis: -

> '[I]t would be equally far besides the point if someone interpreted chess as a perfect American game because there's a constant struggle between hierarchically organised white and black communities, genders are not equal, and there's no health care for the stricken pieces' (Eskelinen, 2001)

It is, however, possible to argue that *both* of these perspectives are act of interpretative violence, as whilst Murray and Poole aim to generate meaning at all costs, Eskelinen is seen to be equally passionate about its subversion (Bogost, 2008b, p. 100). By way of mitigation, Voorhees (2009) instead suggests that there is a need to account for the role of both visual and narrative forms of representation, *as well as* the role that is played by a game's underlying procedural structures. As such, I aim to provide a middle-ground approach that accounts for **both** the storied aspects that are evident in the content of video games **and** the role of their unique structural forms. The following section outlines the form that such an engagement will take within this analysis: -

4.2 Outlining an 'Object-Focussed' Approach to the Analysis of Video Games

In constructing my own qualitative framework for the analysis of video games texts, I acknowledge that 'games can be several different things, depending on how one approaches them. Looking for

	General Focus	Specific Research Considerations
Narrative Discourse	The use of space in the creation of storied meaning.	• How does the game seek to script the world that it presents? What "events" occur in particular spaces? • How is the narrative presented within the game's content? What practices of 'environmental storytelling' are present in the game? • The use of metaphor/symbolism: are these environments provided alternative textualities?
Characters	The role of player and non-player characters.	• Which characters/perspective does the player adopt? • How do the different characters interact with each other? How do the characters interact with their adversaries? • How do the different characters interact with the landscape? • Which characters are included in, and excluded from, the representation of specific spaces and landscapes?
Space	The representation of space.	• Setting: Real world or fictional backdrop? • Scale: local, national or international space? • Type: What places are represented in the game? Town and cities, or villages and countryside? • Architecture: Official buildings/installations, or local dwellingscapes? • Functionality: Do such spaces appear habitable?

Figure 8: Summary of Thematic Aspects to the Video Game Medium

narrative, one can find (or construct) them, and it is equally possible to search and find the essence of game in their interactive character – in their gameplay' (Mäyrä, 2008, p. 10). As such, this analysis deliberately eschews the binarizing approach that is offered by a focus on exclusively either ludological or narratological concerns, accounting for **both** the practices associated with 'environmental storytelling' (Carson, 2000a; 2000b; Jenkins, 2004, pp. 120-121; 2007; Zakowski, 2016) and the function of video games as 'procedural' texts (Bogost, 2007). The first of these foci necessitates an engagement with the aspects within video games which can be seen to serve a storied function, offering a form of *thematic analysis* which is 'sensitive to the symbols and messages conveyed by the game's operation as a cultural medium' (Mäyrä, 2008, p. 166). These aspects, which are summarised in Figure 8, include the role of the narrative discourse, the role of the characters, and the representation of particular forms of spatiality: -

Whilst the above factors largely address narratological concerns, a *structural analysis* instead attends to the medium-specific structures and rules systems that act to control the ways in which the player is able to interact with these virtual worlds. These factors, which are summarised in Figure 9 address ludic aspects such as 'positions, resources, space and time, goals (sub-goals), obstacles, knowledge, rewards or penalties' (Konzack, 2002, p. 93): -

	General Focus	Specific Research Considerations
Gameplay	The role of the rules system	• How is the player's engagement constrained, or enabled, by the rules systems? • What is the player being asked to achieve in order to bring the game to a conclusion? • Are certain actions subjected to punishment/penalty?
Scripting	The level of player agency	• Does the player have control over their engagement with the virtual world? • What are the interactions that are available to the player within a given space? • Do the actions of the player change the surrounding gameworld? Do different actions have different effects? • What role do cutscenes and FMVs play in the simulation of space?
Visual Mechanics	The existence of non-narrative visual aspects	• What details are shown on the screen? • What additional visual aspects control the player's engagement?
Structure	Use of Genre Conventions	• Do the games adhere to, or subvert the 'shooter' genre conventions?

Figure 9: Summary of Structural Aspects to the Video Game Medium

My examination of the above thematic and structural variables is predicated upon my own engagement with a range of different video game texts. As Aarseth highlights, this form of "hands-on" analysis leaves the researcher well-positioned to understand the intricacies of the medium: -

'If we have not experienced the game personally, we are liable to commit severe misunderstandings, even if we study the mechanics and try our best to guess at their workings. And unlike studies of films and literature, merely observing the action will not put us in the role of the audience. When others play, what takes place on the screen is only partly representative of what the player experiences' (Aarseth, 2003, p. 3)

All observations that were made during the act of gameplay were recorded using *Dragon Dictate* software. Whilst this posed some initial challenges, mostly pertaining to the maintenance of proper diction during the act of gameplay, this process proved to be more efficient than either the creation of manually-recorded notes (which disrupted the natural immediacy of gameplay) or a more conventional audio-recording (a process requiring long transcription time). This audio transcription allowed for the identification of recurrent themes, both within individual game texts and between different titles. This meant that, where necessary, individual levels could then be targeted for more detailed analysis. Whilst subsequent sections of this chapter will offer a more detailed exploration of these different theoretical emphases, drawing upon pertinent methodological literatures, it is important to first acknowledge some of the practical aspects that are associated with such an engagement. Such factors include the criteria that were used in order to select particular video games for analysis, the stated parameters of the video game text, and the potential issues arising from the subjective nature of research into popular cultural artefacts. The following subsection addresses how these variables were managed in the undertaking of this analysis, whilst acknowledging that other examinations of video games may choose to take a different approach: -

4.3   Playing Games? Addressing Practical Concerns

One initial practical issue surrounding the implementation of a potential qualitative methodology is the process by which one identifies the appropriate targets for such an analysis. As Nitsche notes, whilst 'the prophets of cyberspace were restricted to relatively few digital artefacts, often available to the selected few with access to high-tech research labs, the field of game studies today faces an overabundance of games to analyze' (2008, p. 1). It is, as a result, important that the selection of specific video game texts reflects the broader aims and objectives of the analytical engagement. Aarseth, for example, argues for the incorporation of a broad-ranging sample of video games, suggesting that 'too often generalizations are made on the basis of a few examples that are neither representative nor popular' (2003, p. 8). Similarly, Schwartz argues that a 'variety in terms of genre, year of publication, gaming hardware, and country of origin, allows for a broader analysis of gaming… than an examination of only one or two specific games' (2006, p. 314). For my own analysis however, which aims to engage with the ways in which video games produce a specific form of geopolitics, a

more detailed analysis of a smaller range of texts is a more appropriate research strategy. The games that are addressed in each chapter are summarized in Figure 10: -

Chapter Five: Monuments & the Mundane	Chapter Six: Reading Rural Space	Chapter Seven: Temporality and the 'Event'
Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare (Infinity Ward, 2007)	Battlefield: Hardline (Visceral Games, 2015)	Spec Ops: the Line (Yager Games, 2012)
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 (Infinity Ward, 2009)	Call of Duty: Ghosts (Infinity Ward, 2013)	Splinter Cell: Blacklist (Ubisoft Toronto, 2013a)
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 (Infinity Ward, 2011)	Ghost Recon: Wildlands (Ubisoft Paris, 2017)	Homefront: the Revolution (Dambuster Studios, 2016)
Splinter Cell: Conviction (Ubisoft Montreal, 2010)	Homefront (Kaos Studios, 2011)	Tom Clancy's the Division (Ubisoft, 2016a)

Figure 10: Video Games Included in Subsequent Chapters

Whilst the specific rationale for the inclusion of each of the above titles is discussed within the individual chapters, it is important to acknowledge the broader boundaries that were used in order to guide this selection process. In the first instance, the focus of the analysis was restricted to the study of military video games. More specifically, I chose to engage with *proleptic* video games, which commonly offer 'a focus on individual or small groups of Special Forces soldiers conducting clandestine missions, rather than platoons taking part in a broader, mass-military engagement' (Smicker, 2010, p. 113). This is a genre of video games which has allowed the player to engage in a variety of present and near-future forms of conflict, set in a variety of time periods and – in some cases – even on other planets. Here, however, the aim is to utilise the chosen selection of video game spaces in order to force a level of critical reflection on the constructed nature of the various theoretical tools that we use to conceptualise the nature of our post-9/11 "real world" politics. As such, this analysis is thematically restricted to games that (a) offer either a simulation of a real-world location, or a convincing facsimile, (b) model current or near future conflicts, and (c) model human characters and adversaries, rather than aliens or robots. I have also chosen to limit my focus to video games that have been released for the Xbox 360 (Microsoft, 2005) or Xbox One (Microsoft, 2013) home console systems on the UK market. Whilst any particular in-depth discussion of the technical aspects of such hardware is placed beyond the scope of this analysis, such a restriction does serve a number of practical purposes. Firstly, as Nitsche highlights, 'the restriction to available consumer products ties the study to a de facto analysis of existing worlds and serves as a reality check that prohibits any overly

enthusiastic prophecies. It avoids the danger of promising unrealistic future wonders' (2008, p. 5). Secondly, this ensures that the chosen texts are freely accessible to the reader, allowing for the potential duplication or development of this research. Thirdly, this restriction serves to ensure a uniformity of encounter that would not be possible across multiple forms of hardware. Indeed, as Konzack notes, 'the computer in question may be very different depending on whether it is a mobile cell phone, home game console, or personal computer wired to the Internet or other network facilities' (2002, p. 91). Different video game consoles, PC systems and handheld devices often use different control schematics (including touchscreen input) which would complicate any direct comparison of the process of simulation. Different video games may also be released into different markets, reflecting specific cultural norms and sensibilities – such alterations may be as minor as changes in the characters' names or nationalities, or may be as broad as the removal of entire plot arcs or factions. Finally, I must acknowledge that such a focus allows for me to benefit from my ludic competencies as a long-time Xbox console gamer. Video game play demands a level of individual competency with the medium's mechanics, in order to achieve progression, in a manner that is not required in the analysis of film, television or literature (Robinson, 2015b, p. 93). The player-researcher must meet the conditions that are required for advancement through the gamespace, overcoming enemies and/or solving puzzles, or else will not be able to view the artefact in its entirety. This is, as Aarseth surmises, 'analysis practiced as performance, with direct feedback from the system' (2003, p. 5). My familiarity and competency with such systems will allow for an easier progression through these games than that which would be faced by a less experienced researcher.

As well as outlining the process by video games were selected to serve as the foci for this analysis, it is also important that the parameters of my engagement with these texts is clearly defined. Many of the "shooter" video games that are the target of this analysis have a both a central campaign and a multiplayer mode. In the former, the player engages with the game's core story and must complete a series of objectives in order to progress. Whilst the structure of the text may afford the player a number of potential ways of achieving these goals, progress and movement are very much guided, re-structured and moulded by the game (Carr, et al., 2004, p. 27). In the multiplayer mode, however, the player battles with and against other users.

Here, I have chosen to focus specifically on the campaign mode, and to exclude the multiplayer portions of these games from consideration. This has permitted a focus on the ways in which these games make specific geopolitical truth claims through their content, whilst removing the need to 'contend with the influence of multiple transformational players [and] social interactions' (Jennings, 2015). In engaging with this game mode, it must be acknowledged that the player will commonly be allowed to vary the level of difficulty that is experienced during the act of gameplay.

This has the potential to influence the ways in which the underlying rules system constructs the player's engagement with the text through, for example, the addition of extra enemies or a reduction in the amount of damage that the player-avatar can sustain before "dying" (see Figure 11). For the purposes of this analysis, I elected to focus the analysis on the 'second-hardest level of difficulty, because in the hardest level often some a-typical game play elements are included, and because in the less difficult levels often a lot of features are not elaborated with as much detail' (Malliet, 2007). This engagement, therefore, is likely to be the most representative of a game's content.

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Figure 11: A Difficulty Menu (Ghost Recon: Wildlands, 2017)

It is, however, unclear to what extent the player must engage with a video game text in order to be able to claim to have accessed it in its entirety. This form of qualitative analytical play can prompt a wide variety of different levels of user engagement, ranging from superficial play, through light play and partial completion, through to total completion, repeated play and expert play (Aarseth, 2003, p. 7). It is also questionable whether it is sufficient to complete the main campaign mode, as some aspects of the text may be hidden, may require repeated or alternative forms of play, or may simply be sold separately:

> 'Does epilogue DLC or extra episodes count towards the original game or do you subconsciously think of them as different games? For the actual end, if you put in the work, but couldn't quite get to the very last spot is it enough to watch someone else play the game? If there are multiple endings, is one good enough or do you have to play it

through multiple times? And now with achievements and trophies, is complete all the points or the platinum trophy?' (Swain, quoted in Jennings, 2015; see also Harper, 2011, p.6)

For my own analysis, each of the games was initially played through to "total completion". By this, I mean that each campaign mode was played through to its conclusion, *without* the attempt to either collect all the "achievements" associated with each title or to access any hidden levels and/or collectibles other than those that were encountered organically during gameplay. This allowed me to approximate the experience of an "average" gamer, without distorting the encounter through the use of walkthrough guides or cheat codes. Such an approach does, however, require a continued awareness that 'the object of the analysis is partly a construction of the motivations and preferences a researcher carries into the play experience' (Malliet, 2007). This does not simply mean that the act of video game research is subjective, which is true of all analyses of popular culture, but rather that the specific ways in which the player-researcher interacts with the video game will unavoidably influence the nature of the audio-visual output that appears on the screen: -

'There may or may not be failures, restarts, or modifications. The critic's performative skills may improve or worsen, influencing play experience, the unfolding of a narrative, and access to further sections of the game. The critic may make choices that open up certain paths through the game and close off others' (Jennings, 2015).

Most video games do, however, now offer the ability to replay chosen sections of content – such an option that provides the player-researcher with the means to consider an interesting section of gameplay from a different perspective. As a result, my own analysis utilises a combination of both targeted repeat play and extra-textual resources (such as *YouTube* videos) in order to both review any particularly notable sections, as well as to account for the possibility of alternative playstyles and multiple, branching narratives (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2016, p. 212). Such an encounter also served to highlight the wide variety of ways in which a player's engagement with a particular gamespace may be broader than the content that is contained on the game disk itself, encompassing a wide variety of external referents. These might include video game trailers (aired both on television and online), advertising hoardings, interviews, reviews, walkthrough guides, gameplay videos, companion or source fictions, fan art, official and unofficial forms of memorabilia, and plethora of both official and fan-made websites (Jennings, 2015; Kirkland, 2005, p. 168). In the example of *Tom Clancy's The Division* (Ubisoft, 2016), which is discussed in Chapter Seven, there are not only a raft of official game trailers – which can be accessed via the *YouTube* streaming site – but also a companion novel called 'New York Collapse' (Irvine, 2016; Ubisoft, 2016b) and a companion website entitled 'Collapse: the

End of Society Simulator' (Ubisoft, 2016a). The latter website invites the player to participate in the simulation of a virus outbreak, similar to that which is encountered in *The* Division, placing themselves in the position of 'patient zero' and modelling the subsequent decline of the surrounding 'real world' (see Figure 12). This simulation is an effective tool by which the game can establish the apparent authenticity of its core premise (a biological attack), whilst also serving to premediate the total failure of the established systems of globalisation and international order.

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Figure 12: Result from the Collapse simulation (Ubisoft, 2016e)

Some analyses have opted to exclude such materials. Šisler, for example, conducts an analysis of the portrayal of religion in video games which opts to 'consciously exclud[e] interpretations and meaning depending on the materials outside the work under scrutiny' (2016, p. 4). Whilst the external texts are not a primary source for my own analysis, I nonetheless acknowledge the role that these may play in establishing the broader narrative discourses of video game worlds. As a result, I utilise some of the surrounding trailers to provide broader context for my observations on the 'thematic' and 'structural' content of the video games that have been subjected to my analysis. The following section of this chapter examines how these variables emerge from an engagement with the associated methodological literatures, ahead of their implementation in Chapter Five: -

4.4   Video Games as Environmental Storytelling

As emphasised earlier in this chapter, analyses of video games can be seen to disagree on the role of narrative aspects. This is due, at least in part, to a perceived conflict between interaction and

narration, which disrupts the ability of video gaming to offer a clear and controlled narrative arc. Zakowski, however, suggests that this focus on a linear narrative arc is representative of 'the relative theoretical neglect of the experiential capacity of space in favour of time' (2016, p. 1). Whilst time is conceptualised as a fundamental category of narrative, with the story understood as the linear progression of a sequence of events, the surrounding space is treated as though it is merely the "setting" or "background" in which such events take place. This section argues that space is more important to the process of narrative formation than this narrow conceptualisation suggests, echoing the suggestion that the analysis of video games risks becoming 'preoccupied with the rules and conventions of classical linear storytelling at the expense of considerations of other kinds of narrative' (Jenkins, 2004, p. 121). In accounting for the role of narrative within video games, there is a need to re-focus the terminologies that form the basis of such an enquiry, moving beyond the blind importation of the approaches and concepts that are used in the analysis of film, television and literature (Aarseth, 2003; 2012; Frasca, 2003). Here, this is achieved through reference to the concept of 'environmental storytelling', a reformulated conceptualisation of narrative meaning which has its roots in the design of immersive theme-park attractions (Carson, 2000a; 2000b; Jenkins, 2004, pp. 120-121; 2007; Zakowski, 2016). Such a concept does not rely on a temporally-driven model of narrative, but implies the existence of a process which can 'tell a story through the experience of travelling through a real, or imagined, physical space' (Carson, 2000a). The "story" is not told in any conventional manner, but rather is infused into the surrounding space through the creation of a series of environmental "rules" that are used to control the user's experience. This approach is applied to video games by Jenkins (2004; 2007), in order to better understand the ways in which video game spaces can be used in the service of narrative goals. He suggests that the narrative potential of video games is only diminished through a comparison to film or television, instead likening the medium to 'a much older tradition of spatial stories, which have often taken the form of hero's odysseys, quest myths and travel narratives' (2004, p. 122). He suggests the process of environmental storytelling, occurring within video games, creates the preconditions of an immersive narrative experience in at least one of four specific ways. These are described as the creation of evocative space, enacted narrative, embedded narrative, and emergent narrative. The consequences of these different forms of narrative creation require closer consideration: -

Evocative Spaces

The creation of an "evocative" space relies upon the pre-established narrative competencies of the consumer, drawing upon the knowledge a reader, rider, viewer or player brings into a particular space when they arrive within it. One way in which this may be achieved is through the utilisation of a familiar story or narrative universe as a primary point of reference. Reflecting on the video game

American McGee's Alice (2000), for example, Jenkins suggests that its creator could 'safely assume that players start the game with a pretty well-developed mental map of the space, characters and situations associated with Carroll's fictional universe, and that they will read his distorted and often monstrous images against the background of mental images formed from previous encounters with storybook illustrations and Disney movies' (2007, p. 57). The value of this process is contested by Juul, however, who compares the narrative of the *Star Wars* films to that of the *Star Wars* themed racing games: -

> 'Star Wars the game cannot be said to contain a narrative text that can be recognised from Star Wars the movie: most characters from the movie are missing, and the few events that are included in the game have become simulations where the player can either win or fail' (Juul, 2001)

In outlining the concept of an evocative space, however, Jenkins (2004) suggests that the creation of a video game story (even one which is directly adapted from a book, film or television program) need not necessarily be a direct retelling. Instead, he argues that the aim of an evocative space is not to reproduce a particular story, place or piece of literary work, but rather to evoke its essence in a way that makes it relatable to the audience. Such an approach is supported by Egenfeldt-Nielson et al who argue, in response to Juul's criticism, that the players of the *Star Wars* racing games will require only the barest thematic similarities in order to situate their play as part of the *Star Wars* universe (2016, pp. 201-202). A similar process was also evident in some of the games that were studied as a part of this analysis - the *Spec Ops: the Line* (2K Games, 2012) video game, which is discussed in Chapter Seven, can be seen to draw on the narrative structures associated with the book *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad, 1902) and the film *Apocalypse Now* (1979).

In addition, it must be noted that the use of a familiar 'story' is not, however, the only form of narrative competency that can be drawn upon in the manufacture of these worlds. They may also play on our genre competencies, utilising our familiarity with the conventions of different fictions in order to situate the player within their worlds. This form of evocative space is, for example, discussed in Chapter Six, in order to reflect on the narrative role that is played by the depiction of the 'Cabin in the Woods' within *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* (Ubisoft, 2017). Egenfeldt-Nielson et al (2016) refer to this as the activation of the 'literary repertoire', describing the mobilisation of the conventions of the horror genre within the *Resident Evil – Code: Veronica* video game: -

> '[T]he repertoire is activated by 'clues' in the game (everything from the creepy sounds when you go up the stairs to the dark rain on the fresh tombs) and outside the game

(such as the game cover, which shows a zombie reflection in the eyes of the protagonist) which indicate that we are immersed in a survival horror game' (2016, p. 217)

Players may also draw on more specific "game-competencies", drawing meaning from the elements (or combinations of elements) that are specific to a particular video game genre type. Kirkland, for example, notes in his analysis of the *Silent Hill* franchise, that the 'survival horror might be understood as: an action-adventure game employing a third person perspective, and drawing on horror film iconography, in which a typically average character navigates a maze-like landscape, solving puzzles and fighting off monsters with limited ammunition, energy and means of replenishing it' (2005, p. 172). These different aspects can be used to immerse the player in the game world, conveying its overarching logics and structuring expectations of coming events. These same aspects can also be used in order to subvert the expectations of the players, as is evident in the ways in which *Spec Ops: the Line* (2K Games, 2012) manipulates the user's familiarity with the conventions of military-shooter video games (see Chapter Seven). Indeed, as Payne suggests, 'the experiential realism of Spec Ops derives not from the game's fidelity to some worldly reality; its experiential realism emerges from the game's troubling of the aesthetic relationship that we typically enjoy in first- and third-person shooters. The game critiques the attempt by any war game—itself included—to pleasurably immerse users in war's horrors' (2014, p. 268). The title challenges the familiarity of the "shooter" conventions, such as the "evil Other", whilst also repeatedly breaking the fourth wall in order to talk directly to the player about the nature of the content that they are consuming (Figure 13).

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Figure 13: *'You are still a good person'* - Breaking the Fourth Wall (Spec Ops: the Line, 2012)

Understood in such a way, the spaces that are depicted within video games can be considered to exist as a part of a broader cultural intertextuality. Jenkins, for example, suggested that 'one can imagine games taking their place within a larger narrative system, with story information communicated through books, films, television, comics, and other media… [with]… the richest understanding of the story world coming to those who follow the narrative across multiple channels' (2004, p. 124). This referentiality, as Konzack highlights, requires that we pay attention to the existence of the 'signs, ornaments or game structures that have originally been used in other media or other games, and which have been put to use in the game we are about to analyse' (2002, p. 96). These different aspects of a gameworld are a form of 'narrative' in the sense that they are used to facilitate a process of meaning-making. As Nitsche surmises, 'the argument here is that game spaces evoke narrative because the player is making sense of them in order to engage with them. Through a comprehension of signs and interaction with them, the player generates new meaning' (2008, p. 3). Such a process should be used to reflect upon the ways in which other aspects of our relationship with space are 'evocative' and intertextual in nature. This can include the formation of a nationalistic attachment to certain spaces (Chapter Five), or the sensation of being out in 'the wilderness' (Chapter Six). In his reflection on national identity, for example, Edensor highlights the existence of 'dense spatial, material, performative, embodied and representative expressions and experiences of national identity which are inextricably linked with each other, which constitute a shared compendia of resources, akin to a vast matrix into which individuals can tap to actualise a sense of national belonging' (2002, p. vii). Whether we are in-game or in the real-world, evocative processes of meaning-making draw on accumulated knowledges to generate a sense of our relationship to that space – a relationship that represents a natural-feeling, commonsensical mode of existence.

Enacted Narrative

As noted earlier within this chapter, it is often suggested that the interaction of the player with the gameworld is a threat to the ability of the game to construct a meaningful narrative – either the actions of the player disrupt the development of the story, or the narrative devices overly constrict the sense of freedom enjoyed by the player. Such an argument relies on the notion that this underlying story 'is a controlled experience [and that] the author consciously crafts it, choosing certain events precisely, in a certain order, to create a story with maximum impact' (Costikyan quoted in Jenkins, 2004, p.124; see also Bizzocchi, 2007, p.3; Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2016, p.211). Within video games, however, some control over the events is ceded to the player and cannot be pre-scripted. Whilst their actions may result in the formation of individual narrative moments, insofar as the player is allowed (or forced) to perform or witness narrative events, these events are arguably not clearly integrated into the broader narrative arc. This has often meant, as Jenkins notes, that video games are 'dismissed

as episodic – that is, each episode (or set piece) can become compelling on its own terms without contributing to the plot development and, often, can be reordered without significantly impacting our experience as whole' (2007, p. 58). Such an accusation is not without some merit. It is, for example, common for popular discussion of video games to centre on compelling moments of gameplay – such as the so-called "boss fights" – without these necessarily being placed within any form of broader narrative context. Jenkins, however, suggests that 'the tension between performance (or game play) and exposition (or story) is far from unique to games. The pleasure of popular culture often relies on spectacular performance numbers and self-contained set-pieces' (2004, p. 124). He likens video game play to the viewing of musicals or martial arts films, mediums which contain 'memorable moments' (songs and fights respectively) but which have an 'accordion-like' narrative framework through which these moments are rendered meaningful: -

> 'Certain plot points are fixed, whereas other moments can be expanded or contracted in response to audience feedback without serious consequences to the overall plot. The introduction needs to establish the character's goals or explain the basic conflict; the conclusion needs to show the successful completion of those goals or the final defeat of the antagonist' (Jenkins, 2004, p. 125)

This flexible structure is particularly evident in open-world games, in which the player is permitted a less structured interaction with the world. Writing about the *Mass Effect* video games series, for example, Zakowski argues that the series deliberately manufactures a 'fuzzy temporality' and challenges the player to configure the narrative form for themselves (2014, p. 76). A similar focus is evident in both *Tom Clancy's The Division* (Ubisoft, 2016) and *Homefront: the Revolution* (Deep Silver, 2016). In the former of these titles, for example, the player must piece together the narrative surrounding a terrorist attack on Manhattan. Whilst some "fixed" story moments remain, the player is left to address the remaining side-missions in almost any order (or, in some cases, not at all). The structure of the core narrative, as a result, is provided by the player's progression through a series of broadly-defined objectives, which are usually realised by the movement of the character through the surrounding space.

This is where the examination of the surrounding environment can be particularly relevant, as 'organising the plot becomes a matter of designing the geography of imaginary worlds so that obstacles thwart and affordances facilitate the protagonist's forward movement towards resolution' (Jenkins, 2007, p. 58). Whilst a linear narrative may be present, Jenkins argues that video games also 'respond to alternative aesthetic principles, privileging spatial exploration over plot development' (2007, p. 58). Such an idea can usefully be extended even further, to instead suggest that spatial

exploration – at least in some cases – *is* plot development. As the player explores the environment, they will encounter 'localised incidents' or 'micronarratives' that – whilst not always contributory to the main "plot" – permit the player to better understand their relationship with the surrounding space. Jenkins (2004, p. 125) notes a variety of different forms that such micronarratives may take, discussing the use of stock characters, sensations (e.g. fear and speed) and emotions (e.g. anger and sadness). This analysis draws on some of these micro-narrative encounters, such as the discussions overheard to take place between characters in *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* (see Chapter Six). I also seek to extend a similar understanding to the role that is played by significant and symbolic buildings, such as the representation of recognisable urban landmarks (see Chapter Five).

Embedded Narrative

Whilst literary theory evokes the notion of the linear story, most works are also believed to contain a non-linear form of narrative discourse that can jump backwards and forwards during the process of exposition. One of the most overt examples of this narrative form can be found in detective fiction, which tells the story of both the investigation and the events that led up to the commission of the crime (Jenkins, 2007, p. 58). Despite the suggestion that video games are unable to engage in this process of narration (see, for example, Juul, 2001), Jenkins argues that the medium is 'no more locked into an eternal present than films are always linear. Many games contain moments of revelation or artefacts that shed light on past actions' (2004, p. 127). One particular clear example of this is evident in the *Call of Duty: Ghosts* (2013) video game, as a part of the level *Ghost Stories*. Not only is this level introduced through a more conventional narrative, in the form of a campfire story shared between a father and his sons, but we then experience a missile attack before we then witness its cause. Jenkins describes this as a process of narrative comprehension, 'an active process by which viewers assemble and make hypotheses about likely narrative developments on the basis of information drawn from textual cues and clues' (2004, p. 126). In engaging with the simulation of a space, the viewer or player is invited to continuously test their knowledge of the world around them, formulating and reformulating their ideas of what both places and peoples are like, as well as what has happened and what will happen next. In video games, this can occur in a number of sites. These include the game's initial exposition and 'training' levels, which offer 'a space for rehearsal so that we can make sure we understand our character's potential moves before we come up against the challenges of navigating narrational space' (Jenkins, 2004, p. 126). The player may also see their actions impact on the environment itself, which may symbolise a broader struggle (Jenkins, 2004, p. 124; see, for example, the *Fable* franchise).

Conceptualised in such a way, we can view a story (and the resultant story world) as a body of information, rather than a temporal structure (Jenkins, 2004, p. 126). In video games this process

must, however, operate in a different manner to that in books or films. Whilst an author or a filmmaker can control the order in which we receive such information, a game designer controls the narration by distributing narrative material across and even outside[13] game space. Henry Jenkins suggests that, 'with an open-ended and explanatory narrative structure like a game, essential narrative information must be presented redundantly across a range of spaces and artefacts, because no one can assume the player will necessarily locate or recognise the significance of any given element' (2004, p. 126)[14]. These embedded narrative aspects can take a variety of forms. This is noted by Kirkland in his analysis of *Silent Hill*, in which he identifies a variety of 'pictures and photographs, fragments of newspapers, inscriptions on monuments, diary entries, graffiti, writing on collectible objects, radio transmissions, audio-tape recordings [and] background conversations, [that] all contribute to this second-level storytelling process' (2005, p. 169). In *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* (2017), some of these collectibles take

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Figure 14: Locating "Intel" in Ghost Recon: Wildlands (2017)

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[13] Jenkins (2004, p. 127) notes the example of the game *Majestic* (2000), in which the embedded narrative is spread across a variety of documents, webcasts, faxes, email and phone calls. Whilst this title is outside the scope of this analysis, this does highlight some interesting question about the boundaries of any particular text.

[14] Although, as Jenkins (2004, p. 126) highlights, this is not unique to games. Serialised fiction, such as TV soaps, must also repeat information for the benefit of those who may have missed episodes.

the form of civilians and militia members that can be found and interrogated (see Figure 14). Whilst this interrogation process is not represented onscreen, the player can still conceptualise the passage of time and the potential actions that may have occurred during that moment.

Conceptualised in such a way, the gameworld functions as a form of 'memory palace' (Jenkins, 2007, p. 58) with narrative information embedded in the surrounding space. Whilst some of this information is created by the players, made important as they explore the gameworld and formulate their impressions of the space based upon this encounter, other forms of information are pre-structured and left to await the player following the completion of specific tasks.

Emergent Narrative

A final narrative form, that of the 'emergent' narrative, refers to the creation of narrative that is not in any way pre-structured or pre-planned, but one which is instead created through the act of gameplay (Jenkins, 2004, p. 128; Kirkland, 2005, p. 169). One example of this can be seen in *The Sims*, in which the player guides an on-screen person, or 'Sim', through a variety of everyday activities and interactions. The game leaves it open to the player to decide how to treat their Sims and, ultimately, what success and failure mean to the player - whilst one player may derive satisfaction from their Sim's successful life, another player may choose to deprive their Sim of food and water. In doing so, the game offers 'a kind of authoring environment within which players can define their own goals and write their own stories' (Jenkins, 2004, p. 128). Here, the interaction between the gameplay and the underlying rules systems is afforded narrative value only insofar as the player can project their own 'meaning' onto a more directionless form of play that is facilitated and constrained by the rules and characteristics of the surrounding gameworld.

Whilst a focus on this 'free play' is of less value to the analysis of military simulations, which will commonly include inbuilt goals and objectives in their contest, Jenkins does offer a useful reflection on the ways in which the formation of meaning through player interaction is tied to a series of spatial and contextual rules. Although generating the illusion of narrative freedom, *The Sims* offers a mechanically limited range of behaviours and controls the ways in which specific objects and spaces are used: 'characters sleep in beds. Bookcases make you smarter. Bottles are for spinning and thus motivating lots of kissing. Such choices result in a highly legible narrative space' (Jenkins, 2004, p. 129). Rather than seeking to recover a specific narrative, or storied meaning, from the interactions permitted by a particular gameworld or object, we can instead examine the ways in which the affordances and constraints that are offered by a particular rules system act to create or foreclosure specific interpretations of the 'reality' of a spatial system. This has clear ties to the notion of procedural rhetoric, a term which is used in order to denote the ways in which process-based systems

such as video games can be seen to engage in 'the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures' (Bogost, 2007, p. ix). Whilst such a perspective does not discount the potential for narrative processes to operate within video games, it instead places the critical focus on the ways in which the existence of the underlying rules-based systems that structure gameplay act to control a player's interaction with a video game in a manner which creates 'frames' that control the conveyance of political meaning. Whilst accounting for the role of narrative is important, I also argue that there is a need to understand how the procedural processes that operate within video games may influence their ability to convey political argument. As Bogost highlights, 'when video games represent things – anything from space demons to long-term debt – they do so through procedurality, by constructing rule-based models of their chosen topics' (2008a, p. 123). As a result, the following subsection focuses on the 'procedural' nature of video gaming, examining the ways in which their specific nature can potentially allow video games to offer a form of political argumentation that is unavailable to other forms of entertainment media.

4.5   Video Games as Procedural Texts

Whilst the previous section focussed on narrative aspects to the analysis of video games, this section engages with the various different ways in which arguments 'are embedded in the rules of the games, and how the rules are expressed, communicated to and understood by a player' (Sicart, 2011). Here, the concept of *procedural rhetoric* is used to highlight the specific ways in which video games are able to create discourse of value as a result of their procedural representational mode: -

> 'Procedurality refers to a way of creating, explaining or understanding processes. And processes define the way things work: the methods, techniques and logics that drive the operation of systems, from mechanical systems like engines, to organisational systems like high schools to conceptual systems like religious faith. Rhetoric refers to effective and persuasive expression. Procedural rhetoric, then, is a practice of using processes persuasively. More specifically, procedural rhetoric is the practice of persuading through processes in general and computational processes in particular' (Bogost, 2007, p. 3)

It is a conceptualisation of the 'meaning' of video games that is rooted in the notions of 'rhetoric' and 'procedure': -

Rhetoric

The contemporary use of the concept of rhetoric is often profoundly pejorative, used in order to assail a form of 'elaborate and well-crafted speech that is nevertheless devoid of actual meaning' (Bogost,

2007, p. 15). The meaning of the term has, however, changed substantially over its history. In its classical formulation, rooted in Athenian society, the concept of rhetoric was used in order to refer to the art of oratory, and the various forms of persuasive speech act (Bogost, 2007, p. 15). The concept of rhetoric, in such a context, offered the speaker a means by which to convert the listener to a particular perspective, with the hope of influencing their subsequent actions. This conceptualisation has since been broadened, however, as the concept of rhetoric was expanded to address the significance of visual representation within photography, film and other forms of non-oral rhetoric practices: -

> 'Effectively, rhetoric was extended to account for new modes of inscription – especially literary and artistic notes. Rhetoric in writing, painting, sculpture, and other media do not necessarily make the same direct appeals to persuasion as oratory' (Bogost, 2007, p. 19)

The focus on these mediums offered a conceptual departure from the prior focus on the ability of rhetoric to generate influence, instead privileging the role of 'elegance, clarity, and creativity in communication' (Bogost, 2007, p. 20). Bogost argues that there is a need to further develop this conceptualisation of rhetoric, arguing that it does not currently account for the uniquely 'procedural' model of inscription that is offered by computational technologies. He suggests that the current notion of a 'digital' form of rhetoric often simply abstracts the process-driven nature of the computer, inserting computational forms of rhetoric into the place of more conventional practices. One example of this is the substitution of the e-mail for the practice of letter writing (Bogost, 2007, pp. 25-26). He argues for the need to offer an account of rhetoric that addresses the claims and ideas that are made through process, rather than through speech, ideas, images, or any combination of those aspects. Thus procedural rhetoric can be understood as a form of rhetorical argumentation that is dependent upon 'the practice of using processes persuasively, just as verbal rhetoric is the practice of using oratory persuasively and visual rhetoric is the practice of using images persuasively' (Bogost, 2007, p. 28). Procedural representation, meanwhile, requires a medium in which processes are enacted, rather than simply described. Human behaviour is one such medium, as individuals enact rule-sets in even basic behaviours (e.g. crossing the street, setting the table, playing rules-bounded card games), but it is difficult to study its arbitrary expression - people require rest, and incentives (Bogost, 2007, p. 10). Computerised systems, including video games, have no such limitations.

Procedure

In computer science, a procedure 'is sometimes used as a synonym for a subroutine – a function or method cell' (Bogost, 2007, p. 11). Within more general parlance, we tend to think of procedures in the context of bureaucracy. They may have their obvious manifestations (such as 'company policy'),

or they may be subverted (such as the use of torture in military interrogation). In each case, the concept of procedure is thought of as something fixed, that is 'tied to authority, crafted from the top down, and put in place to structure behaviour and identity infringement' (Bogost, 2007, p. 3). In either form, a 'procedure' is something that acts to control the actions that can be performed at particular instances.

Murray (1999) argues that procedurality is one of the core properties of digital artefacts, alongside participation, spatiality and encyclopaedic scope. Here, the concept of a 'procedural' system is used to highlight the computer's 'defining ability to execute a series of rules' (Murray, 1999). Although some procedural aspects can be identified within non-computational structures, it is this 'ability to execute a series of rules [that] fundamentally separates computers from other media' (Bogost, 2007, p. 4). Whilst written and visual rhetorics may be driven by the desire to represent human and material process, it is only procedural systems – such as computer software and videogames – that represent process with process (Bogost, 2007, p. 14). As in the example of company and bureaucratic procedure, the procedural nature of computational systems – including video games - permits them to establish 'rules of execution, tasks and actions that can and cannot be performed' (Bogost, 2007, p. 4). This means that video games can be understand as 'models of experience, rather than textual descriptions or visual depictions of them. When we play a game, we operate these models, our actions constrained by their rules' (Bogost, 2011, p. 4; see also Šisler, 2016). This focus on the rules systems that underpin video game play acts to make specific claims about the ways in which things work, often with the effect of either reproducing or contesting the nature of particular social, political or cultural processes and practices. One example of this is offered in Bogost's account of the teaching simulation *Tenure* (1975), a program which models the various decisions that academic personal might face over the course of the school year. He suggests that the game subverts notions of pedagogical purity, in order to make 'claims about how high school education works. Most notably, it argues that educational practice is deeply intertwined with personal and professional politics' (Bogost, 2007, p. 2). A further example is identified in *The MacDonald's Videogame* (2006), which affords the player control over the farm, processing factory, retail arm, and corporate office. For Bogost, this game 'mounts a procedural rhetoric about the necessity of corruption in the global fast-food business, and the overwhelming temptation of greed, which leads to more corruption' (2007, p. 31). The game makes a procedural claim about the nature of corporate business, but does so in a way that intends to disparage and undermine the ethics of the fast food industry. It is important to note that procedural claims are not restricted to these smaller independent titles. Bogost notes that, 'in Doom's model of the world, emphasis is placed upon the trajectory and power of weaponry. In Animal Crossing's model of the world, emphasis is placed on work, trade, and arrangement of the

environment' (2008a, p. 123). Wendler argues that the *Portal* video game 'relies on psychological models of identity, identification, organisational interaction, and sociological bond formation in the *player*, not in any of the game's characters, in order to rhetorically craft a narrative that is co-created by the players of the game during gameplay' (2014, p. 352). Voorhees (2009), meanwhile, examines the influence of the party creation system within the various different iterations of the *Final Fantasy* video game franchise. He suggests that the more recent entries in the franchise procedurally foreclose upon an engagement with race, ethnicity and nationhood, as a result of the exclusion of character backgrounds, individual personalities or identities.

The ability of video games to make claims about the ways in which things work is the result of a series of procedural figures (Bogost, 2007) or 'operational logics' (Mateas & Wardrip-Fruin, 2009) that underwrite the act of gameplay[15]. Such processes take on a similar role in computational systems to that of metaphor or metonymy in literature, acting as 'strategies for authoring unit operations for particularly salient parts of many procedural systems' (Bogost, 2007, p. 13). These different logics may include textual, graphical, or resource management forms. Textual logics are most evident in games such as *Zork*, in which typed commands are used to generate a response from the software system. Graphical logics are more common processes in contemporary games, used to 'underwrite the simulation of spaces and objects within spaces' (Mateas & Wardrip-Fruin, 2009, p. 2). This may include, for example, the simulation of movement, the imposition or absence of gravity, or the role of collision detection: -

> 'In many videogames, the player controls an object, agent, or vehicle that he must pilot in a particular manner – toward a goal or to avoid enemies or obstacles. Graphical logics frequently encapsulate procedural representations of material phenomena, such as moving, jumping, or firing projectiles. Object physics and lighting effects offer additional examples, meant to depict changing environments rather than character movement. In the video game industry, sets of graphical logics are often packaged together as a game engine, a software toolkit used to create a variety of additional games' (Bogost, 2007, p. 13)

The final form - that of the resource management logic - is a form of process that is often found in the real-time strategy or turn-based forms of video gaming. This is a practice that is 'concerned with representing finite resources, resource production and consumption, resource trade-offs, and so

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[15] As Mateas and Wardrip-Fruin highlight, 'operational logics are more general, and more fundamental, than game rules or mechanics' (2009, p. 3)

forth' (Mateas & Wardrip-Fruin, 2009, pp. 3-4). Such process are evident in resource-management games such as *Civilisation* and *Oregon Trail*. We can think of clusters of these figures as procedural genres: -

> 'Procedural genres emerge from assemblages of procedural forms. These are akin to literary, filmic, or artistic genres like the film, the lyric poem, the science fiction novel. In videogames, genres include the platformer, the first-person shooter, the turn-based strategy game, and so forth. When we recognise gameplay, we typically recognise the similarities between the constitutive procedural representations that produce the on-screen effects and the controllable dynamics we experience as players' (Bogost, 2007, p. 14)

Approaching the study of computational systems in this way invites a reconceptualization of what is meant by the act of play. As Sicart (2011) highlights, 'game designers are supposed to create play, that is, a particular behaviour in the players. Proceduralists believe that those behaviours can be predicated, even contained, by the rules, and therefore the meaning of the game, and of play, evolves from the way the game *has been created* and not *how it is played,* not to mention where and when it is played, and by whom'. Video game environments serve a mechanistic function, based upon their ability to channel and constrain the act of gameplay. They are used to establish and impose a series of rules that govern both the conditions that the player must meet in order to 'win' the game, as well as the behaviours that are (and are not) available to the player in their pursuit of such objectives. The player engages with these constructs, becoming 'more skilful as he/she masters increasing levels of difficulty whilst overcoming threats and challenges' (Anderson & Kurti, 2009, p. 50). The player fills in the missing portion of the game through the act of play, but the 'meaning' of the text is controlled by pre-set procedural constraints. As Schwartz highlights, whilst the video game player retains some control over their movements, they must 'interact with environments in forms foreseen and coded by the game designers' (2006, p. 318). This means that 'for the proceduralists, a game means what the rules means, and understanding what games are is to understand what their rules describe' (Sicart, 2011). The act of play retains an overall importance, but only in the sense that it serves to 'activate' the forms of procedural argumentation that are embedded within a game's rules.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered an analytical approach which aims to balance both narrative and ludological concerns. This chapter also addresses a number of more practical concerns. I have outlined the broad process by which video games were selected for analysis, noting issues pertaining to genre, thematic relevance and commercial prevalence. I have also sought to delineate the extent of my own

engagement, outlining my perspective on the role of the game mode, potential downloadable content and supplementary missions, and the plethora of extra-textual, non-playing sources that surround each title. Such an engagement is designed to contribute to my own analytical objectives which, as outlined in Chapter One, include the exposure of a video game geopolitics **and** the provision of a means by which to challenge the established practices and theoretical discussions used in the analysis of real-world spatialities.

Chapter Five: Monuments and the Mundane

Introduction

As highlighted in Chapter Two, critical forms of analysis have served to destabilise some of the various different taken-for-granted ways in which we conceive of the Self, both as indivdiduals and as a part of a broader collective. The continuing prevalence of the nation-state has served to provide one such source of fixity, acting as a 'pre-eminent constituent of identity and society at theoretical and popular levels' (Edensor, 2002, p. 1; see also Billig, 1995, p. 53; Cubitt, 1998, p. 1; Dittmer, 2005, p. 630). Despite this, however, it is notable that nationalism has come to be regarded as a peripheral phenomenon. It is often seen as something that is uncivillised, occurring within people and places that are somehow not "like us", whilst 'the ideological habits by which "our" nations are reproduced as nations, are unnamed and thereby, unnoticed' (Billig, 1995, p. 6). The challenge, therefore, is to find ways in which these nationalistic sentiments can be made visible within one's own nation and own people, necessitating that we remain attentive to the variety of different ways in which such ideologies are re-coded and redistributed as unchallenged commonsense.

Such a process is not simply the product of "high" forms of political discourse, but is also created and consumed within the various forms of popular cultural entertainment that we read, watch and play. Prior analyses have, as a result, engaged with the construction of nationalistic geopolitical imaginaries within a range of different cultural artefacts, including those that are found within magazines (Sharp, 1993; 1996; 2000), cartoons (Dodds, 1996; 1998), comics (Dittmer, 2005; 2007a), and popular film (Dodds, 2005; Doucet, 2005; Power & Crampton, 2007; Weldes, 1999). These analyses have engaged with the construction of the national space at a variety of different scales, examining the role of popular culture in shaping our understandings of the world and our place within it. Sharp, for example, reflects on the extent to which 'the Soviet Union became a negative space into which *The Reader's Digest* [magazine] projects all those values which are antithetical to its own ("American") values. It is not possible to have coexisting but different values in this system; one set of values is right, the other exists in opposition and is thus wrong' (1993, p. 496; see also Sharp, 1996, pp.567-568). The magazine is shown to have become part of a broader process of political spatialisation, aiding in the exportation of hegemonic forms of American national identity to a global audience. Dittmer (2005; 2007a; 2011), meanwhile, examines the ways in which American national identity has been narrated through the embodiment of American values in the character of *Captain America*, a Marvel Superhero who is afforded enhanced athleticism and combat abilities by an experimental serum. The character is treated as a part of a broader moral geography, which seeks to create and recreate "America" in juxtaposition to the appearance and values of a variety of non-

American places and peoples. For example, the character of *Captain America* is represented as conventionally physically attractive – desirable to women and envied by men – whilst the German characters, who often played the role of the antagonists, were shown to have 'big teeth, a large mouth, a pointy nose, greasy hair, and a monocle' (Dittmer, 2007a, p. 414). The role of these "hero" characters in the embodiment of the nation is also evident within Dittmer's examination of the *Captain Britain* comics, within which the relationship between *Captain America* and *Captain Britain* is utilised as a cultural proxy for the nature of the "special-relationship" between the UK and the USA. Eschewing many of the characteristics that were ordinarily associated with the heroic American archetype, presumable for the benefit of a British market, this comic is instead shown to juxtapose 'American brashness and power versus British circumspectness and concern for the lives of others' (Dittmer, 2011, p. 83). Whilst such analyses have demonstrated the political potential of popular culture (see also Chapter Two), it is notable that there has been a more limited consideration of the ways in which nationalistic geopolitical imaginaries are created and relayed within the content of military-themed video games. This chapter addresses this imbalance and will argue that the (re)production of a national geopolitics – together with the conterminous sense of national identity and spatial situatedness – is achieved through both the representation of, and engagement with, different forms of "monumental" and "mundane" environments. Drawing from an examination of the surrounding literature, offered in Chapter Three, this analysis differentiates between the spaces which function as an overt appeal to a collective national identity and those which resonate with the quotidian, banal forms of experience that characterise our day-to-day lives. These spaces are shown to be produced at a variety of different scales and through many different processes of individual encounter.

5.1   Taking Place? Reading Nationalist Spatial Imaginaries in Video Games

The popularity of military-themed video games is, in part, derived from the extent to which the medium can claim to offer a "realistic" or "authentic" experience of warfare and conflict. This can potentially be achieved in a variety of different ways. This may, as King highlights, be the result of a 'functional form of realism, in which gameplay is said to be modelled on the embodiment of real-world military tactics' (2015). This form of realism is particularly evident within video games that were originally created for use within military training exercises (e.g. *Full Spectrum Warrior*, 2004), as well as commercial titles that were developed with the direct input of military organisations (e.g. *America's Army*, 2001). This sense of "functional" realism is further bolstered by the simulation of recognisable military technologies, which allows video game players to utilise the weaponry, equipment and vehicles that feature in contemporary "real-world" combat (see, for example, Robinson, N. 2016).

Payne, meanwhile, emphasises that military-themed video games offer 'ever-increasing levels of visual and aural realism, and computational verisimilitude' (2012, p. 306). Here, an underlying sense of "realism" is achieved through the myriad of different ways in which an in-game environment is made to look and sound right, behave in expected ways, and have familiar-feeling physical properties. This may include, for example, the potential for the player to able to break glass, splinter wood, make pipes explode, or even bring down entire buildings (Figure 15).

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 15: Destructible Environments (Battlefield Hardline, 2015)

Of a particular interest for this analysis, however, are the ways in which these video games generate a sense of geopolitical realism through their ability to 'recreate real-world events and spaces, making tangible connections to the outside world. In doing so [video games] use real peoples, places and cultures as their referents, opening new forms of representation' (Šisler, 2014, p. 109). These video games cannot claim to offer a direct, mimetic representation of the reality of the "real world", but rather (re)present selected aspects of this world in a way that is made to *feel* intuitively plausible and familiar. This means that, as Payne highlights, that 'the advertised pleasures of playing wars past, present or future is, in actuality, the pleasure of playing with a delimited textual realisticness, and not a contextual realism that connects the gamer and the game to the lived realities of an outside world' (2012, p. 309). The sense of realism is generated by the extent to which the scenarios, places and peoples that are represented within these video games correlate with our prevailing understandings of the world and our place within it, offering an immersive and visceral facsimile of *selected aspects*

of our surrounding political environments. They may, for example, correlate with hegemonic ideas of what the Self looks like, or with anxieties about where the next existential "threat" might potentially come from. Within this chapter, however, these video games are argued to be co-constitutive of particular geopolitical imaginaries, as a result of their representation of particular types of national space and spatial encounters.

This chapter will examine some of the different ways in which military-themed video games are made able to produce an authentic-feeling form of national Selfhood through the simulation of different encounters with national spatiality, differentiating between spaces which function as an appeal to collective identity and those which occur as mundane aspects of everyday life. As a result, this chapter focusses primarily upon military-themed video games which foreground different forms of political and spatial discourse as a means by which to distinguish between the domestic "patriot" and the foreign "ultranationalist". These video games include the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* franchise (2007-2011), as well as *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Conviction* (2010)[16]. Some background information on these different titles is offered below: -

(1) The *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* series (2007-2011)

The *Call of Duty* franchise is one of the most well-known and successful brands of military-themed video game, routinely generating high sales figures and enduring levels of consumer engagement. According to Bobby Kotick, the chief executive at the video game publisher Activision Blizzard, the *Call of Duty* video games are 'now amongst that rarefied group of sustained franchises like Star Wars, Harry Potter and [the] Lord of the Rings, and the National Football League, that attract or engage tens of millions of people every year or every new release' (The Telegraph, 2011). The *Modern Warfare* series is an individual sub-franchise which, as of 2018, is comprised of three video games - *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (2007), *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009) and *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* (2011). These titles marked a significant stage in the evolution of both the *Call of Duty* franchise and the first-person shooter more broadly, marking the beginning of an initial transition away from a prevailing focus upon a historical, World War setting[17].

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[16] Within this chapter, other supporting examples are also drawn from within similar forms of military-themed video game, including *Homefront* (2011) and *Turning Point: Fall of Liberty* (2008).

[17] It is, however, notable that both the *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield* franchises can be seen to have taken some steps towards reversing this trend. *Call of Duty: WWII* released in November 2017, whilst *Battlefield 1* released in 2016. Whilst these titles are beyond this scope of this analysis, which focuses

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare (2007)

The first entry into the *Modern Warfare* franchise was both a financial and critical success, achieving total cross-format sales of 18.33 million units (VGChartz, 2018f)[18]. This particular title, which is set in the then-future year of 2011, charts British and American attempts to contain the outbreak of both civil war in Russia and a separatist uprising occurring within an unnamed Arabic nation. This analysis will focus specifically on the construction of the extremist ideals and actions of the "ultranationalist" Other, represented by the characters of both Khaled Al-Assad and Imran Zakhaev. These figures are used to reproduce the commonplace assumption that 'the separatists, the fascists and the guerrillas are the problem of nationalism' (Billig, 1995, p. 6). Of a particular interest is the nationalistic rhetoric that surrounds both the execution of President Al-Fulani (Level Three: *Coup*), which is contrast to the "patriotism" associated with the character of Shepherd (*Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*). It is also notable that the game's central conflict is shown to be a global endeavour, leading allied forces to foreign nations such as Azerbaijan and Russia. The portrayal of such spaces allows for a consideration of the extent to which different allied and enemy characters act to embody "national" values and are, as a consequence, shown to be either "in" or "out" of place within particular areas. This is particularly notable during *The Sins of the Father* (Level Sixteen), during which members of the SAS disguise themselves as Russian soldiers.

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 (2009)

The second instalment of this franchise has also achieved strong sales figures, with cross-format sales of 25 million units (VGChartz, 2018b). The game's narrative resumes in 2016, following the death of Imran Zakhaev at the hands of SAS Sergeant John "Soap" MacTavish. Russia is shown to have fallen under the control of an ultranationalist regime, whose forces treat the fallen Zakhaev as a martyr. Following a series of terrorist attacks against Western targets, led by the charismatic Vladimir Makarov, an American military force (codename *'Taskforce 141'*) is mobilised. After an agent is killed during a controversial undercover mission in Russia, during which he participates in an attack on a civilian airport, diplomatic tensions between the USA and Russia give way to open warfare. Whilst

on the practices of representation utilised in both revisionist and proleptic forms of video gaming (see Chapter Four), they represent a viable target for future analyses.

[18] *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* has also been re-released, in a remastered form, alongside special edition copies of *Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare* (2016). Although given a graphical upgrade, this new version of the game does not otherwise represent a departure from the content of the original Xbox 360 release.

again highlighting the extremes of foreign nationalism, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* also emphasises the extremes of American patriotism. As the central plot unfolds, it is eventually revealed to the player that a corrupt US military official – Lieutenant General Shepherd – helped to engineer the conflict between America and Russia, with the aim of bolstering the declining rates of military spending and civilian enlistment. His involvement also includes the murder of Simon "Ghost" Riley and Gary "Roach" Sanderson, two members of *Taskforce 141* (Level Fifteen: *Loose Ends*). This chapter focusses specifically on some of the ways in which the notion of the "nation" is scaled to the level of the body, engaging with the promotion and subversion of identity during the airport attacks (Level Four: *No Russian*) and Shepherd's attempted justification of American hyper-nationalism (Level Eighteen: *Endgame*). This juxtaposition is also evident in the contrast between the deaths of "Ghost" and "Roach", whose passings are largely unmarked, and the eventual interment of Lieutenant General Shepherd at Arlington cemetery. This chapter also highlights some of the different ways in which a nationalistic form of geopolitics is evoked through the representation of both different forms of monumental spatiality - including the White House (Level Thirteen: *Second Sun*, and Level Fourteen: *Whisky Hotel*) - as well as more mundane, everyday environments (Level Six: *Wolverines;* Level Eight: Exodus).

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 (2011)

The most recent *Modern Warfare* video game has achieved sales of 30.97 million units (VGChartz, 2018h). The game resumes directly after the events of the previous titles, as Price and Nikolai take the wounded "Soap" to a loyalist safe-house in Northern India. In the meantime, an American Delta Force team, codenamed *Metal*, forces the withdrawal of Russian forces from the East Coast of America. Months later, however, Vladimir Makarov kidnaps the Russian president in an attempt to force the official to reveal the country's nuclear launch codes. He is also responsible for a series of chemical attacks across Europe, which allows Russian military forces to gain control over of much of the continent. Price and Yuri, in conjunction with *Metal* team, eventually rescue the President from a Siberian diamond mine, allowing for a peace-treaty that brings an end to the conflict. Despite this, however, Yuri and Price pursue Makarov to a Dubai hotel. Whilst Yuri is killed, Price hangs Makarov from the roof with a steel cable. The contrast between foreign and domestic space is again evident within this game. *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* depicts a series of attacks on domestic spaces, including an assault on the American stock exchange (Level Two: *Black Tuesday*) and a chemical attack on central London (Level Seven: *Mind the Gap,* and Level Eight: *Davis Family Vacation*). These levels provide an opportunity to explore the usage of different forms of "monumental" and "mundane" spatial encounters as a means by which to discipline our relationship with the notion of nationhood.

(2) *Splinter Cell: Conviction* (Ubisoft, 2010)

The *Splinter Cell: Conviction* video game is part of a broader franchise that is inspired by the works of the thriller-writer Tom Clancy. Whilst lacking the high profile associated with the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* franchise, achieving comparatively modest sales of 2.16 million units (VGChartz, 2018d), this title also provides a spatially-orientated narrative of nationality and belonging. The player takes on the role of the elite military operative Sam Fischer, who is shown to have left military service in order to investigate the circumstances surrounding his daughter's death. Whilst in Malta, Fischer is contacted by his former handler – Anna Grímsdóttir – who warns him that he is the target of a group of hitmen. Whilst attempting to capture their leader, Fischer is captured and drugged by members of a government sanctioned strike-team codenamed *Third Echelon*. After Fischer is subsequently rescued by Grímsdóttir, who reveals herself to be working undercover on the behalf of the US President, he becomes instrumental in uncovering plans for an EMP attack against Washington DC.

This analysis focuses specifically upon the contrasting notions of the "home", represented through both Fischer's discussion with his daughter (Level One: Merchant's Street Market) and his subsequent return to the Third Echelon headquarters (Level Eight: Third Echelon HQ). The analysis will also highlight the representation of mundane areas, including the presence and absence of civilians, within several different levels (Level One: Merchant's Street Market; Level Two: Kobin's Mansion).

As the above overviews have shown, these video games are notable for their mediation of national identity. This is achieved through the representation of specific forms of space and spatial encounter, which are used in order to either emphasise or blur the distinction between "our" patriotism and "their" nationalism. Within *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, for example, the phenomenon of nationalism is shown as a peripheral affliction – the player travels to a range of foreign locations in order to target the ultranationalists, separatists and zealots that are held up as an existential threat to the national order. *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* blurs this distinction between the Self and the Other, showing the extremes of patriotism and nationalism to be two sides of the same whole. Whilst the visible existential threat remains external, embodied by the charismatic Makarov, the game also calls attention to the dangers posed by the ultranationalist ideologies of the domestic Self. Despite this particular narrative conceit, however, the distinction between the Self and the Other is maintained through specific codes of spatial representation, including the progressive governance that is symbolically represented by monumental spaces such as the White House. A similar spatial pattern of spatial representation is also evident within *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*, within which a foreign ultranationalist is again evoked as a threat to the Western, "civilised" way of life. This distinction between Self and Other is once again blurred within *Splinter Cell: Conviction*, however,

which utilises a senior American political figure – here, the Vice President of the USA – in order to question the externalisation of the potential "threat". In an attempt to address the creation of this internal insecurity, the player – as Fischer – is guided through a variety of monumental and everyday spaces that stand as emblematic of different aspects of American political identity and experience.

Taken together, this chapter will argue that these military-themed video games can be used to illuminate the ways in which national identity and a commensurate sense of belonging or estrangement is mediated through the representation of, and encounter with, a variety of different forms of both symbolic and everyday spaces. With this in mind, the remaining sections of this chapter will offer three broad readings of the representation of different forms of "national" spaces within video games: -

(i)   Capture the Flag – Mission and Encounter

The first section of this chapter focuses on the role of different forms of monumental national space in the "flagging" of national identity, examining the extent to which the simulation of such environments is constitutive of particular ideas of nationalism and national identity. There are two distinct aspects that are targeted within this section, which differentiates between the broader military mission and the process of spatial encounter. The first of these aspects – that of the "mission" examines the overt use of macro-level forms of spatial representation in the creation of a broader context for video game narratives. This section focuses on some of the representations of national and international spaces, examining how these processes work to provide a broader sense of spatial situatedness. The subsequent focus, meanwhile, is upon the notion of the "encounter", engaging with the specific representation and experiential utility of individual, localised monumental spatialities. The section will also reflect on the relationship between monumental and mundane spaces, examining the extent to which the former, symbolic form of spatiality is made able to impose itself on the surrounding environment. Here, this analysis will examine the influence of monumentality upon the space that the player must pass through and progress towards, as well as examining the ways in which the transition from "mundane" to "monumental" forms of space is represented.

(ii)   Press X to Pay Respects: Monumental Spaces, Bodies and Nationalist Sentiment

The subsequent section of this chapter examines the interaction between spaces and particular national bodies. This subsection begins with a focus on some of the limited instances on which video game space is used in practices of memorialisation and commemoration, engaging with the examples of both the Hereford Clock Tower and the Arlington National Cemetery. In examining the representational practices that surround such spaces, this subsection highlights the difference

between the veneration of Lieutenant General Shepherd (ostensibly a traitor that is treated as a national martyr) and the lack of commemoration that is extended to the characters of "Roach" and "Ghost". This contrast is used to highlight the ways in which venerated, monumental forms of space can be used in order to control the public perception of historical events. This section then continues by examining the various ways in which national spaces and identities are scaled to the level of the individual living body. Such an examination considers both the role of nationalistic rhetoric, as well as the various ways in which national identity is linked to the inclusion and exclusion of specific bodies.

(iii)   Ghost Hunting? Exploring "Ruined" Mundane Spaces

The final section of this chapter focusses on the extent to which a sense of spatial situatedness is both (re)produced and challenged through our encounters with different forms of mundane environment. The representations of these familiar dwellingscapes, which are commonly comprised of the environmental aspects that we would expect to see within our own homes and neighbourhoods, are here liked to the construction of the 'urban ruins' (Edensor, 2005; see Chapter Three). Whilst the representation of these areas retains familiar architectures and infrastructural elements, they are stripped of their familiar spatial flows. This section begins by focussing on the intertwined concepts of "home" and "house", reflecting on the ways in which the portrayals of individual dwellings can prioritise some spaces over others. This section then engages with the exclusion of civilians from urban and suburban spaces, examining the role of this representational practice in producing specific forms of space as the target for military violence.

5.2   Capture the Flag: Mission and Encounter

When we attempt to envisage the phenomenon of nationalism or national identity, we tend to think of the open, overt and passionate displays that accompany either periods of intense trauma or shared spectatorship. There is, therefore, a tendency to assume that nationalistic sentiment 'only comes in small sizes and bright colours' (Billig, 1995, p. 6), restricted to its evocation within these particular moments, movements and events. As highlighted in Chapter Two, these brief and highly visible moments of nationalistic sentiment can be thought of as the "waved flags" of nationhood, not unlike the waving of a physical flag at a sporting event. These are moments which directly and overtly hail our own membership of a national collective and a body of associated values. A similar process of visual symbolism is also evident in the role of the national flag within video games, where it is used to signify one's presence within a particular national space. In *Splinter Cell: Conviction,* for example, the American national flag is frequently used to spatially situate the player and their actions (Figure 16).

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Figure 16: Flying the American Flag (Washington Monument, Splinter Cell: Conviction, 2010))

Such an approach is not restricted to the representation of American spatiality. In the level 'Diwaniya' (Splinter Cell: Conviction), for example, the presence of the flag of Iraq serves as just one of a number of signifiers of foreign national space (Figure 17).

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Figure 17: The flag of Iraq (Diwaniya, Splinter Cell: Conviction, 2010)

One's treatment of the national flag can be used as a form of shorthand for shared social and cultural values. Within the real-world, for example, the flag may be flown at half-mast as a sign of shared respect that marks the passing of a notable person or the occurrence of collectively-experienced tragedy. In recent years, the colours of stricken countries have also been projected onto national moments as a sign of national solidarity. The flag is also physically manipulated within video games, within which it may be flown upside or burnt in order to indicate contempt or distress. *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, for example, uses the American flag in order to signify collective trauma as, although still flying, this symbol of American identity is shown to be damaged, tattered, or even on fire (Figure 18) [19].

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Figure 18: Burnt America flag (Of Their Own Accord, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2)

A further – somewhat unsubtle - example of the symbolic value of the "waved" American flag is evident in *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, during one the game's scripted "interrogation" sequences (Third Echelon HQ). As the characters of Fischer and Kobin vie for physical control, Kobin attempts to strike Fischer with a flag pulled from within the surrounding environment (Figure 19). Fischer, however, as a figure sanctioned by the state, is shown to be able to resist this act of violence. The presence of a national flag can also be sufficient to visually reproduce the dangers that are associated with the involvement of foreign "Others". One clear example of this process is evident within the level *Crew Expendable* (Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare), during which the player is tasked with retrieving an

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[19] A further example of this form of symbolism is evident within *Spec Ops: the Line*, within which an image of an upside-down American flag is used in order to generate an immediate sense of disquiet (see Chapter Seven).

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Figure 19: A "Waved Flag" During the Interrogation of Kobin (Third Echelon HQ, Splinter Cell: Conviction, 2010)

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Figure 20: *'It's in Arabic…'* – Retrieving the Package (Crew Expendable, Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare)

unspecified "package" from a boat in the Bering Strait. When this package is located, within the boat's hold, is quite literally "flagged" as dangerous by the presence of the Vietnamese flag, as well as the revelation that the accompanying shipping manifest is written in Arabic and therefore cannot be read by the Western protagonists (Figure 20). This system of "flagging" is not, however, limited to this

particular national symbol, and is also evident in the different ways in which we engage with urban spaces. As highlighted in Chapter Three, our surrounding environments are integral to the production of national memory and identity – a process which can be seen to occur on a variety of different scales. This literature highlighted the role of both collective "monumental" forms of shared spatiality in the representation of collective national values, as well as the influence of the more "mundane" environments that we encounter within our day-to-day lives. The remainder of this subsection examines some of the specific ways in which video games offer an appeal to a collective geopolitical imaginary, centred on the role of the state and state power, before the subsequent section then focuses on the use of different forms of spatiality in the practices of commemoration and memorialisation. This process begins with a specific focus on the notion of the *mission*, examining the ways in which video games represent national and international spaces in a manner which serves to provide a context for the actions that then subsequently constitute the core narrative: -

5.2.1   Mission: Creating a Context for Military Action

Within military-themed video games, the representation of national and international spaces is used to produce specific spaces as the current or potential future sources of geopolitical instability. *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, for example, represents the international arena as characterised by conflict and turmoil, opening on the openly facetious claim that 'the world's in great shape. We've got a civil war in Russia – government loyalists against ultranationalist rebels – and 15,000 nukes at stake' (Gaz,

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Figure 21: Surveillance Map (FNG, Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare)

FNG, *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*). The game's opening cut-scene switches rapidly between the accompanying areas of the world, represented through a combination of broad-scale satellite images of international space and smaller-scale video footage of the events occurring within each area (Figure 21). The representation of these regions in such apparent detail, including the accompanying observation that military intelligence organisations have a key target under continued observation, implies that it is possible to access a totality of "knowledge" about what the surrounding world is like. Different regions of the world are produced in a somewhat binary manner, as the sources of either security or insecurity. This representation has much in common with the phenomenological forms of geopolitical mapping, common to classical geopolitics, in which different spaces are defined by the nature of the events that are expected to occur within each. This representation of political spatiality is - like the broader depiction of conflict - a form of spatial imaginary, rather than the accurate representation of specific forms of real-world experience. This is a process of inclusion and exclusion, which shows "our" space to be quiet, calm and civilised, whilst "other" spaces – presumed not to contain people and places that are like us – are shown to pose an existential threat to the nation and to "our" (usually white, usually Western) everyday life.

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Figure 22: Cliffhanger (Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2)

A similar form of representational practice is also evident within *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, within which the representation of international space is used in order to pinpoint perceived areas of high risk. In *Cliffhanger*, for example, the depiction of civil war in Russia is lent a level of authenticity through its presentation alongside similar forms of real-world conflict in Kosovo, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone. This sequence also offers a brief commentary on Kazakhstan (Figure 22), a region which is established to be both environmentally and politically inhospitable: -

PFC Allen: 'When do I meet the rest of the team?'

Shepherd: 'They're on a mission recovering a downed ACS module behind enemy lines'

PFC Allen: 'Their feet wet?'

Shepherd: 'Imagine they're just about freezing right now'

Within *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, however, a further representation of global space is also offered. This imaginary (Figure 23) centres upon a stylised representation of the world map, overlaid with a series of implied national and international connections.

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Figure 23: World Map (Prologue, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2)

This form of spatial representation has the effect of highlighting the networked nature of the contemporary nation-state, a process which emphasises 'the transformation of the material boundaries of life, space and time, through the construction of a space of flows and of timeless time, as an expression of dominant activities and controlling elites' (Castells, 2010, p. 1). Rather than showing places to be independent, serving as the singular hosts for specific actions, activities and events, this representation of global interconnectivity offers a vision of collective insecurity. What happens in one place cannot be confined there and, potentially, may have broader consequences for other peoples and places. This theme is further reinforced within the prologue of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*, within which the globe is represented as a fragile glass ball (Figure 24). Here, the surface of the world is quite literally ruptured by the conflicts that are occurring within the different places throughout the world, with each fractured shared used to show images of the characters, events and conflicts that have been central within the previous titles in the franchise. Each is shown to have both a literal *and* metaphorical impact on the appearance of the earth's surface, which all extend well

beyond the sites where these things originally happened. This is a representational process that highlights the illusionary sense of security that is afforded through the perception of nationalism and nationalistic passions as 'not merely an exotic force, but a peripheral one' (Billig, 1995, p. 5). We are instead shown our shared fragility, which is exposed as a result of the activities of, and interconnections between, a myriad of geographically disparate peoples, places and actions.

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Figure 24: Breaking Globe (Prologue, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3)

5.2.2   Encounter: Monumental Forms of Spatial Representation

Whilst the broader context for the military mission may be constructed through a national or international spatial imaginary, the commensurate operations are nonetheless shown to be undertaken at a local or regional scale. Individual progress is commonly marked by personal mobility, as the player is required to navigate a series of peripheral, mundane environments in order to reach the location of some specific landmark or "monument" at which a particular objective can then be accomplished. The representation of national spaces and identities, therefore, is closely linked to the ways in which we perceive of the value and utility of different forms of monumental spaces. As highlighted in Chapter Three, there are two distinctive ways in which we can conceptualise our individual encounters with monumental forms of space. Firstly, we can observe that these are spaces that we would expect to have imposing physical and formal properties (Stangl, 2008, p. 246). Secondly, we might also regard these structures as having broader symbolic significance, offering collective expressions of identity and belonging that can potentially link together the past, the present and the future (Edensor, 2002, p. 46). The imposing physicality of these monuments plays an important role in the ways in which urban spaces are structured within video games, as these are locations which

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Figure 25: The Canary Wharf Skyline (Mind the Gap, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3, 2011)

demand attention, recognition and respect from the player. These monuments, which often serve as the destinations for the gameplay, can be seen to impose themselves upon the surrounding space. This is particularly evident in the representation of either American or allied forms of spatial situatedness, within which monumental spaces are framed by the surrounding environment in order to "flag" the player's engagement with a particular national landscape. Within the level *Mind the Gap*, for example, the player's route through the surrounding environment repeatedly frames the nearly Canary Wharf at the end of narrow alleyways and through windows (Figure 25). A similar process is

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Figure 26: Davis Family Vacation (Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3, 2011)

also evident in *Davis Family Vacation* (Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3), within which the Big Ben clock tower serves a one of a myriad of different signifiers of a quintessentially English urban landscape (Figure 26). These monuments not only provide a sense of location, but can also be used in the production of a sense of spatial scale. In *Splinter Cell: Conviction*, for example, the representation of different forms of distant "monumental" spatiality serves to add a sense of authenticity to the representation of Washington as a singular space, whilst also connecting together the disparate events that occur at the different locations that are depicted within each individual level. This is particularly pronounced during *Downtown District* (Level Ten), within which an aerial representation of a number of different American monuments – caught within a series of EMP explosions – is used to indicate the widespread, regional reach of the terroristic incident that the player is shown (Figure 27).

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Figure 27: EMP Detonation (Downtown District, Splinter Cell: Conviction, 2010)

Within these video games, familiar forms of monumentality are often represented as particularly privileged forms of national spatiality. Like their real-world equivalents, some such structures are placed at the centre of the urban core – often providing a backdrop to more mundane landscapes – whilst others are afforded a level of separation and spatial seclusion (Donohoe, 2002, p. 235; Mitchell, 2003, p. 445; Stangl, 2008, pp. 246-247). This means that the boundary between monumental and mundane spaces is constructed and maintained in a number of different ways, which influence the player's movement from one form of environment to another. In some instances, the boundary between monumental spaces and the surrounding mundane environment is made particular clear. In the level *Whiskey Hotel* (Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, 2009), for example, the player must fight their way across the grounds in order to regain control of the protected structure (Figure 28).

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Figure 28: Fighting for Control of the White House (Whiskey Hotel, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, 2009)

In other levels, meanwhile, the border between monumental and mundane spaces – although still present – is shown to be more fragile. Within *Splinter Cell: Conviction*, for example, the player must bypass a fortified checkpoint at the White House entrance. This is shown to be a somewhat simple matter, however, as the player can simply detonate a nearby petrol tanker (Figure 29).

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Figure 29: At the White House gates (The White House, Splinter Cell: Conviction, 2010)

These representations of the boundary between monumental and mundane spaces can blur the distinction between these different forms of urban environment, placing monumental spaces amidst the broader struggle for territorial control. The monumental structures can, however, be seen to have a broader symbolic significance than the everyday urban environment, serving as a commentary upon both national identity and the role of the urban core. Whilst mundane spaces may connect on an individual level, the representation of different symbolic forms of monumental spatiality can be used in order to imbue specific regions with specific values. Salter, for example, reflects that 'the city is represented in [Civilisation and Grand Theft Auto] as the seat of power, the centre of politics, and a particular spatial centre from which exclusive territorial control emanates. On the other hand, in [America's Army] the city is rendered as the complex space of particular war operations, filled with accessible and dangerous places (often driven through at speed or infiltrated and dominated)' (2011, p. 383). This is particularly evident in the conflation of entire spatial regions with the specific forms of monumental architecture that are used in order to signify such spaces to the player base. In *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*, for example, the retention of New York is not defined by control over the broader territory or through the fulfilment of any humanitarian objectives – as the player moves quickly through the surrounding streets, shops and suburbs – but rather in the defence of specific symbolic buildings such as the Stock Exchange (Level One: *Black Tuesday*). This representation of acts of contemporary warfare and counter-terrorism rarely acknowledges the impact of such conflicts upon the lives of the people that would be found in such regions, instead rendering the urban spaces of daily life as fundamentally indistinguishable from the broader battlefield.

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Figure 30: The Destruction of the Statue of Liberty (Turning Point: Fall of Liberty, 2008)

These spaces can also be used as a form of symbolic shorthand for the notion of the nation, as their capture or destruction is used to signify an existential threat to the established national order. This form of visual signification, which is also popular in disaster films, has several analogues within the military-themed genre of video games. Within *Turning Point: Fall of Liberty* (2008), for example, the destruction of the Statue of Liberty serves as a dramatic visual metaphor for a foreign attack upon American freedoms and laws (Figure 30). In some instances, the monuments are even destroyed by allied forces, serving as expressions of national sacrifice. In *Homefront* (2011), for example, the personal sacrifice of Connor – who uses his own body in order to designate a target for the delivery of vital American ordinance – is mirrored by the national sacrifice of the Golden Gate Bridge (Figure 31).

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Figure 31: Fighting on the Golden Gate Bridge (Golden Gate, Homefront, 2011)

This treatment of monumental space is, however, in direct contrast to the representation of the Eiffel Tower within *Iron Lady* (Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3). Here, it is notable that the national discourse is one of loyalty to people, rather than to specific places or symbols. At the start of the level, for example, the US President instructs Overlord to take all possible measures to ensure the success of the mission, reflecting that 'I don't care what it takes. You bring those men home in one piece'. After their primary evacuation site is compromised, the members of Delta Force unit are forced out onto a bridge near the Eiffel Tower. Here, once again, the imposing monument is used to frame individual progress, as the player must move across the bridge and towards its base in their attempt to escape. As the American troops encounter increasingly fierce resistance, hampering their movement, they call for additional air support: -

Sandman: We're dead centre on the bridge! Hit anything north of us with everything you've got!'

Odin 6-1: Overlord, bomb run is going to level everything in that area. Requesting clearance.

Overlord: Odin, you do whatever you have to, to get those men back home.

The decision is represented as a form of common-sense, privileging the lives of combatants over the enduring French monument. As Berents and Keogh (2014) surmise, 'the player's squad has no choice… Melancholic music plays as it falls and the player, successful but bitter, is lifted out by helicopter. These acts, as extreme as they are, are always justified by the righteous goals of the Western protagonist's fight' (Figure 32).

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Figure 32: The Eiffel Tower falls (Iron Lady, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3, 2011)

The player cannot choose not to trigger the airstrike, or to search for another way to resolve the situation, but must – on each encounter with the level – choose to sacrifice this high profile symbolic structure in the name of continued national and international security. Whilst presented as a somewhat bittersweet moment, leaving the player caught between the significance of the destruction and the impressive spectacle that results from it, this sacrifice of monumental structures is not repeated elsewhere within the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* franchise. Locations such as the stock exchange (Black Tuesday, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3) and the White House (Whiskey Hotel, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2), which serve as symbols of a specifically American form of identity, are instead shown as locations which are to be fought for and reclaimed. At the conclusion of the *Whiskey Hotel* level, for example, during which the player fights to reclaim the White House, they also witness

the use of green smoke to indicate American military successes at a variety of different landmarks around the city (Figure 33).

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Figure 33: Green smoke indicates American successes (Whiskey Hotel, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, 2009)

These different forms of monument can, however, also be rendered banal or mundane through this process of spatial encounter. In some instances, this is simply because the representation of particular forms of monumentality are either excluded or passed by unnoticed and unhailed. In the level *Scorched Earth* (Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3), for example, the player attempts to rescue Alena Vorshevsky (the daughter of the Russian president) from a hotel in central Berlin. Here, it is the more

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Figure 34: Damage to the Victory Column landmark (Scorched Earth, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3, 2011)

mundane aspects of the environment that are given precedence. During one initial exchange, for example, Delta team navigate through the environment based on the description of 'a building across the road… Sign on the roof says Reisdorf'. As they move through the area, however, the damage to German monuments is often rendered both distant and unremarkable. The damage to the Victory Column, for example, passes by unacknowledged (Figure 34). Even where a monumental form of space is directly acknowledged by the game, its symbolic value is often derived from its external appearance. Its interior, however, can be reduced to a more mundane series of everyday systems and the recurrence of their accompanying ghosts. This is, for example, evident in the representation of the White House interior in both *Whiskey Hotel* and *Of Their Own Accord* (Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2), as well as *The White House* (Splinter Cell: Conviction). This environment shows traces of the 'poltergeist' (Edensor, 2005) - a presumably once-ordered space is shown to be in disarray with furniture strewn around the room, papers on the floor and holes in the walls. It is made to appear as though some other (potentially even otherworldly) force has gone ahead of the player, to tip over furniture, set fire to the furnishings and demolish brickwork (Figure 35).

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Figure 35: Environmental Damage in the White House (Of Their Own Accord, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, 2009)

This sense of disorder is directly hailed within Splinter Cell: Conviction, with one unseen adversary heard to remark that the encounter with the White House building 'isn't a guided tour. Move it!' (Level 11: The White House). The player's experience with the environment is not a conventional encounter with monumental spaces, within which one could expect that the environment would be arranged in a manner which provides a singular coherent narrative of identity and memory (Atkinson, 2008, p.

382; Edensor, 2005, p. 832). Whilst the exteriors of monumental buildings may provide for a sense of national-level situatedness and shared selfhood, their interiors are often – like many representations of mundane spatiality – represented as a series of damaged rooms which contain the now-indistinguishable clutter that marked banal routines and performances. This detritus does not inspire a singular, uniform reading of nationality or identity, but rather a sense of vague familiarity based upon a few recognisable objects, movements and routines.

5.3.   "Press X to Pay Respects": Space, Bodies and Commemorative Practice

The examination of the role of "monumental" forms of spatiality in Chapter Three served, in part, to highlight the extent to which such spaces are linked to acts to commemoration and remembrance. Whilst the notions of *monument* and *memorial* are not necessarily synonymous (Stangl, 2008), it is nevertheless worthwhile to explore the representational practices that surround the overt acts of memorialisation that occur within the content of military-themed video games. Whilst the use of digital space in acts of remembrance and commemoration remains comparatively rare within this genre of video games, some examples are nonetheless evident. The character of Captain John Price alludes to one such space following the death of "Soap" MacTavish, noting that 'there's a clock tower, in Hereford, where the names of the dead are inscribed. We try to honour their deeds, even as their faces fade from our memory. Those memories are all that's left, when the bastards have taken everything else' (Stronghold, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3). This site, which actually exists in the real world, is used in the commemoration of specific actions and their associated ideals, whilst acknowledging that the other aspects associated with these individuals – even including some as basic as their appearance – are lost to history, preserved only by those individuals that knew them directly. The act of commemoration, more broadly experienced, is shown to be about the control of history – who it is that deserves to be remembered and what it is that they deserve to be remembered for.

This theme is echoed by some of the different characters, who also discuss the ways in which national political histories are created and remembered. Lieutenant General Shepherd, for example, highlights the modernity of the American military and its role in constructing the way in which the past is remembered in the future, describing this as 'the most powerful military force in the history of man. Every fight is our fight – because what happens over here, matters over there. We don't get to sit one out… This is a time for heroes, a time for legends. History is written by the victors' (*Team Player*, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2). Here, the use of military violence in the present is initially represented as an act in defence of a correctly-remembered future. Shepherd, however, is revealed to have manipulated conflict between American and Russia, in an effort to promote a particular form of future remembrance that would ensure that 'there will be no shortage of volunteers, no shortage

of patriots' (*Endgame, Call* of Duty: Modern Warfare 2). The conflict between Shepherd (as a national elite) and the members of the Taskforce 141 (disavowed by their nation) is, therefore, presented as an attempt to control the conveyance of history in order that it be "correctly" remembered in the future: -

> 'This is for the record. History is written by the victor. History is filled with liars. If [Shepherd] lives and we die, his truth becomes written – and ours is lost. Shepherd will die a hero, 'cause all you need to change the world is one good lie and a river of blood. He's about to complete the greatest trick a liar ever played on history. His truth will be *the* truth. But only if he lives, and we die' (Price, Endgame, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2; emphasis added)

These attempts to control the future are again codified in the different ways in which the bodies of the various characters are commemorated. Shepherd - following his death during *Endgame* (Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2) - is shown to have been interred at Arlington, a real-world American military burial site. This is commemorated through the production of a fictional front cover for *Time* magazine, which was both distributed to player in real-life and made evident throughout the game's mundane spaces (Figure 36).

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Figure 36: The Fictional Cover of Time Magazine.
Left: The alternative cover, released with the game (Gayomali, 2011)
Right: The cover, used in the gameworld (Activision, 2012)

Although ostensibly shown to be a traitor, having masterminded events that have caused American deaths, Shepherd is – through his interment at Arlington Cemetery – remembered as a hero and a symbol of American values and identity. The members of Taskforce 141, specifically the characters of Simon "Ghost" Riley and Gary "Roach" Sanderson, are shown to have been discarded by Shepherd. Once they have served their part in his plan, they are shot, set on fire and discarded into a ditch. Their deaths leave no marker of their lives and values, nothing that can be called upon by future generations.

The link between national space and bodily integrity is not, however, limited to the representational of commemorative practices and can also be rescaled to the level of the individual "live" body. This is evident within other forms of cultural mediation. In his analysis of the *Captain America* comics, for example, Jason Dittmer argues that 'the impact of Captain America on readers is different than other symbols of America, such as the bald eagle or the flag, because of his ability to both *embody* and *narrate* America in ways that the bald eagle, flag and other symbols cannot. Such static, non-human symbols represent and construct the nation but do not allow for a personal connection to it in the same way that Captain America does' (2005, p. 630; emphasis in original). His analysis highlights the relationship between national and non-national bodies, as well as the ways in which national bodies might be expected to behave in both familiar and unfamiliar surroundings. The interaction between bodies and spaces plays a similar role in the formation of national identity and national spaces within military-themed video games, offering both a personal connection to the values of the nation *and* a utility as a broader form of political signifier.

The relationship between national space and individual bodies can, for example, be accessed through the different ways in which the characters demonstrate forms of "patriotic" or "nationalistic" ideologies through their speech and actions. As Billig highlights, 'those in established nations – at the centre of things – are led to see nationalism as the property of others, not of us' (1995, p. 6). This distinction is particularly apparent within the *Modern Warfare* games, within which "their" nationalism is rendered dangerous in comparison to the righteous "patriotism" of Western soldiers doing their national duty. The series frequently alludes to the thin line between their nationalism (viewed as dangerous and peripheral) and our patriotism (which often passes by unnoticed). This is particularly evident in the assignation of ultranationalist motivations to the "Other", embodied by characters such as Al-Assad, and the subversion and perversion of these qualities in the form of patriotism that is attributed to Shepherd. These *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* games offer a familiar caricature of foreign nationalism, showing this quality through the apparently dangerous and malevolent rantings that commonly mark the dictator or tyrant: -

'Today, we rise again as one nation, in the face of betrayal and corruption… We all trusted this man to deliver our nation into a new era of prosperity… But like our monarchy before the Revolution, he has been colluding with the West with only self-interest at heart! Collusion breeds slavery! And we shall not be enslaved! The time has come to show our true strength. They underestimate our resolve. Let us show that we do not fear them. As one people, we shall free our brethren from the yoke of foreign oppression… Our armies are strong and our cause is just… As I speak, our armies are nearing their objectives, by which we will restore the independence of a once great nation. Our noble crusade has begun… Just as they lay waste to our country, so we shall lay waste to theirs… This is how it begins' (The Coup, Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare)

This lead to the continued evaluation and re-evaluation of everyone that is encountered within peripheral spaces, meaning that foreign nations and national bodies are portrayed as either good (i.e. potentially, but not currently violent actors) or bad (i.e. violent and irrational actors). This is epitomised in the level *Blackout* (*Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*), in which two characters have the following exchange: -

> **Gaz:** 'Loyalists, eh? Are those the good Russians or the bad Russians?'
> **Price:** 'Well, they won't shoot us on sight, if that's what you're asking'

This notion of "good" and "bad" Others is also evident in the way in which Price treats Yuri – a former Russian Ultranationalist – after he finds out that he knew Makarov (*Blood Brothers*, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3). Following the death of Soap, Price turns on Yuri over his prior association – here, his shared nationality is enough to mark Yuri as suspicious and a potential enemy. Yuri, in his defence, argues that he 'was a soldier with Russia, not a taker of innocent lives. In [Makarov's] eyes, that marked me as the enemy'. He differentiates between the willing use of violence in protection of the nation and the use of indiscriminate violence against civilians in pursuit of political power. It is only in demonstrating his strict adherence to this moral code - as he details his attempt to stop the airport terrorist attack depicted in *No Russian* (Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2) - that the distinction between the "good" and "bad" Other is re-established sufficiently for him to be grudgingly admitted back into the allied fold.

The distinction between nationalist and patriot is, however, entirely subverted through the character of Shepherd, who is shown to have masterminded conflict between Russian and America in order to bolster military enlistment and spending after he 'lost 30,000 men in the blink of an eye, and the world just fuckin' watched' (Shepherd, Endgame, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2). Although

claiming to be acting in the interests of the nation, Shepherd's actions are shown to be incompatible with the values of the nation that he claims to represent.

An alternative role for the national body is evident in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, as the player takes control of the undercover agent Joseph Allen and prepares to participate in a mission alongside Russia ultranationalist operatives. Here, much is made of the ability of the American agent to pass as a Russian solider – an objective that Soap, himself, had proven unable to achieve. Shepherd, for example, can be heard to tell Allen that he looks 'like one of the bad guys. Perfect for your undercover mission' (SSDD, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2). This attempted subversion of "Americanness" is not the only such deception, however, as the members of the ultranationalist cell attempt to avoid being identified as Russian nationals. The group are, for example, forbidden from using Russian to communicate, as a part of a broader plan for the attacks to instead be traced to America. At the end of their mission, Makarov kills Allen and leaves the body behind for the security services to find. As he escapes, concealed within an ambulance, Makarov can be heard to remark that Allen's execution will serve as 'a message. The American thought he could deceive us. When they find that body, all of Russia will cry for war' (No Russian, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*). Here, the presence of the dead American body is sufficient to "flag" American involvement in the airport attacks, meaning that – in shooting Allen – it will take only 'one bullet to unleash the fury of an entire nation' (Takedown, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2).

This incompatibility between particular bodies and places is evident in other interactions, albeit without the same consequences. In *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*, for example, the game's Western protagonists impersonate Russian soldiers in an effort to capture Viktor Zakhaev. Whilst they wait for their target to arrive, Griggs reflects that John "Soap" MacTavish offers an unconvincing facsimile of a Russian soldier: -

'Man, you look like a clown in that outfit. It's a good thing that you're up here, because you look nothing like a Russian' (*The Sins of the Father, Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*)

The extent of Soap's bodily displacement is further emphasised within the contents of his journal, an extra-textual resource that shipped with special edition copies of the *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* video game. Within it the character is not only shown to be out of place, but his bodily capability is also shown to be poorly matched with that of the Russian – even in a physical battle that the powerful Western is implicitly expected to be able to win: -

'How the hell did a scrawny Russian on a vodka/borscht diet outrun me? Victor Zakhaev might have been 39, but he sprinted like he was 22 – the 3rd horseman had the endurance of a colt'

Similarly, in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*, Soap reflects on the difficulties of undertaking a mission in Somalia, noting that the team will 'stick out like bollocks on a bulldog. Stealth's not an option' (*Return to Sender*). The national identity, therefore, not only dictates how it is that specific events are to be preserved and remembered in the future – controlling which specific bodies are preserved or discarded – but also is shown to constrain individual action and interaction in the present day.

5.4. Ghost Hunting? Encountering "Ruined" Mundane/Vernacular Spatialities

Whilst the previous sections of this chapter have focussed on some of the more overt appeals to our sense of collective identity, many of the "flags" that sustain national identity are much less obvious. Billig, for example, notes the existence of 'the uncounted millions of flags which mark the homeland of the United States [and yet] do not demand immediate, obedient attention. On their flagpoles by the street and stitched onto the uniforms of public officials, they are unwaved, unsaluted and unnoticed. They are mindless flags' (1995, p. 40). A similar process is also evident in the construction of national landscapes, as our encounters with mundane or vernacular spatialities can serve to maintain a low-level sense of national situatedness and belonging without there necessarily having to be any conscious level of apprehension or reflection (see, for example, Edensor, 2004, p.108). These everyday environments look and feel familiar, simply because they contain the various infrastructural aspects, spatial flows and everyday clutter that we expect to encounter within the spaces that we inhabit. Unlike the more conscious appeals to the notions of nationhood and national belonging, encountered at symbolic monumental sites, these "unwaved" flags will often pass by unnoticed until they are removed or threatened (Billig, 1995, pp. 40-41). Then, they may become symbolic representations of our "way of life", providing a hitherto unspoken of framework that disciplines and structures "our" national identity and sense of individual belonging. The integration of these familiar landscapes into familiar forms of warfare and counterterrorism practices can, therefore, provide a means by which to evoke an otherwise dormant nationalistic sentiment through the sense that we are participating in the defence of the Self and the others that are somehow "like us" in some significant way. This section examines both the construction of familiar mundane environments - including the notions of "house" and "home" – and also what is achieved through the removal of civilians from within these environments.

5.4.1.   Nobody Home? The Role of Familiar Urban Environments

As highlighted in Chapter Three, our understandings of the notion of the "home" play an important role in the formation of our individual identities. In these video games, however, the representation of a direct and personal connection to one's "home" is comparatively rare. Within the video games examined for this analysis, for example, the only instance occurs during *Splinter Cell: Conviction*. Fischer experiences a flashback to a conversation with his young daughter, after she becomes scared of the dark: -

> 'When's its light, you can't see into a place that's dark. But when it's dark, you can see what's around you much better… So, if there's monsters or bad people around, you can see them. And if you're in the dark, they can't see you' (Fischer, Merchant Fish Market Level, Splinter Cell: Conviction)

Finding her to be unconvinced he highlights her mobile, telling her that he could drop it into onto the "monsters" and make them leave. This explanation, which serves as a transparent analogy for Fischer's ability to manipulate the real-world environment during his missions, has the effect of linking the protection of the private home-space to the protection of the national realm. The home, like the nation, is established as a protected zone, with an architecture that is designed to benefit those who ought to be within its limits and which will punish those who are unwelcome visitors. This is subsequently reinforced during gameplay as the player – whilst responding to a prompt to "Protect

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Figure 37: 'Protect Your Family' from the burglars (Splinter Cell: Conviction)

Your Family" – confronts and executes a small group of burglars (Figure 37). The only other allusion to the notion of the "home" uses the term in a more general sense, as Fischer returns to the Third Echelon headquarters (Figure 38).

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Figure 38: Sam Fischer returns "home" to Third Echelon (Level Eight, Splinter Cell: Conviction)

Here, the notion of the "home" is used to provoke specific issues pertaining to identity and belonging, as the player – as Fischer – must confront the fact that this former place of employment, which would once have offered a sense of security and familiarity, has instead become a place of individual estrangement and danger. This is further reinforced by the subsequent encounter with this space, within which a combination of opposing bodies and elaborate security systems act to make even the most apparently banal of spaces into a potential hazard (Figure 39).

Our understandings of the "home" – when mobilised through video games – are, however, often more closely associated with the structure of the "house" or the surrounding dwellingscapes. As these domestic realms are conscripted within the portrayal of warfare and counterterrorism, the "normal" patterns of use that would be associated with particular buildings and infrastructures are reduced to a variety of ghostly traces that haunt the act of military combat. This form of spatial representation and comprehension resembles that which is exposed in the analysis of industrial ruins, former manufacturing sites which serve as 'an intersection of the visible and the invisible, for the people who managed them, worked in them and inhabited them are not there. And yet their absence manifests itself as a presence through the shed and silent things that remain, in the objects we half

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Figure 39: A mundane office space made hazardous by laser tripwires (Third Echelon HQ,
Splinter Cell: Conviction)

recognise or surround with imaginings' (Edensor, 2005, p. 842). Our ability to connect with such
environments is created and disciplined by the ability of these environments to engender a familiar
mode of spatial being. When we enter houses within other countries, for example, these spaces are
often portrayed as quite barren. They are often badly damaged – with collapsed staircases, roofs and
ceilings – and lack any trace of the luxuries of Western consumerism. These spaces are only
identifiable as "houses" through very basic symbols – they may contain, for example, damaged

appliances or furniture, may display a few – usually unidentifiable - books and pictures, or have a single line of clothing pegged to a washing line outside (Figure 40).

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Figure 40: Simplistic Signifiers of the "Foreign" Home (Diwaniya, Splinter Cell: Conviction, 2010)

These environments, however, lack the clutter that we associate with our own lives, which marks the potential for people "like us" to inhabit a particular space. The level *Charlie Don't Surf* (Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare), for example, offers a form of urbanity that is comprised of indistinct foreign businesses, unintelligible Arabic writing and graffiti, and road signs that warn of crossing camels

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Figure 41: Foreign Urbanity (Charlie Don't Surf, Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, 2007)

(Figure 41). Here, the unfamiliar architectures and narrow streets are made to feel different and threatening, often used in order to lure the Western "outsider" into an ambush.

The representation of the Western home, meanwhile, is often strikingly different. These video games show the influence of warfare upon affluent-looking, aspirational suburban areas, excluding more economically and socially deprived residential areas. One such environment is depicted in the level *Wolverines* (Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2), which is set in the remains of a once-idyllic suburban neighbourhood in Virginia, USA. Here, the dwellingscape is afforded a familiar appearance – as the stereotypical "white picket fence" neighbourhood – meaning that it can instantaneously evoke familiar forms of spatial engagement for the player through the representation of familiar everyday urban clutter. In Figure 42, for example, there are familiar forms of American housing and infrastructural elements (speed limit signs, electricity wires and even roads and pavements).

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Figure 42: Entering the "White Picket Fence" Neighbourhood (Wolverines, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, 2009)

This sense of spatial familiarity is further enforced by the representation of high-end consumer goods, which offer a stark contrast to the barren and largely unfurnished spaces that are encountered in foreign urban areas. Within the *Exodus* level, for example, the player fights through environments which contain pool-tables, large-screen televisions, and a wine collection (Figure 43). These contrasting representational practices afford the two forms of residential space different perceived values. Whilst the Western home is shown to be a space that is in need of protection – as it contains traces of lives that resembles ours – foreign dwellingscapes are shown to be primitive and unworthy

of protection because we are made unable to conceive of the possibility that "normal" people could live there. This is, at least in part, because we are rarely shown that these are environments that could potentially contain ordinary people, rather than combatants. This representation is not only applicable to the domestic interior, but also in the ways in which specific forms of banal urban dwellingscapes are targeted for military violence.

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Figure 43: The American Home (Exodus, Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2, 2009)

5.4.2   The Shade: The Absent Presence of the Civilian

Whilst "monumental" spaces play a significant role within military-themed video games, often providing the focus for the narrative, it is important not to overlook the significance of more mundane, everyday spaces in constructing a broader sense of spatial engagement. Such spaces are, as discussed in Chapter Three, the locations in which the unremarkable routines and familiar practices of everyday life can be seen to take place. The representation of acts of warfare or counter-terrorism is, however, an imposition on these spaces of urban flow, subverting everyday forms of engagement in the creation of a clean and sanitised form of conflict. In their analysis of the *Full Spectrum Warrior* video games, for example, Berents and Keogh (2014) reflect that 'this is war where no one lies for hours gut-shot and shrieking for his mother, has his testicles blown off, or wakes in the hospital finding that he has lost a limb. It is war without mutilation or post-traumatic stress disorder. It is also war without moral dilemmas. And there are almost no civilians. The miracle of [*Full Spectrum Warrior*] is that its streets are deserted and houses empty, apart from the ubiquitous Tangos (who all die instantly when hit)'. A similar representational pattern is also evident within the various video games examined within this chapter, within which the citizenry is frequently shown to be absent, quickly removed from danger,

or else to have been killed prior to the player's arrival within a particular region. Within *Splinter Cell: Conviction*, for example, Fischer is initially encountered amidst a highly populated, mundane environment (Figure 44).

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Figure 44: Fischer, first encountered amongst mundane space (Merchant's Street Market, Splinter Cell: Conviction, 2010)

Although it initially appears that these civilians will impede gameplay (the character can be overheard to remark that 'I'd rather not risk a firefight where there's citizens around') the subsequent exchange of gunfire clears the civilians from the area entirely, leaving the player free to navigate the surrounding environment without risk of collateral damage. A similar process is also evident in the *Kobin's Mansion* level, as Fischer pursues an arms dealer to his urban stronghold. The player is initially located in a mundane, everyday environment, surrounded by civilians going about their everyday lives: -

   Civilian NPC: 'If I don't get a few in me I don't dance anyway, so what's your point'

Whilst the player can interact with these civilians to a limited extent, as bumping into them or walking between them provokes a reaction, this is a space that is defined by the absence of violence. Whilst the player cannot progress the game without moving beyond it, this remains a space that is free of the conflict between Fischer and the then-unseen "Other". The player is also prohibited from using violence and is unable to raise their weapon in this space. Once inside the mansion grounds, however, it is made clear that this is a zone that is inhabited exclusively by the violent and dangerous Other. The player is able to raise their weapon and the various bodies within it can be "marked" for violent force (Figure 45).

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Figure 45: Inside the Mansion Grounds (Kobin's Mansion, Splinter Cell: Conviction, 2010)

Similar practices are evident within the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* franchise. In the level *Bag and Drag* (Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3), for example, the player overhears a soldier report that 'all civilians at the Louvre are dead. Request decon units and MedEvac'. This is then visually reinforced, as the player encounters the bodies of dead civilians within both the surrounding house and at the tables of a stereotypically Parisian street café (Figure 46). Whilst the player is clearly supposed to be affected by the scene, as mournful string music plays, it is nonetheless apparent that there is nothing that can

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Figure 46: Fatalities at a Café (Bag and Drag, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3, 2011)

be done except to continue moving forwards. The removal of citizens from urban environments has the effect of reproducing warfare as a virtuous act, reducing it to the use of "our" violence against "their" deserving bodies. This is often further disciplined within the broader ludic structures. In the training level *SSDD* (*Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*), for example, the player's level of success in navigating "The Pit" is dependent upon their efficient "killing" of the representation of the correct bodies as they proceed through a simulation of a foreign dwellingscape. Within this environment, the terroristic "Other" is always represented as a man. It is, however, notable that the civilians are represented as either women or children (Figure 47).

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Figure 47: Training Level (SSDD, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, 2009)

This video game, it would seem, has very clear opinions about the kinds of people that engage in war against the West, constructing an archetypal imaginary of the terroristic "Other" against whom violence is not only accepted but desirable. The killing of a "civilian", meanwhile, does not generate a fail state, as the game simply imposes a time penalty and a depreciation in the player's estimated level of ability as a soldier.

Although subsequent levels may imply the existence of civilians and a commensurate potential for collateral damage, this is usually precluded through the act of gameplay. This is, for example, particularly evident within the level *Death From Above* (Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare), during which the player takes on the role of a gunner aboard an AC130 aircraft (Figure 48). Here, the player is presented with an image of Russian suburban space – albeit through the mediation of the technologies of vision that are associated with the aircraft's weaponry. There is little apparent regard for the various different forms of infrastructure in this region – including the buildings, water towers

and roads – which serve as navigational markers, rather than as signs of civilian habitation. Here, only the church is identified as a protected structure by the surrounding dialogue.

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Figure 48: Playing as an AC130 Gunner (Death from Above, Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, 2007)

There is similarly little regard for the people that are presented within this area. Allied personal and vehicles are marked with flashing strobe lights, which exempt them from acts of violence, but other than this the player is largely free to act as they choose. Though the player is briefly prohibited from targeting civilian vehicles, this is merely because the allied soldiers intend to co-opt those vehicles for their own ends and not because there is any stated desire to minimise the effects of the attacks on the local people. All targets that are struck by the player are shown to be valid, reinforcing the broader sense that 'air and artillery strikes do not hit wedding parties. There is no collateral damage. War is peace' (Berents & Keogh, 2014)[20]**.** An apparently different approach, meanwhile, is offered through the representation of Paris in the level *Iron Lady* (*Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*). Whilst the player again takes on the role of an aircraft gunner in this sequence, it is notable that they are told that they are 'not clear to fire on the buildings. We suspect that there are still civilians inside at this point'. Whilst this contrast appears to privilege the preservation of allied spaces during times of war, this is *not* reinforced through the broader ludic structures. Whilst the player is frequently *told* not to strike the buildings – a process which is reinforced by verbal prompts if the player should breach this

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[20] This understanding is, however, dramatically subverted by the use of White Phosphorous in *Spec Ops: the Line* (2012). This sequence is discussed in Chapter Seven.

directive – the game *does not* impose a fail-state for even the most persistent of violations. These representations of mundane urban space - absent of civilians – have the effect of reproducing *all* urban spaces as an extension of the contemporary battlefield, serving as legitimate targets for acts of violence.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored some of the ways in which the representation of national space – in both its "monumental" and more "mundane" forms – is used to manufacture specific spatial imaginaries within both the *Call of Duty*: *Modern Warfare* franchise and *Splinter Cell*: *Conviction*. These different understandings of national spaces, which can be presented at different scales, allow for specific values, actions and bodies to be connected to, or disconnected from, different geographical locations.

The initial stages of this chapter focussed specifically on the representation of a "monumental" form of space, here understood to refer to the forms of space that appeal to a collective sense of national identity and shared Selfhood. Section 5.2 highlighted the representational role of such a space at two contrasting scales, differentiating between the representation of national and international space in the provision of context for the military *mission* and the more local or regional forms of spatiality that are evident during the actual process of *encounter*. The foremost of these frameworks – that of the *mission* – was used to highlight the representation of the international arena as fundamentally interconnected, whilst also maintaining the classical geopolitical conceptualisation that "foreign" places are somehow defined by the events that occur within them (see Chapter Two). The concept of the *encounter*, meanwhile, was used to highlight the variety of different ways in which individual "monumental" spatial sites are experienced within these video games. The sites are shown to be representative of shared identities, values and common experiences and, as a result, may be damaged or destroyed in order to indicate that an established – usually Western – form of political order is somehow at risk. This section also sought to problematize the reliance on monumental forms of spatial imagery, noting that these symbolic systems tend to deteriorate once the player is past the symbolic façade and amongst the ruins of recognisable everyday processes. Here, the player gains their sense of situatedness from the familiar nature of particular objects and routines, rather than from the overt signifiers that are offered by the structures themselves.

The utility of these "monumental" spaces is not, however, limited to this surface-level form of visual symbolism, as these spaces are often tied to the bodies that inhabit or move through them. Section 5.3 examined both the connection between national bodies and spatially-orientated forms of commemorative practice, as well as the extent to which different characters can be seen to "embody" specific national characteristics. This analysis began by examining the role of monumental forms of

spatiality in more conventional forms of commemoration and memorialisation, noting the specific examples of the Hereford Clock Tower and the Arlington National Cemetery. This subsection contrasted the formal interment of Shepherd with the uncommemorated and unmarked disposal of the bodies of "Roach" and "Ghost", using this as a means by which to problematize the tacit assumption of objectivity that often accompanies practices of commemoration and the writing of national histories. Noting that the portrayal of national identity is also commonly linked to "live" bodies and their interactions with different forms of space, this analysis was then extended to encompass the embodied construction of the spatial imaginary and the commensurate practices of inclusion and exclusion that are represented within military-themed video games. This section specifically highlights the extent to which these video games can be seen to both reproduce and critique the thin diving line between "safe" patriotism and "dangerous" nationalism. This analysis also emphasised the role of the surrounding space in the perception of specific individual bodies, noting that specific forms of action and interaction are permitted and precluded when the conditions that are required for one's "belonging" are not met.

It is, however, also worthwhile to highlight that not all forms of space – whether "real" or "virtual" in nature – are afforded the same status as the "monumental" forms of space that are discussed within these sections. There are also a plethora of everyday, "mundane" forms of space that are used to convey a more unremarkable sense of belonging, providing a constantly forgotten reminder that we are "in place" when we are amidst the familiar clutter that we take for granted (Billig, 1995, pp. 49-50). Although the labelling of such spaces as mundane implies that this is 'the realm of dull compulsion and habit, boredom and oppression' (Edensor, 2003, p. 155), these spaces are a vital means by which spatial situatedness and belonging is produced in the periods between the more overt evocations of identity and nationalistic sentiment (Billig, 1995). Section 5.4, therefore, focusses specifically on the representation of these forms of space within military-themed video games, highlighting the production of a nationalistic geopolitics through the player's defence of an individually recognisable way of life. As Graham surmises, these spatial imaginaries can potentially 'affect collective notions of what cities and urban life actually are, *or what they might actually become*' (2004, pp. 109-110; emphasis added). Here, our encounters with mundane urban sites are produced by our encounters with their associated "ghosts" (see, for example, Edensor, 2005; see also Chapter Three). Unlike the "ghosts" that are more commonly associated with the supernatural realm, however, the spectral traces that are evident within military-themed video games serve to threaten the corporeality of the player. The player is not witnessing the unearthing of some bygone time – preserved within the excesses of urban decay – but rather the potential entombing of their own spaces and routines, which are subsumed by the practices of counterterrorism and warfare. The aim for the

player, within these video games, is to prevent one's own present and its accompanying way of life from becoming the marginalised "ghosts" of the national past. Whilst such a practice can have the potential effect of rendering monumental spaces banal – highlighting the everyday nature of the routines that surround them – this form of representational practice elevates personal, everyday experience to the realm of national political practice.

This analysis of mundane spaces began with a focus on the related notions of "home" and "house", examining the ways in which the representation of contrasting forms of everyday urban space can be used in order to mark particular places for acts of violence. This was then reinforced with an examination of the presence or absence of civilians, highlighting the extent to which the presence or absence of "normal" peoples (i.e. non-combatants) is used to rationalise the use of military force. These different patterns of representation are used to reinforce the perceptual difference between the notions of "space" and "place". Through the inclusion or exclusion of specific environments, objects and flows, we are shown that "they" live in dangerous and unrecognisable spaces, which are to be subjected to violent action in order to render them safe. "We", meanwhile, are shown to live in recognisable places – characterised by the remnants of familiar routines and spatial practices – and may justifiably draw upon violence in the preservation and continuation of "our" way of life.

Chapter Six: Reading Rural Space

Introduction

In Chapter Two, I examined some of the prevailing conceptualisations of the relationship between political phenomena and popular culture. Drawing on approaches from within both IR and critical geopolitics, I argued that video games can be seen to be 'constitutive' of particular geopolitical imaginaries - the 'collections of facts and stereotypes about places in the world that together compose an individual's (or a group's) worldview' (Dittmer, 2010, p. 18). Such an approach suggests that popular culture does not simply provide a blind facsimile of space, but rather that it serves to naturalise or destabilise the ideas about such spaces that are prevalent at a given moment. Chapter Three addressed some of the different ways in which political spaces are theorised, differentiating between the urban, rural and temporal emphases that are evident within the surrounding literatures. Noting the particular prevalence of urban imaginaries, Chapter Five engaged with the different ways in which the simulation of urban and suburban spaces within video games can be seen to be constitutive of different forms of national identity. Within this chapter, however, the focus of this thesis shifts away from the urban core, out to the rural periphery. As Chapter Three highlighted, the field of rural geography has begun to acknowledge the prospect that the notion of rurality 'does not describe a fast, hard and indisputable material object, but rather refers to a loose set of ideas and associations that have developed over time and which are debated and contested' (Woods, 2011, p. 16; see also, Cronon, 1996a; Cronon, 1996b; Halfacree, 1993; Halfacree, 2006; Lewis, 2007, p. 5). The study of popular culture provides a site within which different, competing imaginaries can be subjected to scrutiny, facilitating reflection upon the ways in which different spatial meanings are created and sustained. This has prompted critical reflection on the representation of peripheral, rural spaces with a variety of different forms of popular culture, including film (see, for example, Bell, 1997; Dalby, 2008; Eriksson, 2010; Fish, 2007; Murphy, 2013; Woodward and Winter, 2007) and television (Horton, 2008a; 2008b).

These analyses have focussed on a variety of different imaginaries of peripheral and rural spatiality, using these as the basis on which to access the prevailing geopolitical scripts. Dalby, for example, argues that 'combat movies have been an integral part of the production of geopolitical spaces which construct identities of heroes and villains on the one hand, but also provide both fictional and mimetic discourses of the terrains of danger on the other' (2008b, p. 441). Woodward and Winter afford a similar role to the rural representations that are contained within British and American war films, highlighting the ways in which these imaginaries have been 'used as a scenic device for narrative

and plot purposes, and as metaphors for broader anxieties about national identity and the morality of armed conflict' (2007, pp. 91-92). Murphy, meanwhile, traces the evolution of a 'rural gothic' imaginary within the horror genre, observing that 'whilst Americans in real life have a high opinion of rural areas and their inhabitants, they have a fondness for watching horror films in which rural and wilderness locales are depicted in a deeply negative light' (2013, p. 9). It is, however, notable that comparatively little attention has been paid to the role of rural imaginaries within video games.

This chapter aims to address this lacuna and will argue that the different conceptualisations of rurality – used as analytical lenses – are productive of specific ways of thinking about forms of spatial and political identities. Whilst there are a myriad of different forms and uses of the concept of the rural, this thesis can necessarily engage with only a limited number of such imaginaries. Drawing from the examination of the literature in Chapter Three, this chapter considers three particularly prevalent conceptualisations of rural spaces – the concepts of the rural idyll, the backwoods, and the wilderness. In taking this approach, I acknowledge not only that these terminologies are not universally accepted, but also that these are predominately English and American notions that may not easily translate into other contexts. Eriksson, for example, highlights that 'the term countryside has different connotations in Sweden than in the US and UK. In Sweden, rural areas far from the large cities are rarely termed 'countryside' (in Swedish: 'landsbygd') but merely as a 'sparsely populated area' (in Swedish: 'glesbygd'), and 'glesbygd' has no idyllic connotations' (2010, p. 96). Nonetheless, these terms provide a useful framework for my own analytical approach: -

6.1 Playing [the] Outside? The "Spectre" of the Rural Idyll

As Chapter Three explores, the rural idyll is a manufactured and culturally-contingent form of representation which 'imagines the rural to be a place of peace, tranquillity and simple virtue, contrasted with the bustle and brashness of the city' (Woods, 2011, p. 21). Idyllic representations within popular culture often pay little attention to the lived realities of rural culture, instead reproducing common stereotypes about the people that inhabit these regions, the activities they undertake, and the lives that they lead. These positive imaginaries of rural life are evident in games such as *Animal Crossing*, in which 'players move into a town filled with cartoonish animal creatures and buy a house, then work, trade, and personalise their microenvironment. The game offers a series of innocuous, even mundane activities like bug catching, gardening, and wallpaper designing; like *The Sims*, *Animal Crossing*'s primary metaphors are social interaction and household customisation' (Bogost, 2007, p. 267). In the 'shooter' genre of video games, however, this 'idyllic' form of rurality is much less evident. This may, to some extent, be the result of the requirements of the genre type, which uses imaginaries of violence and conflict as a means by which to control player progression and

advance the core narrative. It is, however, worthwhile to note that comparable, combat-themed media forms can be seen to have drawn on the representation of the 'idyllic' as a means by which to either emphasise aspects of identity or to outline what it is that is somehow 'at stake' in the central conflict. Jason Dittmer, for example, reflects on the origin story of the *Captain Britain* comic book character, concluding that the figure garnered political legitimacy 'from his connection to an essentialised primordial British nation, symbolised by the trans-historical figures of Merlin and the Round Table' (2011, p. 78). As a result it is important to question what role – if any – notions of an 'idyllic' form of space can be seen to play in the formation of particular geopolitical imaginaries within the 'shooter' genre of video games. There were some, albeit limited, examples of idyllic imaginaries evident in the video games that were analysed in the construction of this thesis. Particularly notable is the representation of the Oasis encampment within Chapter Three of *Homefront* (2011), which serves as a symbolic starting point from which American soldiers can seek to restore their way of life following Korean occupation: -

> 'From the outside it's just more boarded up suburban failure. But inside we've built ourselves a safe haven' (Boone, Chapter Three, Homefront)

The camp serves as an analogy for the idyllic conceptualisation of the relationship between rurality and the early American settlers. The rural protections afforded to nations by mountains and seas (Edensor, 2002, p. 40) are rescaled to fit 'our little piece of America' (Boone, Chapter Three), as the camp is hidden from view by the surrounding trees. The camp exists in harmony with nature, growing its own food, generating electricity from the wind and solar power, and collecting rain water. Despite its modest resources, the inhabitants of the camp emphasise the value of freedom, having somewhere to call home, and the importance of hands-on labour (one inhabitant, for example, patches into Korean radio signals). The camp is the new homely space, following the erasure of conventional daily life, one that is occupied by families undertaking ordinary, day-to-day tasks such as cooking. Imbued with this symbolic value, the subsequent GKR attack (in which Boone is killed) garners a much greater emotional impact. That he is hung from the children's swing set only serves to heighten the affectivity of this destruction of the rebuilt American domestic sphere.

It is also worthwhile to note the way in which the space is treated by the game's ludic structures. This is one of the few sections in which violent actions are not available to the player – the only permitted means of interaction is to move through the camp, talking to the various residents. The gameplay also highlights the narrative significance of the area, as a hidden zone away from the Korean gaze. It is only through the player's actions that Korean violence is brought into the Oasis. The

player could have instead chosen to stay in the camp, amongst friendly faces, but would have played no further part in the war effort that forms the game's narrative.

The above examination highlights the extent to which idyllic notions of space may be incompatible with the violence that underpins the 'shooter' video game. Such games more commonly focus on 'backwoods' or 'wilderness' imaginaries, producing externalised spaces that stand in opposition to the Self. The analysis of these backwoods and peripheral spaces could conceivably focus on a wide range of different video games, as many titles call upon the player to venture beyond the limits of the urban core. Here, however, this thesis will focus specifically on video games in which the simulation of rural, peripheral forms of space – whether internal or foreign – is afforded a key role within the narrative. To this end, four games were selected for a closer scrutiny – *Battlefield: Hardline* (2015), *Call of Duty: Ghosts* (2013), *Ghost Recon: Hardline (2017)* [21], and *Homefront* (2011). Some background information on the different titles is required: -

i.   *Battlefield: Hardline* (2015)

Unlike the other games considered here, *Battlefield: Hardline* takes the form of an episodic crime drama. The player takes on the role of Nick Mendoza, a Miami police detective tasked with fighting the drug war in and around the city. After he is framed by a group of corrupt police officers, led by Captain Julian Dawes, Mendoza is convicted of laundering drug money. After an escape from jail, with the help of his former partner, Mendoza works to expose his former captain's corrupt private security business. After eventually tracing Dawes to a private island, Mendoza shoots him – only to discover that he has been handed full control over the operation. This game, which was a departure from the normal focus of the broader *Battlefield* franchise, has achieved only modest cross-format sales of 4.29 million units (VGChartz, 2018a). Although placing an emphasis on policing – rather than military conflict – *Battlefield Hardline* offers a compelling example of the supposed corruption of peripheral space, predicated upon a series of powerful imaginaries of peripheral spaces. Of a particular interest to this analysis is the simulation of an anti-government commune (Episode Eight: Sovereign Lands). Such representations are crucial to the game's ability to situate the player's sense of Self, visually documenting Mendoza's journey from urban public servant to peripheral wanted criminal.

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[21] To a lesser extent, I also acknowledge the role of similar symbolism within earlier games in the *Tom Clancy* franchise, acknowledging some of the spatial codes that are offered in *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter* (2006) and *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter 2* (2007).

ii.   *Call of Duty: Ghosts* (2013)

Call of Duty: Ghosts (2013) was a greater commercial success, achieving 28.78 million cross format sales as a part of the broader *Call of Duty* franchise (VGChartz, 2018d). The game offers an alternative timeline in which a powerful group of rogue states conducts an attack on America using a hijacked orbital weapon. As the game opens, US Army officer Elias Walker recounts the legend of the formation of the titular 'Ghost' unit to his sons, Logan and David. After the attacks, the timeline advances to show the two boys now involved in a war of attrition between America and the forces of the 'Federation'. The game is notable for its focus on a core 'Ghost' identity, held to epitomise the core sense of American selfhood. The game's various missions, which see the brothers' reconnaissance units strike out into insecure peripheral spaces, are revealed to be 'test missions' in order for the brothers to prove themselves worthy of adopting the 'Ghost' mantle for themselves. The antagonist is also notably a former Ghost team member, corrupted by Federation torture. Logan is eventually kidnapped and incarcerated in a jungle pit, presumably being 'broken' in just the same way. The analysis of this game will focus on the formation and loss of self-identity, noting that a clear premium is placed upon the need for the soldier to return from their engagement with the 'uncivilised' periphery.

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Figure 49: The Structure of Santa Blanca in Ghost Recon: Wildlands

iii.   *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* (2017)

In *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* (2017), the player is tasked with disrupting the activities of a Mexican drug cartel that has seized control of the coca production in Bolivia. Spurred into action by the murder of an American DEA agent, Ricky Sandoval, the player is charged with undermining the cartel's security, distribution, influence and production activities – each of which is represented by a sprawling web of influence (see Figure 49). In this game, the player once again takes on the mantle of the 'Ghost', developing on the broader mythology of the previous titles in the franchise. This concept, referring to the elite unit featured in the game, forms a prominent part of both the game's marketing (see Figure 50) and broader narrative structure. As one of the more recent titles considered, *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* has posted only 4.49 million units of cross-format sales (VGChartz, 2018e), but remains relevant for consideration here as a result of its clear focus on identity formation through engagement with the rural periphery. The game is also notable for the use of rural and peripheral spatiality in the creation and maintenance of numerous non-American others, using its representation of Bolivian spatiality in order to script roles for the cartel, the Bolivian citizenry, and the ongoing resistance movement.

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 50: Promotional Communication for Ghost Recon: Wildlands
Source: https://twitter.com/ubisoft/status/736206281610928128

iv.   *Homefront* (2011)

The *Homefront* (2011) video game is set in the near future, following the invasion and subsequent occupation of the USA by a unified 'Greater Korean Republic' ('GKR'). It offers a dystopian imaginary of future politics, building from the real-world geopolitical tensions between North Korea and other global political powers. Its core narrative begins in 2011, charting both the unification of Korea and the economic decline of the USA. In 2024, as America becomes increasingly insular, the Greater Korean Republic launches 'their latest communication satellite, claiming that it will bring a message of peace to the entire world' (Pre-Game Cinematic). Instead it transpires that the satellite is the carrier of a massive EMP weapon, which cripples American infrastructure and scatters military forces. The player takes on the role of combat pilot Robert Jacobs, who is recruited by the American resistance forces to aid in the fightback. Although including a number of notable urban environments, some of which were discussed in Chapter Five, the game also offers several encounters with peripheral rural spaces. One such sequence details a confrontation between American resistance fighters and the occupants of a survivalist farmland encampment. Taken as a representation of the internal Other (Eriksson, 2010), this environment is used to understand the role in the cultural and political imaginary for those that detach themselves from their responsibility to the civilised core of the nation.

Within these video games, the rural periphery is uniformly presented as a zone of corruption and hostile encounter. In *Battlefield: Hardline* (2015), the rural periphery becomes a primary front in the war on drugs. In *Call of Duty: Ghosts* (2013) the player pursues a Rourke (a former ally) into the rural periphery, losing themselves in the process. In *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* (2017), the player must survive the periphery in order to prevent cartel drugs from reaching the American heartland. In *Homefront* (2011), the player must strike out beyond the perimeter walls erected by the occupying Korean forces in order for the resistance forces to push the invaders back. Taken together, the following subsections of this chapter will argue that these different approaches to the simulation of the rural imaginary can be used to understand the way in which such spaces are used to facilitate the production of a core identity dialectic – these games, like broader political society, draw upon rural spaces and imaginaries in a way that scripts particular roles for both the core, national Self and the peripheral, excluded Other[22]. With this in mind, the following sections are used to present two different readings of the role of rural spatiality within video games: -

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[22] It should be noted that I do not claim that these imaginaries encompass all potential interpretations of the role of video game rurality, but rather that this is indicative of some of the more prevalent themes identified within this material.

1. *The role of rural space in the production of an (Americanised) sense of Self identity.*

The first of these readings will explore the ways in which rural representations are afforded a role in the production of a sense of Self identity. In the first instance, this chapter examines the role of rural representations in the production of a sense of Self identity. Of a particular interest here is the notion of the 'Ghost' identity, which is advanced in *Call of Duty: Ghosts* (2013) and *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* (2017). Such characters are warrior figures, central to the process of 'physically securing the West, and simultaneously securing its identity as a repository of virtue against barbaric threats to civilisation' (Dalby, 2008b, p. 440). These figures are produced as strong, virtuous protectors through their entry into, and engagement with, peripheral places and peoples that are somehow not 'like us'. As a part of the examination of the creation of these identities, I argue that the maintenance of these identities is constructed as an act of willing subversion - the 'Ghost' must subvert its own identity in order to be able to operate successfully within the rural periphery. This reading engages with themes of control and violence, before also examining the ways in which the virtue of the 'Ghost' is threatened by a lack of mobility. Many of these games feature narratives in which the potential cause of corruption is one's permanent residence, willing or otherwise, in regions beyond the reach of urban civilisation. These games share narrative commonalities, addressing notions of 'becoming' through an engagement with peripheral forms of spatiality. Here, I examine how such developments are framed and what the consequences are for the ways in which we view peripheral regions.

2. *The role of rural space in the creation of the barbaric Other, standing in contrast to the exalted national Self*

In examining the theorisation of rurality in Chapter Three, it was notable the extent to which our understandings of peripheral places and peoples are constructed in juxtaposition to those associated with the urban core. As a result, in addition to examining the production of the Self, I also examine how rural spaces are used to facilitate the creation of geopolitical Others that are not 'like us' in some way. This may be the national Other (such as a country or foreign power) or an 'internal' Other (a marginalised offshoot of the core national identity that serves to provide a repository for denied maladies and malformations). Here, I focus particularly on the relationship between peripheral spaces and peoples and their perceived status as outside of modernity and civility. This process examines the ways in which anti-modern themes are evoked in the creation of peoples and places that are deemed to be in some way deviant or dangerous. This section offers an initial reflection on *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* (2017), noting the use of horror themes and tropes in characterising the violence and torture associated with the characters of La Yuri and El Polito. This section then discusses the representation of 'Prepper' imagery in the representation of survivalist compounds in *Battlefield:*

Hardline (2015) and *Homefront* (2011). To conclude this section I examine the construction of *Hardline*'s cartel more broadly, suggesting that this portrayal confounds the common association between peripherality and anti-modernity.

In the concluding section of this chapter I emphasise the tensions in the representation of the rural periphery, arguing that they are not only implicated in the reproduction of naturalised, 'common-sense' notions of internal and peripheral spaces, but also that these representations have implications for the way in which we are invited to think about the process of securing different forms of national and international space. The use of the rural as trope is used to highlight the problematic equivocation between rurality and, at best, anti-modernity and at worst savagery and the loss of (a particularly masculine) sense of self identity.

6.2   The 'Ghost' in the Machine: Rurality and the Formation of the Self

The nature of the rural periphery has historically been encountered and understood in a variety of conflicting ways. As Woods notes, 'rural areas are celebrated variously both as wilderness and as a bucolic ideal. Yet, they can also be portrayed as remote, backward, under-developed places, in need of modernisation' (2011, p. 1). For the early settlers, the experience of the rural 'wilderness' was one of a profound loss of control. More recently, however, that same peripheral space has been reconceptualised as a form of restorative refuge that acts to ease the pressures associated with city life (Murphy, 2013, pp. 6-7). This section explores how these spaces are presented and experienced within video games, examining how such experiences manipulate our understandings of selfhood and our relationship to peripheral regions.

In the video games examined for this analysis there were a number of notable attempts to portray the rural periphery as a zone beyond the control of urban civilisation. One example of this is evident in Episode Three of *Battlefield: Hardline* (2015), which is entitled *Gator Bait.* In this section, the player is tasked with electronically tagging bundles of drugs that are being dropped into the Everglades National Park. Although we would commonly think of such areas as managed rural space, subjected to control measures, here we are shown that attempts to integrate the region into urban American culture have failed. This is visually signified by the dilapidated and disused stadium which, through an embedded narrative moment, is revealed to have been the site of a major accident: -

> 'There was a motor boat pulling ten girls in a pyramid. They were, like, on the side of the lake and then there was boat pulling a tiger on the other side of the lake. Well… unfortunately their paths crossed. Tiger's rope crossed over the girl's rope… Next thing you know, girl loses her hand. All the other girls, they dove in, they're trying to find her

hand, and of course, the tiger swam into the mix and… that kind of messed stuff up'

(Episode Three: *Gator Bait*)

There is also evidence of the lawlessness of this peripheral zone in the integration of formerly productive infrastructural elements into an ongoing drug-smuggling operation. As such, the area is shown to be an un-tameable borderland, valuable only to those with less than moral aspirations for its use. It is a space which is populated only by criminals and aggressive wildlife.

There is, however, a clear tension between the representation of rural regions and the ways in which the player will interact with these environments. Whilst desiring to manufacture a sense of isolation and distance, the player is routinely still led through these environments by their heads-up-display (or 'HUD'). This visual apparatus places the player on the map, as well as highlighting the position of any threats that may be occupying this peripheral space. In this sense, there is little difference between the player's engagement with urban and rural spaces. In the above example, the Everglades functions primarily as a narrative sphere – the player drives for long, uninterrupted stretches whilst entering into dialogue with a supporting non-player-character. *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* (2017) also contains ludic structures that undermine this sense of vulnerability. It is, for example, impossible for the player to become separated from his/her team, as the non-player characters will simply warp to the player's location.

This level of control does, however, contribute to the broader creation of a 'warrior' like identity for the protagonist. A comparable example is provided by Woodward and Winter (2007) in their analysis of *Rambo*. Here, they reflect on the level of control over wilderness spatiality that can be attributed to the film's titular character: -

'Through his qualities and skill, we see him utterly at home in the jungle. A mere twenty-four seconds after he is parachuted into hostile territory, he proves this to us by strangling a snake bare-handed. He's so at home here that he runs (runs!) through the jungle – no silent, stealthy advantage to battle here' (Woodward & Winter, 2007, p. 95)

This 'warrior' identity is key to the formation of the player's sense of self-identity in these games, as the protagonist – and their relationship to their environment – functions as a direct extension of the player's own identity. Of a particular significance is the concept of the *Ghost*, an ethereal warrior identity that is used to signify a level of control and professionalism. These are elite warrior figures, often members of covert operations teams.

6.2.1   The 'Ghost' Mythology

One early example of the 'Ghost' mythology is evident in the *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter* series (2006-2007), during which the team often discuss their status as urban legends. In the first game in this franchise the protagonist, upon being told the antagonist is a man that is without fear, remarks that 'he's about to see a Ghost'. Like the vengeful ghosts of scary stories, Ghost team members are believed to be able to pass through their environment invisibly and reach the target for their wrath unnoticed. Like such ghosts, we are also led to believe that the Ghost team benefits from a denial of its existence. In one instance, when asked to identify himself by a Mexican commander, the protagonist responds that 'I have no name Captain. I am a Ghost and I was never here'. In the absence of a given name and national identity, the Mexican commanders address the team leader as 'Senior Ghost' – the player formally takes on the primordial national identity and 'becomes' the Ghost. The role of the 'Ghost' identity is expanded in *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* (2017). In one of the trailers for the game, entitled *'We are Ghosts'* (Ubisoft, 2017), the significance of this identity is explored in detail: -

> 'We are travellers, going miles through mud and muck. We are survivors, equipping the right gear to survive for months in the harshest conditions. We are strangers, far away from home. We are hunters, blending so deep into the environment we become part of it. We are adventurers, doing what no one else dares. We are watchers, seeing everything – leaving no trace. We are scholars, studying our enemies – so we can hit 'em where it hurts. We are judges, deciding who will live and who will die. *We are Ghosts, and we do not exist*' (Ubisoft, 2017; emphasis added)

The ethereal nature of the 'Ghost' continues to be identified in *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* (2017). This 'Ghost' identity is created in contrast to the rebel and cartel factions, which are portrayed as different forms of ideological extremism. El Sueno, leader of the cartel, is described as having 'a religious streak that reads pretty close to delusional. He's taken vows of poverty, chastity – he's not in it for the chocha or the money, he's in it for the power'. Even the allied Bolivian faction, the rebel group referred to as *Kataris 26*, are characterised as being fundamentally untrustworthy and self-interested: -

> 'Bolivians have a long history of hating us Yankees, but this time let's hope the enemy of my enemy will be my friend. But don't turn your back on him, I'm not going to' ('Karen Bowman', opening cutscene)

This is further reinforced during an incidental moment of dialogue, heard whilst exploring the Itacua Bravo base, during which one of the Ghosts says that he's not comfortable working with the rebels as 'that sort of ideology tends to lead to more bodies'. The 'Ghosts' meanwhile, seem to have no ideology, subverting their own self-interests and self-identity in pursuit of the mission objectives. This

is emphasised in the game's dialogue, as the team evade discussions of their past missions and discussion of their status as 'urban legends': -

Karen Bowman: 'I was a rookie field officer in Moscow when the coup went down. There was talk you were involved'

Ghost: 'Na, it must've been someone else, we were never there'

Karen Bowman: 'It's not every day that you get to meet an urban legend in the flesh'

Ghost: 'Ha, you should tell that to my kid. Maybe, he'd listen when I tell him to take the trash out'

The 'Ghosts', whilst extraordinary soldiers, have lives and families that are safe back home – well away from the frontlines that they themselves defend. Their denial of recognition continues throughout the game, reflected in moments of embedded narrative. One such sequence occurs as the team discover some of the lavish tombs in which the cartel inters its fallen soldiers. When one of the Ghosts professes a desire for such a monument, he is scolded by his teammates: -

'What are you, a Seal? Because I don't know any quiet professionals who'd need something like this'

They do not maintain the characters that might be expected of seasoned warriors, often disrupting serious moments of action with moments of group banter. Some such exchanges include the ways in which they wear their underpants whilst on mission and the stories surrounding their worst injuries – ''Boston Elementary Academy 1991: Cindy Margolan caught my fingers in a door – thought I was gonna die' (Background exchange) – as well as the stories surrounding the professional misconduct of other personnel: -

'[S]quad leader didn't feel like humping the minimum safe distance from the explosion…so when they blew the cache we were dodging goddamn rocks… two kids got concussion, one fucker's ankle got smashed to hamburger – all because one squad leader was too lazy to hump two clicks… That's when we knew we had to join the secret squirrel squad'

Although these characters do not acknowledge their own influence themselves, this is reinforced in key moments within the game's dialogue: -

Pac Katari: 'Four soldiers? This is the help you promised? That Sandoval promised? A single Yankee died, so you send a handful of soldiers. Hundreds of Bolivians have died from Santa Blanca's bullets, where will my hundreds of soldiers come from?'

'Karen Bowman': 'As Americas, we aren't here remember? These soldiers are the best covert ops team our country has to offer. With their help, you won't need hundreds of soldiers'

This is also reinforced through the use of visual shorthand. Whilst the arrival of the Ghosts in Bolivia is masked by rain and the darkness of the night sky, the commencement of their mission is marked by a time-lapse montage of the sun rising over Bolivia. The emphasis of this particular sequence - which incorporates the game's opening title sequence – is not subtle, the arrival of the Ghosts is symbolically represented by the dawning of a new day for Bolivia. In *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* (2017), the depiction of rural space is used to discipline our understandings of the 'Ghost' identity. This relationship, which implies a symbiotic relationship between the soldier and their environment, is not confined to this one particular title.

A similar imaginary is also evident within *Call of Duty: Ghosts* (2013). This mythology is established within the game's opening narrative, in which the player is told what is supposedly an urban legend surrounding the formation of an elite 'Ghost' military unit. This story says that, whilst fighting back against an overwhelming number of enemies, a group of fifteen soldiers became covered in blood and sand. This is described as being form of baptism, 'changing them, anointing them' (Ghost Stories, Call of Duty: Ghosts), and affords these fighters a distinct advantage in combat. One's ability to 'become' a Ghost is, as a result, presented as the logical consequence of the communion of the national guardian and an innate natural power. One is stripped of one's own identity, and becomes an extension of the environment itself – no different to the wide oceans, high mountains and deep ravines that protect national territories.

This 'Ghost' identity is, however, more nuanced that this initial reading might suggest. At one level, the synergy between man and nature has the effect of feminising these regions, as they are made the subject of masculine, American penetration and reclamation. At the same time, however, there is an implied sense of risk. Whilst the wilderness landscape is initially depicted as unproblematic, relegated to the status of something that 'used to freak the hell out of your mother' (Ghost Stories, Call of Duty: Ghosts), it is also shown to threaten the moral compass of the 'Ghost'. We are told of the torture of Rourke, a former Ghost team member corrupted by 'Amazonian' torture techniques: -

'There are ancient tribes, deep in the Amazon, who have perfected the art of torture over hundreds of years. The Federation embraced this heritage, enhancing it with more sophisticated methods. They kept Rourke in a hole for months, feeding him food mixed with the poisons of exotic plants. As they broke down his body, they went to work on his

mind. When his mind broke, they went to work on his soul' (Elias, The Hunted, Call of Duty: Ghosts)

Whilst it is made clear that the individual can become a better protector as a result of their interaction with the wilderness, they too risk being lost unless they can come home to the urban centres that they are sworn to defend. Rourke loses himself, after months of torture in the jungle and, at the end of the game, stands ready to inflict the same fate upon Logan: -

'You're good. You'd have been a hell of a Ghost. But that's not going to happen. There ain't gonna be any Ghosts, we're gonna destroy 'em together' (The Ghost Killer, Call of Duty: Ghosts)

Rourke's actions serve to interrupt the process of Logan's 'becoming a Ghost'. Instead, Logan is forcibly removed from his team and - it is implied - is held in captivity in a pit in the Amazonian jungle. By preventing Logan from returning home, he renders him unable to fulfil the greater purpose that underpinned his journey. This narrative repurposes the wilderness as a place where the monsters skulk in the bushes. Here the monster 'out there' is shown to be just like you, but disconnected from the urban core that provides the foundation for the formation of our sense of Self. This need for a Ghost to be able to return to his home, to remain involved in the defence of his home country, explains the treatment of the bodies of Ghost team members who are killed in action: -

'In the event a Ghost is killed, his remains are placed face down, with his head pointed in the direction of his home [and] his weapon next to him. We do it this way, so that when our fallen are taken to the other side they can watch over us and keep an eye on the enemy. Dad was gone. Nothing could change that. But Logan and I, we were still here. The Federation was still here. Rourke was still here. This war wasn't over, not by a long shot. Goodbye dad. I'll never take your place, but I'll die trying to fill it' (Hesh, All or Nothing, Call of Duty: Ghosts)

Whilst a dead Ghost might physically remain in the wilderness, his role transcends the limitations of his physical form. When buried, the Ghost is returned to nature and symbolically regarded as a part of the broader, 'natural' systems of territorial defence that protect the members of the family, and the nation, that are left behind.

6.2.2   Fighting in the Periphery: Space, Violence and Identity

It is also worthwhile to consider how these games approach the use of violence against these peripheral regions. In many 'shooter' video games, the potential for collateral damage is simply coded out through the removal of civilians from the simulation of the space. This is noted by von Zwieten,

whose analysis of *Medal of Honor* (2010) highlights that 'the region of Afghanistan modelled into the game appears to be populated by thousands of Taliban and Chechen fighters, and one lonely sheep herder, who is taken out of the player's consideration by having him taken care of by one of the player's teammates in a cut-scene' (2011, p. 8). A similar approach is evident in both *Homefront* (2011) and *Call of Duty: Ghosts* (2013), which simply remove the possibility for the player to take violent action against civilian targets. Whilst *Battlefield: Hardline* (2015) can also function as a straightforward 'shooter' video game, in which the player eliminates all opponents before progressing, the use of a non-violent approach is promoted by the game's underlying ludic structures. The game provides additional rewards for the use of non-lethal takedowns – its so-called 'Arrest' mechanic – in the form of 'Expert' experience points that are used in order to unlock new weapons and attachments. This mechanic is not without narrative issues however, as it somehow remains available to players even after their character becomes a wanted fugitive. In contrast to these approaches, the *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* (2017) video game is one of the few 'shooters' in which civilian avatars are routinely included throughout the gameworld. In this title, the avoidance of collateral damage is represented as being a core part of being a professional military operative. The non-player characters constantly highlight the proximity of civilian avatars, reminding the player that we 'don't want to shoot anybody by accident'. At one point, after a slipup driving between missions, one of the team can be heard to exclaim: 'What the hell? You just hit a civilian'. As an isolated incident, however, the game allows this mistake to go unpunished. This game even affords other combatants some protections, as the game's loading screen informs us that 'killing surrendering enemies can lead to a game over'. Some embedded narrative moments even attempt to humanise the cartel members. In one of the game's radio broadcasts, the character of DJ Peralta berates the Ghosts for the murder of a cartel member who had 'three kids and a fourth on the way. She's gonna be a girl, and her name's Paula. Hope you remember that name, I hope it haunts your dreams. I hope you choke on it and die!'. The Ghosts, for their part, differentiate between the killing of combatants as a part of their mission, and the actions that were necessary for Sandoval to maintain his undercover status: -

> 'Think of all the evil shit Sandoval had to do to be Sueno's right hand – dropping bodies…
> All the stuff you have to do against the people you are supposed to protect, that's what
> gets me, how do you live with it for that long?''

Here, however, all sense of introspection is almost immediately disrupted as one of the Ghosts excitedly exclaims: 'Assisting cartel-crushing rebels… I love my job!'. A more sombre analysis of the comparative use of Ghost and cartel violence is offered following the mission to terminate the cabal torturers La Yuri and El Polito. This aspect of these games is discussed in more detail in the following subsection, which will reflect on the use of gothic tropes in the formulation of the 'Other'.

6.3   Rurality and the Role of the Rural 'Other'

The process of creating an 'Other' is one of inclusion and exclusion, necessitating 'a process of reflection by which other people, cultures and environments are everything our cultures are not; 'their' otherness contains 'our' sameness. This implies that meanings of places are constructed as bounded enclosed spaces defined through difference, and that the construction of place attempts to establish a relationship between place and identity' (Eriksson, 2010, p. 96). The rural - where constructed in opposition to the urban - is often valorised for its apparent masculinising effect, perceived to act as a tonic for the feminising effect of the city and of 'civilisation' (Cronon, 1996a). Here, however, I suggest that the representation of rurality is a means by which to represent a perceived difference between the disciplined and modern Self, and a backwards (and backwoods) Other that is shown to participate in behaviours that would be unacceptable within the confines of urban, supposedly civilised, space. Such a binary is particularly common within horror fiction, including films such as *Lord of the Flies* (1954), *Deliverance* (1972), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *YellowBrickRoad* (2010). Indeed, as Murphy notes, this is a medium which has long depended on rural imaginaries in order to remediate 'the long-standing historical sense that those who dwell in backwoods are prone to savagery and degradation' (2013, p. 8). Similar themes are also noted by Eriksson in her analysis of the film *The Hunters*, in which she suggests that 'racism, sexism, tax evasion and other phenomena disassociated with the discourse of Swedish modernity can, via the logics of internal orientalism, be geographically situated in places such as Norrland (but also other places dislocated from 'urban modernity') since these places and peoples remain accepted targets for the elite' (2010, pp. 102-103). These rural imaginaries provide a simple shorthand for our fears of what might happen if we leave civilisation and risk an encounter with the 'uncivilised' evil that lurks beyond the walls. In *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* (2017) we are introduced to two "uncivilised" rural monsters – cabal torturers La Yuri and El Polito, described as 'demons… [whose] talk of love made me want to vomit' (Pac Katari). Here, rural Bolivia becomes a place in which the pair are able to act on a sexualised, fetishistic enjoyment of physical violence. In one audio recording, a collectible discoverable by the player, La Yuri can be heard to overtly sexualise the genitals of one of her victims: -

'Look at that boner… 'That's a big boner - I'm taking his pants off'

This imaginary of the abject Other is reflected in the representation of the environment. When the team eventually trace the pair to a hunting lodge, 'the audience doesn't need to have it explained to them that the isolated cabin in the midst of the deep, dark forest is a locale in which horrific events will take place: they've seen it all before' (Murphy, 2013, p. 15). Unlike the deconstructive *Cabin in the Woods* horror film that is explored by Murphy, the 'Cabin in the *Wildlands*' offers no such subversion

of this classic trope. Even before the Ghosts encounter the pair in the building's basement, there are a series of familiar visual signifiers that mediate a particular understanding of the environment. As the player progresses into the lodge, they encounter rooms that are filled with antique weaponry and mounted hunting trophies – including endangered animals such as lions and tigers – as well as a television that shows only static. In the bedroom, a human skull and macabre images of human anatomy are juxtaposed against a glossy picture of a couple in love. Moving towards the basement, the player encounters representational imagery associated with the so-called 'Prepper' movement – including a large amount of toilet roll and tinned food. Once in the basement, the imagery becomes more overtly gothic. The player encounters a series of holding cells – including one in which a mutilated body has been hanged – as well as a series of dismembered bodies, strapped to morgue tables. When they eventually reach the two cabal members, the pair are 'working' on another victim. Here, the discussion of the violence continues to have a sexual tone: -

> **El Polito:** 'Just now, when I was breaking that man's hands, I was imagining that he had tried to touch you…'

> **La Yuri:** '…when he was lying there whimpering, I almost felt pity for him. I wanted to take care of him, put my arms around him'

In addition to the representation of La Yuri and El Polito, as well as their hunting cabin, it is also important to highlight the ways in which the perceptions of violence and torture are managed within this game. After killing the two torturers, a subsequent dialogue sees the Ghost unit reflect on the mentality of the pair and the utility of torture as a tool: -

> 'Obviously it's nothing as softball as waterboarding right?' 'I mean, we're talking permanent damage and death here' 'They were also medically trained, so you have to figure that there's some pharmaceuticals involved to keep their victims awake' 'You see, back in the days, the real torturers didn't need tricks to keep their victims awake' 'So, they're amateurs?' 'That's obvious from how few people survive their interrogations – a real torturer, a professional, he or she is in control, he or she understands what's needed. Yuri and Polito were sloppy. They can get carried away, they do it for the fun of it – not because it's a job, not for the art. They're brutal – not because they try to be. They're brutal because they're incompetent'

This rumination on the nature of torture is revealing. Here, the cartel torturers – the abject Other – are imagined as brutal, uncontrolled and sloppy. The torturers aren't good at their jobs, because they aren't truly working – they are engaging in acts of violence, because such acts give them pleasure. In

contrast, it is implied that the American agent is a professional – a civilised person who gets no gratification from the act of torture and shows a distaste for the infliction of permanent harm. Despite such moralising, it should be noted that the Ghost team are shown to be simply accepting of the value of violent action. One revealing exchange, after La Yuri and El Polito are dispatched, reflects on the actualisation of this revenge mission. Bowman notes that, in films, vengeance is often not fulfilling, before reflects that she feels 'fucking great… Taking out that lovey-dovey horror show also earned us some points with the locals'. This primal violence is also evident in other interactions with cartel members: -

> 'Here's the deal asshole, you answer my questions or I put a bullet in your gut and leave
> you to die in your own shit' (Interrogation of the cartel boss as part of the rescue of
> Amaru)

The threat of violence against these lieutenants is shown to be effective, always yielding results. It is notable that the *actualisation* of such threats of violence is not facilitated by the game's ludic structures, however, as the player simply knocks the lieutenant unconscious and moves on.

More broadly, then, the periphery becomes a place in which people – even the members of the Ghosts – can act in accordance with the primal urges that are forbidden to those in 'civilised' urban regions. This is foregrounded in one later level, in which the player aims to expose a high-profile Argentinian politician, who is known to be 'using Carzita's resort to hide his flings with local escorts'. Using the drone, the player is able to capture footage of a bizarre sex session in which the politician is talking to a prostitute about how he 'stole a cat's leg… it had a wooden leg, and I stole it'.

In engaging with the construction of the 'Other' within these games, it is important to highlight that such an emphasis implicates more than the boundary between the national and the non-national. As Eriksson highlights, it 'is often ignored that the construction of national distinctiveness produced by the elite to identity the inside of the nation from the outside, also produces internal exclusions (2010, p. 95). Such a practice is refered to as *internal* Orientalism, a term which denotes 'the deeply embedded practices and tradition of representing a subordinate region as afflicted with various vices and deficiencies so as to produce an exhaulted national identity' (Eriksson, 2010, p. 96). There have been a number of different ways in which this internal 'Other' has been represented with culture, including as the American hillbilly, the redneck, and white trash (Eriksson, 2010, p. 97; see also Jansson, 2005; Jarosz & Lawson, 2002; Murphy, 2013; Williamson, 1995). The following section examines some of the ways in which these stereotypes are produced in video games, focussing on particular sections of *Homefront* and *Battlefield Hardline*: -

6.3.1 Rurality and the Internal Other

The examination of an internal Other implies a different form of political geography, as the Othered region remains a part of the national whole and retains access to the national institutions that are enjoyed by the Self (Eriksson, 2010, p. 96). The creation of such an Other has found a variety of different targets. Stewart (1996), for example, focussed on the characterisation of Appalachia as both a region of both an old-fashioned authenticity and a regressive backwardness. Similarly Murphy (2013), in her analysis of horror films, highlights the frequency with which the American South is constructed as an abhorrent Other that is held apart from the rest of the USA. Eriksson notes a similar characterisation of specific regions of Sweden, evident in films such as *The Hunters*. In doing so, she suggests that our engagement with the portrayal of such regions in popular culture 'is structured by certain principles to evoke feelings and emotions toward characters according to values we are

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Figure 51: Promotional Communication for Far Cry 5 (Ubisoft, 2017a)

expected to share. We are spoken to as though we already hold the same field of vision. Through these processes, individuals are grouped into categories of 'we' with a given set of values and identities, and of 'others' – groups of individuals who are represented as different with traditional and primitive values we not are expected to identify with. The groups of 'we' and 'others' are social constructions but have distinct and factual material consequences; filmmakers contribute to these social constructs whether it is intentional or not' (Eriksson, 2010, p. 102). The representation of the internal Other is gaining increasing traction in video games. The then-forthcoming *Far Cry 5* (Figure 51), for example, caused some controversy by apparently making white, Christian men the enemy in its narrative. Other types of 'internal' Others are evident within both *Homefront* (2011) and *Battlefield: Hardline* (2015). In Chapter Five of *Homefront*, the resistance fighters go to collect a helicopter that had been promised to them by Americans living on nearby farmland. In Episode Eight of *Battlefield: Hardline*, entitled *Sovereign Lands*, the player goes to a similar encampment in order to collect a safe-cracking robot. Each of these environments represents a perversion of the 'idyllic' notions of country life, relying on some of the stereotypical conceptualisations of the prevalent (and particularly American) survivalist, or 'Prepper', movement. The following readings examine how the representations of rurality that are contained within these sections are influential in the formation of an *internal* Other: -

Homefront (2011): On the Farm

Before the player leaves the urban core, the underlying narrative structures our expectations. In one radio broadcast, the player is told that 'after the EMP went off and the electronic grid that sustained us broke apart, our nation fell into a kind of madness… People turned on each other… Many beyond the Wall have no allegiance to any cause, other than their own survival. If you must deal with them, be advised that they can be unpredictable, and a fair number are outright insane' (The 'Voice of Freedom' Radio Station, Chapter Five). This broadcast serves to render these individuals, and the environments in which they can be found, as being somehow disconnected from the American, masculine values that a return to nature would otherwise be expected to stimulate. Although the surrounding farmland is shown to be occupied by Americans, who display the American flag and therefore are 'supposed to be on our side' (Rianna, Chapter Five), they are lack the expected values of American citizens. Once they are told of Boone's death, they renege on the prior agreement to aid the American resistance movement. They offer to spare Connor's life, but only if he will allow them to lynch Hopper and keep Rianna for their 'entertainment': -

> 'Well shit, I guess the deal's off… You know, I'll tell you what – I'll take the bitch, and scarface hiding over there, and you can walk away without a bullet in you' (Chapter Five, Homefront)

Here, the player is confronted with a form of violent hyper-nationalism that is commonly attributed to the 'foreign' Other or to the mentally ill. This manifests in both the violence that the survivalists direct at the protagonists, as well as that which is directed at captured Korean fighters. In one section of the level, two survivalists are shown shooting at the ground around the feet of a captured KPA soldier[23]. Although this violence is committed by Americans, against Korean soldiers, it is identified by the resistance team members as being un-American. One exclaims 'I can't watch, they're toying with him', whilst another protests that 'this isn't right, we [Americans] don't kill for sport'. The underlying message here is that these environments do not provide spiritual enlightenment, but rather that they result in a loss of Self due to one's distance from civilising urban structures. The perceived lack of American values demonstrated in this region not only causes the resistance members to question the morality of their fellow Americans, but also that of Boone – their ally – who had helped to set up the meeting with this group in the first place.

In this space, then, we see a form of rurality that is devoid of the spiritual connection to one's 'better' Self that is promised by the idyllic and pastoral mythologies, instead experiencing the rural periphery as a morally barren place of betrayal, violence, torture and murder. This framing of rural inhabitants is not specific to *Homefront* (2011). Some similar approaches are also evident in the portrayal of rural space in *Battlefield Hardline* (2015).

Battlefield: Hardline (2015): Going to Camp

Two particularly interesting examples of the internal Other are evident in Episode Five ('*Gauntlet')* and Episode Eight ('*Sovereign Lands*'). In Episode Five, rural space serves a clear symbolic purpose. In the early stages, with Mendoza travelling on prison transport, the surrounding wilderness represents both unreachable freedom and considerable isolation. Indeed, when Mendoza is eventually freed, he then must navigate the borderland town and head for the hills. Everything in the interim space is expendable and valueless – indeed, as part of his escape Mendoza can create a distraction by blowing up a meth lab. In Episode Eight, meanwhile, the representation of the hostile external space relies on similar stereotypes to those evident in the *Homefront* farm. Here, the player must retrieve a safe-cracking robot from a survivalist encampment (Figure 52). Unlike *Homefront* however, in which the background narrative is provided by the faceless *Voice of Freedom* radio station, the setting for this encounter is established through an interim narrative space – the American diner serves as the last bastion of civilisation, whilst the long and dusty roads are used to indicate the region's isolated and

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[23] This sequence can be viewed online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lG5-oSpVduU, from 8 mins and 23 seconds onwards.

unproductive nature. The characters call attention to the region's inhospitable climate, with one of the group – Dune Albert – remarking that 'if I wasn't covered in dust, then I'd need like SPF5800 out here' (Episode Eight). As they travel to the encampment, the dialogue between Marcus and his former girlfriend hints at a perceived racism[24]: -

'He didn't approve – I'll give you one guess why' (Marcus, Episode Eight)

The girl shows the pair a GPS tracking bracelet, given to her by her father after Marcus supposedly tried to 'kidnap' her from the commune. Again, this aspect speaks to some broader tropes surrounding the status of women in communes – like Rianna in *Homefront*, they are perceived as possessions that are to be kept and enjoyed. Also similarly to *Homefront*, the inhabitants of the commune are shown to be treacherous – they sell out Nick Mendoza for a $250,000 bounty and imprison Boomer against the agreement made with Dune. Their break with the broader national identity is also signified in the ways in which these characters act towards the government – they discuss the possibility of false flag attacks and the need for martial law. Following some exploration, the player can also discover a secondary narrative pertaining to the abduction, torture and subsequent murder of a law enforcement official.

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Figure 52: Survivalist Compound (Episode Eight, Battlefield Hardline, 2015)

Both of these depictions of survivalist encampments serve to reinforce the centrality of the state to American identity, noting the need for the civilising structures that it provides. Those who settle in wilderness regions are shown to lose humanity, replacing the structures of governance with violence

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[24] Although this is later subverted, as the group's leader clarifies that 'race is not a factor here… My dislike for you is strictly personal'.

and brutality. Whilst alternative systems of self-governance are evident, drawing upon widely held cultural fantasies of survivalism and self-reliance, these are shown to be an insufficient means by which to preserve cultural values. In both *Homefront* and *Battlefield Hardline*, the absence of state intervention into wilderness areas is shown to result in the decline of one's moral integrity. Unlike idyllic or pastoral models of peripheral spaces, in which rural life is shown as something admirable, rural/wilderness space is used within these games to symbolically represent a group of people that choose to withdraw from the state and its laws and social norms of behaviour.

6.3.2   Modernity and Traditionalism

As a final focus, it is worthwhile to consider the ways in which our notions of modernity unduly influence our formulations of the notion of the Other. As Eriksson highlights, 'the apparent others of "progressive" and modern nations are those who fail to meet the standards of what is considered modern' (2010, p. 95). A similar form of representational shorthand is often evident within video games, as the analyses of *Homefront* and *Battlefield: Hardline* demonstrated, in which rural regions are commonly constructed as anti-modern, backwards regions. Rather than valorise rural life, video game environments visually demonstrate a degraded standard of living. These games show rural dwellingspaces to be simplistic, lacking the trappings of modernity that are identifiable within their urban and suburban analogues. Buildings often lack basic amenities and are made from cheap materials (including corrugated metals), and have often suffered significant structural damage. The rigidity of this framework is complicated in *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* (2017), which contains multiple prevalent 'Others' against which American identity is balanced. In this game, the nature of the American identity – represented by the 'Ghost' identity that is discussed earlier in this chapter – is constructed in contrast to the Mexican cartel, the Bolivian paramilitary and the Bolivian citizenry.

As Eriksson highlights in her analysis of Swedish film, belonging to Western modernity 'means, to a great extent, having the means for and knowledge of which commodities and symbols to desire and consume' (2010, p. 95). Here, the narrative is driven by the conflict between the modern, capitalist influence of the cartel and the agrarian ideology of the Bolivian resistance movement. In *Ghost Recon: Wildlands*, the Mexican drug cartel is shown to share many of the characteristics that we would more commonly attribute to the allied fighting force – mobility, modernity and tech-savvy. This interpretation is frequently reinforced through the game's emergent narrative aspects. On the in-game radio station, for example, cartel broadcasts describe Bolivia as 'a backwards corner of mud and muck', claiming that the arrival of the coca trade has advanced standards of living in the country. The cartel members position themselves as businessmen, individuals fulfilling the needs of the market. This hard-line capitalism, predicated on the continuing production and exportation of Bolivian coca,

allows the group to position themselves as 'Bolivia's partner in bringing our traditions into our future' (Radio broadcast). Consumption is blurred with spirituality, with addiction described as the provision of a sense of spiritual meaning – it provides a purpose for being a part of the world. Other aspects of the narrative also reflect the seductive role of the trappings of Western modernity.

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Figure 53: La Yuri and El Polito converse on Facebook (Ghost Recon: Wildlands, 2017)

Reflecting on the cartel's recruitment of the torturers La Yuri and El Polito, Bowman highlights that the cartel 'showered them with gifts… even a new car' (Bowman Briefing). The pair are even likened to lovesick teenagers, shown corresponding via the messaging functions of social media (Figure 53). A further example of this is also evident in the Bowman briefing on Carzita: -

> 'He's a Meppy – a Mexican preppy – or a Prepxican if you prefer. His main achievement in life was to win the sperm lottery… Son of a telecoms billionaire, who gave his son everything – money, cars, education - BA from Harvard, MA Warton Business, DPhil from Oxford to acquire a little sophistication and some good English clothes'

If, as Eriksson suggests, modernity can be measured through consumption, then the cartel are clearly intended to represent a modern security threat. They are able to rely on the symbols of modern life in order to lure recruits, including status symbols – including vehicles and vast personal wealth – as well as media icons, such as narcocorridos singers: -

> 'His fans are so nuts for him that, this past August, when he refused to go onstage in Anaheim over some pay dispute… the audience rioted. Wrecked the venue'

The cartel are even heard to offer a doctrine of female empowerment, telling of the potential for strong women to rise to positions of power: -

> 'How did I rise through the ranks to become one of the most feared and respected women in the cartel? I act like I am afraid of nothing, like I have the biggest [balls] in the room… Like nothing, and no one, is going to stop me from getting what I want. I tell you, do the same damn thing – it's the only way a woman can win in our world. If you live a life like ours, and you don't win, you're fucking dead'

The cartel modernity is, however, displayed as somewhat toxic. Modernist cartel ambition is shown to have disrupted the way of life in the country, as national parks are taken over by tourists, route-ways are blocked by checkpoints and fences, and peaceful homes are subjected to cartel attacks.

This representation of the cartel as a modern, progressive business stands in stark contrast to that of the rebel group, whose ideology centres on notions of an agrarian proletariat. Whilst there this little evidence that the citizenry have enjoyed any of the trappings of wealth promised by the cartel, there is a suggestion that these peoples might at least share *moral* values with the American fighting forces. Following one early mission, the player is told that a rebel lieutenant escaped and was concealed by Bolivian villagers. Rather than give the man up to the cartel, the village chose to hide the individual – sacrificing their own lives as the cartel burnt the village to the ground.

The resistance members, meanwhile, seem to be treated as a little more than a means to an end – they lack both the mobility and modernity of the Ghosts or the cartel, or the inherent moral values of the peoples that they represent. The Ghosts have not entered into the conflict in Bolivia to join a moral cause, as the rebels had 'been fighting Santa Blanca and corrupt Bolivian officials for six years' (Opening Cutscene), but rather are shown to be acting in retaliation for the torture and murder of an American agent. Indeed, as one of the team surmises, 'we need to focus and get this done quick – before we get stuck between local politics and a firestorm of cartel bullets'. The internal politics do not seem to matter to the group, at least not as much as avenging the death of the one American. This representation of the resistance is reinforced through a series of side missions, during which the player electronically tags a variety of different resources for resistance use. These objectives serve no ludic function other than to unlock special abilities, such as a resistance-led attack on the enemy, offering little in the way of narrative development. As a result, the needs of the resistance have little narrative resonance, becoming merely another tool in the American military arsenal.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored some of the ways in which the representation of different forms of rural spatiality within video games acts in the formation of particular political imaginaries, ordering such spaces and naturalising specific behaviours. Whilst we have difficulty distinguishing between rural and urban space within the "real" world, video games often make plain this division. Within these video games, the experience of rural space is shown to be central to the formation of the "proper" national identity and national values. As this imaginary is tied to movement – advocating one's swift "return" to civilisation – the representation of peripheral spaces can also be used in order to highlight the dangers that are associated with immobility and stasis.

Section 6.1 explored the diminished role of the rural idyll, noting that the representation of peripheral space within video games often seems to be devoid of either the productive value that is assigned to it by the "pastoral" conceptualisation or the restorative value that is afforded to it by the resurgent "romantic" conceptualisation. Though noting the exceptional example of Oasis – an idyllic survivor encampment in *Homefront* – this section highlights that the idyllic imaginary is usually made absent from *direct* practices of representation and is, instead, used as a tacitly implied state of being against which it is possible to ground the more dystopian imaginaries that we consume.

Section 6.2, meanwhile, explored the role of rural space in the creation and maintenance of the Self. Focussing specifically on *Call of Duty*: *Ghosts* (2013) and *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* (2017), this section examines the ways in which the encounter with rural spaces is made integral to the maintenance of the hyper-masculine "Ghost" identity that is ascribed to the protagonists within these games. These video games offer some imaginaries that correlate with the characterisation of rural regions within the surrounding literatures, balancing notions of masculine renewal against more primitivistic notions of fear, danger and loss. The romanticised aspects of such an engagement are evident within the process of "becoming" a Ghost. The player's journey into the wilderness is shown to facilitate access to the best possible version of the Self, a process that is essential to becoming a better soldier and national guardian. This is shown to be a space within which men can become "real" men, engaging in primal behaviours in a consequence-free environment. It is implied that rural space is necessary for the manufacture of stronger national subjects. Individuals who enter into rural or wilderness regions are shown to become an extension of the protections that are afforded to urban centres by natural environments. Such a process is, however, shown to be dependent upon continued movement, as 'too much time in the wilderness, it is suggested, makes a people resentful, savage and degenerate' (Murphy, 2013, p. 11). The monster that lurks in the periphery is not something that leaps from the bushes, but rather is an aspect of the human psyche that is corrupted by prolonged

engagement with this uncivilised sphere. This notably includes the brainwashed "patriot" – an individual who has been turned against their former values of duty and sacrifice. The implication is that 'when you leave "civilisation", you will inevitably become less civilised, often as a result of a process of transformation that turns you into something partially or wholly monstrous' (Murphy, 2013, p. 11). A successful engagement with the rural periphery is shown to be one in which the masculine hero attends to their duties, before returning home to be ignored when they tell their children to put the rubbish out.

Whilst there is a focus on the role of mobility in the creation of the Self, the inverse relationship is also evident. The mobility of the soldier, free to travel through peripheral zones, is constructed in contrast to those who dwell within such regions. It is the construction of this rural Other that is the target of Section 6.3, which further highlights the apparent incompatibility of urban values and rural life. As highlighted in Chapter Three, the rural periphery can be viewed as a place for living out one's fantasies, facilitating a range of behaviours that are not normally possible within the bounds of so-called "civilisation". Within these rural spaces, however, the player witnesses numerous behaviours that transgress established moral codes – including sexual violence, torture and murder. Represented in this way, these "backwoods" rural spaces serve as a form of visual shorthand for regressive, anti-modern attitudes. These video games can be seen to distinguish between the value of the productive urban centre – which contains identifiable patterns of everyday life – and the failing, corrupted rural zones that are shown to be in a state of crisis. This makes the "rural" into a zone of encounter, within which one's own identity is pitted against the people and places that are not "like us". Some of these devices are, however, somewhat subverted in the narrative offered by *Ghost Recon Wildlands*. Here, the Mexican cartel is afforded many of the same characteristics that are afforded to a modern military force. The Bolivian nationals, represented through the traditional and "natural" ways of being on the land, are shown to be the desirable alternative to the modern, capitalist Mexican outsider.

Chapter Seven: Mediation and the "Event"

Introduction

As highlighted in Chapter Two, critical forms of analysis have suggested that the practice of geopolitical analysis does not provide an objective, scientific mediation of the "reality" of the real world (see, for example, Bassin, 2004; Dalby, 1991; Dittmer & Dodds, 2008; O'Tuathail, 1996). Instead, critical geopolitics is shown to expose the means by which a variety of different characteristics – including both virtues and weaknesses – can be "written" onto the map, in order that they might either be claimed for oneself or else assigned to others (see, for example, Dittmer, 2010; Kelly, 2006; O'Tuathail, 1999). This thesis has sought to explore some of the different ways in which these characteristics are represented within popular culture, focussing on some of the key binaries that are evident in the manufacture of political spatialities within the content of military-themed video games. Chapter Five offered an examination of the construction of the urban imaginary, distinguishing between the deployment of a commemorative, monumental form of spatiality and the use of more mundane, everyday environments. Chapter Six, meanwhile, focussed on the construction of contrasting imaginaries of rural spatiality, exploring the distinction between the representations of the idyllic countryside, the backwoods and the wilderness. The focus of this chapter shifts to the role of the "Event", examining the use of both forwards and backwards looking practices of mediation in the representation of unconventional forms of violence and their commensurate forms of militarised space.

As discussed in Chapter Three, critical terrorism studies postulates that our understandings of unconventional and terroristic forms of violence is created by our engagement with a raft of different, yet interconnected discursive forms (see, for example, Gunning, 2007; Hülsse and Spencer, 2008; Jarvis, 2009). Whilst the analysis of this terrorism discourse is often still focussed on the examination of its official, "high" manifestations, this shift has nonetheless facilitated the analysis of artefacts of popular culture as available and more accessible sites for contemporary study. Terrorism, counterterrorism and the consequences of terroristic violence are popular discursive themes within cultural artefacts, evident in the continuing proliferation of the television shows, films and video games that explore these topics [25] This has prompted wide-ranging critical reflection on the

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[25] The website IMDB, for example, lists 406 individual film and television programmes matching the keyword "terrorism" released in the period 2013 – 2018 (IMDB, 2018a). This is a considerable increase

representation of traumatic and terroristic "Events", using these artefacts as the basis upon which to examine the mediation of the prevailing geopolitical scripts. Dittmer, for example, focusses on the *Captain America* comics, noting that the 'readers witness the disciplining of characters and ideas so that they understand how Americans behave and do not behave' (2007a, p. 414). Other analyses have focussed on the artefacts of popular culture that engage in the direct remediation of real-world events. Holland (2011), for example, examines the fictionalised representation of the 9-11 attacks within a special, non-cannon episode of the television show *The West Wing*. Weber (2008), meanwhile, examines how the attacks were selectively recreated and remediated in both television and film.

It is, however, notable that there has been a more limited consideration of the role of the "Event" in the configuration of political space within video games. Salter, for example, observes that 'what is missing is an analysis of the particular configurations of the political future in large video game franchises… which imply very imaginative premediations of the geopolitical future' (2011, p. 383). This chapter will explore the mediation of the "Event" in video games, examining the process by which the representation of current and near-future conflicts is imbued with geopolitical meaning by a series of different, temporally-inflected processes of mediation. Here, video game spaces are explored with the specific intention of uncovering the ways in which temporal discourses and practices of mediation influence the ways in which national identities and practices of spatial securitisation are constructed, performed and understood. Whilst these forms of space are not physical realities, with some lacking even real-world analogues, these can nonetheless still be understood as competing, multi-layered forms of political discourse whose mediation of particular logics and value systems can be subjected to critical scrutiny. This chapter will address the ways in which the representation of the specific spatio-temporality of the "Event" can be utilised to expose the prevailing geopolitical imaginary, as well as the potential for it to offer an insight into the role that is afforded to both the state and civilian actor during times of trauma. Drawing upon the examination of the literature in Chapter Three, this examination of the portrayal of the "Event" is guided by the interrelated concepts of 'remediation' (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) and 'premediation' (Grusin, 2010). Whilst the former concept is used to address the ways in which the representation of the "Event" can offer a form of temporal therapy, drawing on the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy, the latter is used to examine the incitement to action that is prompted by the representation of an imagined and uncertain future.

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on the comparable list of 235 titles that match the same search for the period 1995 – 2000 (IMDB, 2018b).

7.1   Playing for Time? Temporality and Video Games

This examination will require a broader understanding of the function of temporality in the formation of distinctive sub-genres of military-themed video games. A framework for this engagement is offered by Smicker (2010), whose analysis distinguishes between video games which can be seen to either **re-enact** history, **re-envisage** past conflicts, or engage in acts of **prolepsis**. Re-enactments are historically-orientated video games, such as *Call of Duty: WWII* (Sledgehammer Games, 2017) and *Battlefield 1* (EA Dice, 2016), which 'try to recreate and reproduce, as accurately as possible, specific wars, battles, armies and equpment' (Smicker, 2010, p. 113). Such titles raise interesting potential issues surrounding the role of popular culture in the process of commemoration and memorialisation. Gish, for example, observes the extent to which the re-enactment video game 'continually and uniquely raids and re-appropriates cultural and international history in the interest of providing foundational narrative structures for individual games' (2010, p. 168). Focussing specifically on video games within the *Call of Duty* franchises, he concludes that this type of video game can allow for the negotiation of the multiple, conflicting ways in which we understand our shared military histories. Rejack, however, focusses on the linear narrative that is presented within *Brother in Arms: Road to Hill 30* (Ubisoft, 2005), arguing that it offers 'a view of history as a straightforward sequence of events, with no sense of competing interaction or multiple viewpoints' (2007, p. 421). Whilst such a focus represents a potential area for future research, this analysis is more concerned with the ways in which more imaginative representations of political spatiality are used to structure our geopolitical imaginaries[26]. As a result, this thesis focuses specifically on the practices of mediation that are evident within *revisionist* and *proleptic* forms of military-themed video game.

Within revisionist video games, past conflicts can be restaged with a different outcome. These games often focus on infamous defeats or failures, allowing for these to be reintegrated into the broader national narrative. A number of the missions that are available in *Kuma\War* (2004) facilitate this revisionism: -

> '[T]he 1980 Iran hostage rescue can be successful, Osama Bin Laden can be captured in
> 1998 (or captured in Tora Bora in 2001), [and] the Iraqi and Afghan national armies can
> be existent, functional, and efficient' (Smicker, 2010, p. 112).

Whilst many contemporary military-themed video games aim to mirror current or near future forms of conflict, such narratives often remain dependant on the re-scripting of the logics and frameworks

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[26] For a broader discussion of the selection of video games for this analysis, see the corresponding section of Chapter Four.

that were evident within past conflicts. This process of remediation is made one of the primary focuses of this chapter, examining the extent to which our engagement with the present and future is still partly constructed through this backwards-looking focus. As such, I argue that the notion of historical revisionism can be meaningfully broadened in order to incorporate the manipulation or evocation of past conflicts as a means by which to generate a more dystopian representation of the geopolitical "reality" of the present day. *Homefront: the Revolution*, for example, envisages what the world might have looked like if the American digital revolution of the 1970s had instead 'started with the APEX corporation… and the birth of the Silicon River in North Korea' (Introductory Cinematic). In broadening the notion of revisionist video gaming in this way, I utilise the term 'compliant history' in order to emphasise the malleable nature of our geopolitical knowledges.

Proleptic video games, meanwhile, are those which are 'set in the present or near future and present possible future interventions into present day "hot spots" (e.g. North Korea, Iran, Nigeria, Cuba, etc.) as necessary and unavoidable realities' (Smicker, 2010, p. 113). The video game medium has proven to be particularly adept at the creation and mediation of these fictitious futures, offering 'sites where the post-9/11 dreams of victory and nightmares of oppression are embodied' (Annandale, 2010, p. 98). This process is one of 'premediation' (Grusin, 2010), allowing the player to envisage, experience and combat the attacks of the future before they emerge unmediated into the present day. Such video games provide a means by which to think about future "worst-case" scenarios, allowing the player to consider both how such events might come to fruition and what forms of response may be necessary. These future "Events" can, therefore, be used to examine the role of both the state authority and the national citizen in the process of spatial securitisation.

This analysis of *revisionist* and *proleptic* forms of video gaming could conceivably engage with a wide-range of different video games, as many titles address – either directly or indirectly – the role of the "Event" in the mediation of particular forms of political spatiality. Here, however, this chapter will focus specifically on a series of video games in which the simulation of different forms of temporality – through both backwards-looking and more future-orientated processes of mediation – is integral to the overall narrative. To this end, four video games were selected for closer examination: *Spec Ops: the Line* (2K Games, 2012), *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Blacklist* (Ubisoft, 2013), *Homefront: the Revolution* (Dambuster Studios, 2016), and *Tom Clancy's The Division* (Ubisoft, 2016a). Some background information on these different titles is offered below: -

i.   **Spec Ops: the Line (Yager Games, 2012)**

The *Spec Ops: the Line* video game is notable for its use of evocative narrative (Jenkins, 2004; see Chapter Four), drawing from both the book *The Heart of Darkness* (Conrad, 1996) and the film

Apocalypse Now (1979). The game centres on American military incursions into Dubai, amidst a series of worsening sandstorms. Prior to the commencement of the gameplay, it is established that both a decorated American colonel and his unit have gone missing whilst attempting to lead a civilian convoy out of the city. The only subsequent contact is a looped radio message, which conveys that the 'attempted evacuation of Dubai ended in failure. Death toll: too many' (Opening Cutscene). The player takes on the role of Captain Walker, the leader of a team of Delta operatives that is subsequently sent into the stricken city in order to both search for the missing unit and to check for any civilian survivors. Once inside, they become embroiled in the battle between a group of armed survivors – referred to as the Insurgents – and the remnants of the 'Damned' 33rd Battalion.

Although well-received both by critics and the general public (Metacritic, 2018), *Spec Ops: the Line* has currently achieved just 1.2 million units in cross-format sales (VGChartz, 2018c). Nonetheless, the title remains relevant as one of the first mainstream anti-war military video games (Payne, 2014, p. 266). Unlike the various other video games that are considered within this analysis, *Spec Ops: the Line* utilises the player's familiarity with the various narrative and ludic conventions that are commonly associated with other forms of military fiction in order to offer an overt critique of violent interventionism[27].

ii.   Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Blacklist (Ubisoft Toronto, 2013a)

Splinter Cell: Blacklist offers a narrative of preventative global counterterrorism, beginning amidst an attack on the Anderson Airbase in Guam. An organisation identified as *The Engineers* subsequently claims responsibility and threatens the commission of a series of further strikes on American targets (the game's titular 'Blacklist') unless all military personnel are recalled from overseas deployment. The player takes on the role of the elite military operative Sam Fischer, the commander of 'the newly authorised Fourth Echelon, a deep black agency reporting only to the Oval Office' (Ubisoft, 2014b), and is charged with preventing these attacks. Like its real-world counterpart, Fischer's War on Terror is a global effort, as his Fourth Echelon team infiltrate overseas territories to dismantle terror cells or to achieve the interrogation or rendition of strategic targets. The team must also respond to threats within the domestic realm, contending with a variety of attacks upon the American infrastructure. Whilst *Splinter Cell: Blacklist* has achieved only modest commercial success, with cross-format sales of 2.32 million units (VGChartz, 2018g), it nonetheless exemplifies the role of the "Event" in the creation

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[27] Some other examples of this criticality include *This War of Mine* (11 bit Studios, 2014), modelled on civilian experiences during the Bosnian war, or less mainstream releases such as *September 12th* (Newsgaming, 2003). Whilst such titles represent potentially interesting subjects for future analyses, these video games are beyond the scope of my own critical enquiry (see Chapter Four).

of specific practices of action and reaction. Of a particular interest for this chapter are the different ways in which the characters justify their respective uses of violent or other immoral actions in order to engage with the geopolitical uncertainties of the present and near future world.

iii.   Homefront: The Revolution (Dambuster Studios, 2016)

Like *Homefront* (THQ, 2011), which is examined in Chapter Six, *Homefront: the Revolution* also depicts a Korean occupation of the USA. Unlike this prior title however, *Homefront: the Revolution* offers a revisionist narrative in which the USA has become heavily indebted to a technologically-dominant Korea. With this financial situation exacerbated by continued wars overseas, America defaults on its payments for Korean munitions. By way of response, the Korean government utilises a technological backdoor in order to disable American hardware and, under the guise of providing humanitarian relief, is able to subsequently invade and occupy the American mainland. In stripping this alternate universe America of the copious armaments that are wielded by its real-world counterpart, this game acts to subvert any form of security doctrine that is predicated upon the conventional mass mobilisation of troops and munitions. Rather than taking the role of the global aggressor, backed by technology, this fictional America is instead reduced to the waging of small-scale guerrilla warfare (see Figure 54).

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Figure 54: 'Thank You' Trailer (Deep Silver, 2015)

The game itself begins in the year 2029, which is four years after the beginning of the occupation, and places the player within a guerrilla resistance movement that is operating in Philadelphia. Following a raid upon a resistance stronghold, which results in the capture of the group's charismatic leader by the Korean military, the player must continue the resistance effort. This narrative, which resembles

one of resistance to wartime Nazism, notably addresses different perspectives on the role of both of soft-power and violent uprising during times of crisis. This chapter will examine some of the different ways in which the practices of remediation and premediation are utilised in order to support this core narrative theme.

iv.   Tom Clancy's The Division (Ubisoft, 2016)

Like the other games produced as a part of the *Tom Clancy* franchise, *The Division* also 'centres on high-technology military interventions set in the near future and extrapolated out of current concerns and conflicts' (Smicker, 2010, p. 106). The game is set in a near-future imaginary of New York City, following the release of a weaponised smallpox virus (referred to as the 'Green Poison') during the Black Friday sales. The player acts as a member of the game's titular *Division*, a sleeper-style military unit which has 'been activated and sent to Manhattan to save what remains of civilisation after the devastating pandemic' (Ubisoft, 2016c). The player must address the decline of social order in the city, responding to the activities of the various violent and criminal factions that have developed as a result of this unstable situation (see Figure 55).

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Figure 55: The Opposition Factions (Ubisoft, 2016d)

Tom Clancy's The Division offers a clear representation of the perceived role of power in the aftermath of the traumatic "Event", juxtaposing the supposed heroism of the *Division* against the apparent criminality of the various other civilian and military factions. In doing so, however, the game offers a clear standpoint on the utility of military force in crisis situations and advances a narrative which

suggests that domestic rights can be suspended by the state. Whilst unlikely to have been intended as a tacit critique of geopolitical power structures, this is a narrative with an increasing political relevance in light of subsequent, ongoing debates about issues such as anti-terror legislation, surveillance, political freedoms and police brutality.

This selection of video games are unified by their mediation of the traumatic "Event" and, in creating their dystopian geopolitical imaginaries, offer logically consistent worlds. *Spec Ops: the Line* explores the role of American interventionism in the aftermath of a humanitarian crisis. In *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, the player participates in a process of pre-emptive counterterrorism, designed to prevent the occurrence of future attacks. In *Homefront: the Revolution*, the player participates in a campaign of guerrilla warfare in order to repel an occupying military force. In *Tom Clancy's The Division*, the player joins a unit of first responders that aim to restore order to Manhattan, following a biological attack. Taken together, the following subsections of this chapter argue that the mediation of these different forms of traumatic "Event" can be used in order to expose the production of a core identity dialectic. These video games draw upon familiar spaces and imaginaries, from both the past and future, in order to produce the "Event" in a way that provokes both familiarity and a sense of low-level anxiety about our role in the world. With this in mind, the following sections present two different readings of the role of temporally-inflected mediation in the production of political spatiality within military-themed video games.

1.   The Remediation of the "Event"

This first subsection of this chapter focuses on the temporally-inflected processes of mediation that are influential in the production of geopolitical order within military-themed video games. This is initially achieved through a focus on the concept of 'remediation' (Bolter & Grusin, 2000), which examines the extent to which the composition of an event or media form can be seen to rely upon different forms of mediatory precedent. *Section 7.2.1.* examines how the construction of the "Event" in military-themed video games is faciliated by the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy. Within the video games examined as a part of this analysis, there were a number of points at which these logics were especially evident. This subsection offers an examination of some of these instances, identifying their consequences for the ways in which we are invited to conceive of the worlds that these video games represent.

Section 7.2.2. will then engage with the remediation of some familiar cultural frameworks and tropes, including those evident within other military-themed video games, examining how these experiences can be used to manipulate our relationship to the spaces that we are asked to inhabit and the broader geopolitical order in which we are located.

2. The Premediation of Action and Reaction

The following subsection - labelled *7.3.* - will then examine the process of premediation, which engages with the extent to which the process of mediation can be used to mitigate the impact of traumatic future events (Grusin, 2010). In doing so, I argue that the "Event" – as depicted within military-themed video games – is a moment in time that is portrayed as both inevitable and yet endlessly deferred into the future by correct, preventative action in the present day. The representation of the "Event", therefore, can encourage a low-level of fear by forcing the player to remain aware of the wide variety of different threats to the current political order. This section is also used to explore the premediation of the "moral" national citizen, exploring some of the different ways in which different characters are shown to respond to the various challenges and opportunities that accompany future, post-Event forms of spatiality. Here, I examine the ways in which the representation of acts of unconventional and terroristic violence is used to legitimise and delegitimise particular ways of acting and reacting in times of crisis. Each of the video games selected for this analysis interrogates the utility of particular security measures when faced with an existential threat: military interventionism in *Spec Ops: the Line*, guerrilla warfare in *Homefront: the Resistance*, the 'Fifth Freedom' in *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, and violence without trial in *The Division*. These not only 'provide accounts of what the War on Terror is like, why it is being fought, and what its effects are' (Schulzke, 2013, p. 587), but also allow for an exploration of the premediation of "right" action and reaction to such developments.

The chapter then concludes by examining the potential consequences for the ways in which we understand the role of the "Event". I argue that the application of the salient theory to the study of video games highlights the extent to which the "Event" is simultaneously mediated in different and conflicting ways. The process of 'remediation' serves to highlight the problematic level of dependency upon culturally and politically familiar imaginaries that is involved in the simulation of the future. I also emphasise the role of premediation in disciplining present and future action, noting that it works to discipline the level of political power that is afforded to both the state government and the individual citizen. These representations, as such, have clear implications for the ways in which we are invited to think about the geopolitical present and future, and the nature of our involvement in such a world.

7.2   Looking Back? Remediation in Military Video Games

The examination of the broader theoretical literatures in Chapter Three highlighted two interrelated processes of mediation that structure the ways in which we understand popular culture: remediation (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) and premediation (Grusin, 2010). Whilst the past primacy of remediation has been challenged in the post-9/11 period, the notion retains an influential role in understanding the

ways in which we engage with the representation of the "Event". As Bolter and Grusin highlight, the process of remediation refers to the extent to which the representational practices that are evident within digital media can be seen to 'oscillate between immediacy and hypermediacy, between transparency and opacity' (2000, p. 19). It is these contradictory logics that are responsible for the creation of a connection to the worlds that are represented within popular culture. The logic of immediacy reflects the desire that the representation of an "Event" be experienced as though it were occurring live, rather than as filtered or mediated. As Kirkland highlights, digital media can achieve this sense of immediacy through the suppression of the process of mediation, allowing the viewer or player to 'experience the world as if untouched by media technologies' (2010, p. 231). In video games, this effect can be achieved through the use of a first person perspective. This allows the player to see the world through the eyes of character that they are controlling, as though physically inhabiting the body of that character. Such a perspective is, for example, utilised in *Homefront: the Revolution* (Figure 56). This has the effect of making the player an embodied presence in the game world, rendering them a part of the events that occur on screen.

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Figure 56: The First-Person Perspective (Homefront: the Revolution. 2016)

Even where a third person perspective is used, where the player views the action from behind the represented body of the protagonist, the player-camera can still be integrated into the game world as a physical object. In *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, for example, the camera is affected by the environment – in both the *American Power* and *Abandoned Mill* levels**,** for example, raindrops can be seen to fall

across its "lens" (Figure 57). A similar effect is also evident in *Spec Ops: the Line*, within which the third-person player camera is splattered with blood.

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Figure 57: Visual Representations of Rainfall (American Power, Splinter Cell: Blacklist, 2013)

This creation of a sense of immediacy can also be both promoted and subverted by the imposition of temporal frameworks. These environments, and the events that occur within them, are experienced in real-time. This means that the threat is experienced as though it is occurring now, even when the narrative may be set at a point in time that is far into the future. This can generate a sense of player engagement, offering a sense that something can potentially be changed within the game world. This reliance on time and temporal frameworks can, however, also serve to highlight the mediated unreality of the experience, emphasising the processes of mediation that are at work within video games. This is particularly evident in timed sections of gameplay, which are a common inclusion within action-orientated video games (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 93). In *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, for example, the player is given just under ten minutes of gameplay in order to turn off two valves at a water treatment facility. Here, the player is supposedly attempting to avert the release of a biological agent as a part of a terrorist attack codenamed *American Consumption*. Whilst the temporal restriction has the effect of highlighting the immediate nature of the threat, failure to achieve this objective within the time merely resets the game state and exposes the mediated, consequence-free nature of video game play. The player does not bring about the end of the game, but simply resets for another try at stopping the attack. As this suggests, the creation of a continued sense of immediacy is paradoxically dependent upon the hypermediated nature of the video game text. Such a process is afforded a narrative significance in *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*. In this game, the *Engineers* seek the subversion of mediation by uploading both first person footage of their attacks on the Guam airbase and their

subsequent demands to both social media and video streaming websites. Such a process is shown to allow the group to bypass the remediation of their message through the twin filters of the political establishment and the mainstream media, instead providing direct access to the American people (Figure 58, Top). A subsequent image of a *YouTube* style website is used in order to affirm the efficacy of such an action, showing a rapidly increasing number of "views". Such an imaginary also garners further credibility from its stylistic remediation of similar videos attributed to the real world pressure group *Anonymous* (Figure 58, Bottom). This has the effect of visually tying together the actions of the fictional terrorist group and the real-world, sub-state pressure group.

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Figure 58: Online "Threat" Videos
Top: Engineers threat video (American Power, Splinter Cell: Blacklist, 2013)
Bottom: Video attributed to 'Anonymous' (Anonymous Belgique, 2015)

The representative integration of familiar forms of mediative technologies, including those which are common in our day-to-day lives, is also a key means by which these games are able to manufacture a broader sense of spatial authenticity. The representation of these other technologies acts in much the same way as the technique of linear perspective, associated with painting, insofar as it serves to extend the parameters of the represented world beyond those which are directly shown to the player on screen (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, pp. 24-26). This is, for example, particularly evident within *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, in the phonecalls that the player – in the role of Sam Fisher – can make to the protagonist's daughter in between the campaign missions (Figure 59).

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Figure 59: Making a Phone Call from Paladin (Splinter Cell: Blacklist, 2013)

Whilst Fisher and the other members of the Fourth Echelon team are shown to be somewhat detached from the outside world, these phonecalls – which function as a form of embedded narrative (Jenkins, 2004; see also Chapter Four) - provide a means by which the player can situate themselves as a part of a responsive and reactive world. The player is made able to access an alternative, non-military perspective on the significance of the *Blacklist* attacks for the civilian population. Whilst his daughter remains merely a voice on the other end of the phone, and is never directly represented on screen, this practice of mediation – which centres on an interaction between two family members – provides an opportunity for the player to be reminded of alternative sites and sights of terroristic violence. The division between these military and civilian perspectives is subsequently collapsed entirely within *LNG Terminal*, during which the Fourth Echelon team are denied access to their electronic equipment by a sophisticated computer virus. Once back online, the team learn about the successful undertaking of the *American Fuel* attack in the same way as the wider citizenry – through its representation in the news media as a "breaking" story (Figure 60).

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Figure 60: Splinter Cell: Blacklist (Ubisoft, 2013b)

This process of hypermediacy is also evident in other forms of embedded environmental storytelling, which are facilitated by the recovery of conventional forms of narrative media from within the game world. These collectable artefacts can take on a variety of different forms, and can serve a variety of narrative and nonnarrative ends. In *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, the player is able to collect information from so-called 'dead-drops', as well as from enemy laptops. Whilst these collectables have no direct impact on gameplay, they serve to provide more information about the surrounding world. A similar

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Figure 61: Collectable Journals in Homefront: the Revolution (2016)

system is evident in the *Homefront* franchise. In *Homefront*, for example, the player can collect a series of newspaper clippings, which are used in order to relate the manner in which the conflict is perceived by the wider world. In *Homefront: the Revolution*, meanwhile, the player can find a series of electronic journals, which convey different individual engagements with the lived "reality" of the conflict between the American resistance and a unified, occupying Korean military (Figure 61).

The representation of this hypermediated, artificial construction of reality is also used to demonstrate the extent to which supposedly objective forms of information and "intelligence" can be exposed as misleading, manipulated, or otherwise imperfect. Within *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, for example, the flow of "intelligence" is shown to indicate that the *American Consumption* attack will occur at a different location to that which is eventually attended by the Fourth Echelon team. In *Homefront: the Revolution*, meanwhile, the content of the news media – which is controlled by the occupying Korean military – is shown to be little more than propaganda, mirroring the content produced by North Korean authorities in the real world. In *Spec Ops: the Line*, even the authenticity of one's own vision is challenged. Although the player, as Captain Walker, is shown to encounter a dystopian Dubai, some aspects of this imaginary are eventually attributed to the lead character's ongoing battle with psychosis and post-traumatic stress disorder.

7.2.1 Remediation and the Creation of a "Compliant" Geopolitics

Whilst Bolter and Grusin (2000) emphasise the role of the logics of 'immediacy' and 'hypermediacy' in the process of mediation, it is worthwhile to note that the function of remediation is not constrained to these specific processes. The remediation of an "Event" is also achieved through a broader reliance on the various narrative and ludic tropes that are commonly found in popular culture, including video games, and also the familiar frameworks that are drawn from our experiences of real world places, politics and past events. One clear example of this process is evident in the level *Black Tuesday* (*Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*)[28]. Here, as the player emerges from an overturned army vehicle, a missile can be seen to strike a nearby skyscraper (see Figure 62, Top). Such an imaginary clearly evokes the visual language of the 9-11 attacks, displaying a similar perspective to that of the footage that was recorded by nearby bystanders during the attacks (see, Figure 62, Bottom). Other representational practices speak to commonly understood forms of cultural symbolism. In *Spec Ops: the Line*, for example, the image of an inverted American flag that is shown at the start of the game is a universally

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[28] *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, which focusses on the representation of the urban imaginary within military-themed video games.

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Figure 62: Ground Level Footage of Aerial Attacks
Left: A Missile Strikes (Black Tuesday, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3, 2011)
Right: Amateur Footage of the 9-11 Attacks (Retrieved from https://tinyurl.com/pgo35d3

understood signifier of either distress or disrespect (Figure 63). Whilst this process of remediation has the potential to allow for the mitigation of contemporary anxieties, facilitating the mediation of contemporary warfare and conflict through familiar frameworks, this process of historical revisionism commonly takes on a more dystopian tone. Here, the familiar imaginaries that are associated with the present, or near past, are changed in order to manipulate the present-day geopolitical "reality" that is presented within a particular title. In order to achieve a sense of plausibility, video games can be seen to utilise elements that are associated with past conflicts. These representations allow for a familiar historical narrative to be brought into the present day, but altered in a manner which suits particular contemporary geopolitical sensitivities. In the *Homefront* video games, for example, the representation of internment camps, mass graves, and the use of chemical gas, are all clearly intended

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Figure 63: Title Screen (Spec Ops: the Line, 2012)

to evoke the historic actions of Nazi Germany during World War II. In situating the narrative within North America, however, it is possible for this game to substitute in the contemporary geopolitical animosity between the USA and North Korea, whilst still also evoking the prior historical knowledge of its audience. The game also inverts the accusation that the USA was late to become involved in World War II, acting only after they themselves became the subject of the Pearl Harbor attacks. It allows for the rescripting of the initial lack of American involvement in the military conflict, instead representing the continued absence of European intervention. It is this creation of a compliant geopolitics that allows for the manufacture of a sense of American vulnerability and geopolitical instability, contrary to all the evidence of the present day real-world.

This process of remediation can also draw upon more contemporary cultural and political references. In *Homefront: the Revolution*, for example, the Korean APEX corporation are introduced through the remediation of imaginaries familiar to a global audience from the real-world launch of Apple products (Figure 64). This representation of Korea, which rescripts past American technological dominance, can be seen to represent broader socio-economic anxieties surrounding the rise of competitors in Asian markets and their potential influence on the American economy: -

> 'We bought everything they could sell, from phone to tablets, to just about anything… As the dollar tanked, our debt to North Korea spiralled. Unemployment rocketed and the country was on its knees' (Homefront: The Revolution, 2016, Intro Cinematic)

Whilst the country of North Korea is unlikely to provide real-world competition, this fictional representation provides a means by which to address such anxieties without provoking any real-world backlash.

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Figure 64: Technology Launches
Left: Homefront: the Revolution Introductory Cinematic
Right: The Launch of the IPhone in 2007
(Retrieved from (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7qPAY9JqE4)

Tom Clancy's The Division, meanwhile, offers a remediation of the 2001 'Dark Winter' security simulation, which sought to explore a range of potential responses to a biological attack against the USA. Whilst an in-depth review of the original simulation is beyond the parameters of this analysis, it is notable that O'Toole, Mair and Inglesby concluded that the exercise offers 'instructive insights and

lessons for those with responsibility for bioterrorism preparedness in the medical, public health, policy, and national security committees and, accordingly, helps shine light on possible paths forward' (2002, p. 983). Within *The Division*, however, the remediation of 'Dark Winter' is instead used to legitimise a geopolitical present in which such attacks have not only happened, but have brought about a decline in social order in a major American city: -

> 'Within just a few days, the simulation spiralled out of control. The operation predicated
> a rapid breakdown in essential institutions, civil disorder and massive civilian casualties.
> Dark Winter has revealed how vulnerable we've become' (Ubisoft, 2013c)

The process of revisionism within these video games does, however, show some recognisable congruency with the real world. In *Homefront: the Revolution*, for example, American financial difficulties are exacerbated by the fact that the country's 'wars in the Middle East had been getting worse, one leading us straight into the next' (Introductory Cinematic). Although offering a revisionist approach to global geopolitics which portrays America as the victim of nationalistic aggression, this game retains as plausible the suggestion that the USA and Middle East remain locked in military conflict. Though never directly addressed, the game implies that these two regions are natural enemies and that war – as a consequence of American interventionist foreign policy – remains unavoidable.

It is also notable that *Spec Ops: the Line* utilises our familiarity with the common tropes and conventions associated with military shooter video games to offer a critique of the violent interventionist action that is common within this subgenre. Whilst this title is reliant on many of the same mediative processes as other video games, demanding similar competencies from its audience, these are utilised in pursuit of a different experiential objective. This is particularly evident in the game's simulation of a post-Event Dubai, which promotes a sense of estrangement and the uncanny above a more authentic feeling sense of presence. *Spec Ops: the Line* does not attempt to subvert the artificial, constructed nature of the "Event", but rather encourages the player to remain aware of the manufactured nature of contemporary war-gaming. This includes, for example, the depiction of the red explosive barrels that were a common feature of early first person "shooter" video games. This is also evident in the range of 'achievements' that the player can collect for specific in-game actions, many of which are named after either prominent works of military fiction (including for example, *Three Kings* or *We Were Soldiers*) or common military phraseology (including, for example *Friendly Fire* and *All You Can Be*). *Spec Ops: the Line* also dispenses with some of the narrative conventions that are normally associated with video games, breaking the fourth wall in order to talk directly to the player. The loading screens, for example, which are more commonly used to offer gameplay prompts

or inspirational quotes, are instead used in order to hold the player to account for the events that take place as they play through the game (Figure 65).

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Figure 65: "The US military does not condone the killing of unarmed combatants. But this isn't real, so why should you care?" – One of the loading screens in Spec Ops: the Line (2012) that speaks directly to the player.

The game also offers a direct deconstruction of the repetitive nature of military gameplay, through the direct repetition of a sequence in which the player takes control of a helicopter-mounted machine gun. Here, finding himself in this situation for a second time, the player character can be heard to briefly voice a sense of déjà vu: -

'This… This isn't right… We did this already…' (Chapter Seven, Spec Ops: the Line**)**

This comment serves as a reflection on both the repetition of the sequence, as well as the broader process of repetition within this video game genre. It is, for example, not uncommon for the player to experience a particular level multiple times, as they may become lost, die, or search for collectables. Other levels of this game also question the forms of interaction that are common to more mainstream video game titles. Throughout this game, there are a number of decision points at which the player's actions influence the manner of their progression. These are used to highlight both the linearity of conventional military themed games, as well as the level of immediacy that is associated with decision-making in this genre.

In one such instance, the player must choose how to deal with an angry mob of civilians that have attacked the unit and lynched one of its members (Figure 66). Here, the player is afforded a sense

of agency that is somewhat uncommon. The player can choose to fire on the mob, alleviating the risk. Whilst the player can also choose to fire into the air, dispersing the mob without causing injury, there is no ludic prompt that suggests that this is a possible course of action.

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Figure 66: Captain Walker faces down an angry mob (Chapter Eight, Spec Ops: the Line, 2012)

A similar scenario is encountered when the player is faced with two people that are suspended from a bridge (Figure 67). The player is informed of the "crimes" of each individual and is given the choice of which to shoot dead: -

> 'The civilian on the right stole water – a capital offence. The solider on the left was sent to apprehend him. Which he did… Killing the man's family in the process. Five innocent people are dead, because these two animals couldn't control themselves… They are guilty. But what is justice? And how would you see it dealt?' (The Road, Spec Ops: the Line)

Whilst the game appears to invite a moral judgement, forcing the player to choose between the life of a desperate civilian and that of a duty-bound soldier, there are other options available. The player can choose to fire through the ropes binding the captives, or can shoot at the surrounding snipers in a difficult and dangerous act defiance.

Once again, however, it is notable that these options are not signposted by either the game's narrative or ludic structures.

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Figure 67: An Apparent Moral Dilemma at 'The Road' (Spec Ops: the Line, 2012)

In contrast to the above narrative instances, it is also notable that the game's most graphic moment of violence cannot be circumvented. In this section, the player is tasked with utilising the banned chemical weapon White Phosphorous against an enemy encampment. Whilst the player can stall the use of the chemical weapon, instead shooting the enemy soldiers from the raised platform, they cannot climb down the rope to proceed through the level. It is also impossible to clear the camp of adversaries from this raised position, as the enemy soldiers continue to spawn. The only way to continue the game is to utilise the chemical weapon against the camp. This lack of choice is highlighted as a part of the game's dialogue in Chapter Eight (The Gate): -

> SSG Lugo: You're fucking kidding right, that's White Phosphorous.
>
> Capt. Walker: Yeah, I know what it is.
>
> SSG Lugo: You've seen what this shit does, you know we can't use it.
>
> Cpt Walker: We might not have a choice, Lugo.
>
> SSG Lugo: There's always a choice.
>
> Capt. Walker: No, there's really not.

At this stage, there is initially little to warn the player that anything untoward is about to happen. The enemy soldiers are represented as merely a series of thermal images (see Figure 68, Bottom), serving as a remediation of similar sequences within military-shooter video games such as *Call of Duty* (see, Figure 68, Top). In this case, however, the game does not separate the hypermediated act of violence from the immediacy of its consequences. The face of the protagonist remains visible during the attack, reflected in the computer display, and sounds of screaming can be heard from the camp.

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Figure 68: Aerial Assaults
Top: Death from Above (Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, 2007)
Bottom: The Gate (Spec Ops: the Line, 2012)

Once the player has decided to commence the attack, they are then free to proceed down into the camp. Here, however, they are forced to face the consequences of their actions. The game uses this section in order to create a heightened sense of immediacy, to exacerbate the sense of shock that is

caused to the player. The player is made to walk through the affected area, witnessing the attempts of wounded soldiers to crawl to safety. This is uncommon in military-themed video games, in which dead bodies will often simply disapper. The player is forced to look at the bodies of their victims, some of whom are shown to be civillians and young children, making it apparent that they have acted against a humanitarian convoy (Figure 69).

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Figure 69: Civilians Found After the Gas Attack (The Gate, Spec Ops: the Line, 2012)

Here, the supposed adversaries were actually attempting to protect the civilian population of Dubai *from the actions of the player*. This means that, unlike the conventional video game narrative in which the player assumes the role of the rightious protagonist, the player is instead shown to have taken on a role that is more commonly associated with the violent and destructive Other. This is reinforced at the conclusion of the game, where the character of Konrad reminds the player that 'you're here because you want to feel like something you're not. A hero' (Chapter Eleven: Alone). Whilst the representation of the geopolitical event is ordinarily utilised to allow the player to play through their anxieties, acting as the hero, *Spec Ops: the Line* subverts this expectation through unconventional processes of mediation and subject positioning. The perspective of the player, therefore, is made dangerous and threatening by their dogged commitment to violent interventionism.

7.3   Planning for Judgement Day? Premediating Action and Reaction in Times of Crisis

In the aftermath of the 9-11 attacks, members of the various cultural industries were invited to envisage other, similar vulnerabilities in an attempt to predict the next attack that could potentially occur on such a scale. This process of attempted prediction and foresight is particularly evident in the video games that are examined in this chapter, which offer representations of future "Events" that

serve as plausible-feeling extensions of our current-day fears about the world around us. In *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, for example, the player must attempt to prevent the occurrence of a series of timetabled and codenamed attacks that are threatened by an organisation referred to as the *Engineers* (Figure 70).

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Figure 70: The Blacklist (Ubisoft, 2013b)

In this particular video game, the player occupies the spaces that exist immediately before, during, and after, the occurrence of a series of terrorist attacks against mainland America. As highlighted in Figure 70, various different codenames are used in order to obscure the nature of the planned attacks. This representation of forthcoming "Events" is used to magnify current instabilities, emphasising that in the real world - just as in these games - we cannot know what form the "next" attack might take. Some of these attacks are eventually realised, with each successive action shown to have a higher death toll than those before it. The *American Consumption* attack, for example, is described as being 'biological in nature, with the potential for over two million casualties in the Greater Chicagoland area' (Private Estate, Splinter Cell: Blacklist). The final attack - codenamed *American Dust* – is, however, left unexplored and unexplained. This makes it is unclear whether this future action has truly been subverted or simply deferred into the future, and what form it might have been expected to take.

Such a representational pattern has the effect of questioning the true role of counterterrorism, suggesting that true prevention may not be possible and that the goal is to defer the inevitable act of future violence as far into the future as possible. This foregrounds the uncertain nature of the political future, showing that the world – as we know it now – is fundamentally unstable and prone to dramatic change, if it is not defended correctly in the present-day. This sense of fragility

is also emphasised in *Tom Clancy's The Division*, which highlights our tendency to assume that catastrophic events only happen to other people, elsewhere in the world: -

> 'It's hard to watch something you love destroy itself, to see it fall apart. Disaster always seems so distant and detached – someone else's struggle in some faraway place. It's not until it's in our city, at our doors, that we realise how fragile we are. All of us. All of this' (Ubisoft, 2014a)

In being shown future acts of terroristic and unconventional violences occurring in familiar feeling places, to people that we identify as being similar to ourselves, we are invited to consider questions of how we might be expected to respond to similar scenarios. As such, the geopolitical utility of these "Events" is not necessarily predicated on the representation of the inciting violent incident, but can also encompass the process by which the resultant spaces are used to prescribe and proscribe certain subsequent forms of behaviour. As Jason Dittmer highlights in his analysis of the *Captain America* comics, this is a representational process which 'territorialises American identity from the inside through a bonding process that not only perpetuates certain values such as loyalty to the nation, commitment to the status quo social system, and courage in the face of oppression, but also contrasts, through a process of differentiation, American identity from various others' (2007a, p. 414). The process of premediation allows the creation of a sense of security by pre-scripting certain behaviours that can be undertaken in response to events that haven't actually happened yet. This allows for the exploration of a range of different potential actions and their associated moral and political consequences, which can facilitate commentary on the perceived role of both the state and the individual civilian actor during times of collective crisis.

One particularly common representation is evident in *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, within which the player takes on the role of Sam Fischer. This character is portrayed as a heroic, self-sacrificing individual, prepared to risk his own life in the furtherance of a utilitarian common good. This characterisation evokes elements of the Hegelian social contract, in which 'civil and political rights were guaranteed in exchange for paying taxes and fighting in wars… In wartime, the citizens became part of a collectivity – the nation – and had to be ready to die for the state' (Kaldor, 2000). One example of this can be seen following Fischer's exposure to nerve gas, whilst attempting to place an electronic tracker insight a biological weapon. Although in need of urgent medical assistance, having been made aware of an 'elevated BP, tachypnea, tachycardia … consistent with symptoms of nerve gas exposure', he continues to pursue the game's antagonist. Even on the point of death, Fischer orders a support character to continue the pursuit in his place - an action that would certainly have resulted in his

death. Although rescued, Fischer repeatedly then chastises Briggs for valuing his life above those of the wider population placed at risk by Sadiq's escape: -

> 'Finish the job Briggs. Nothing comes before that. Not me, not you. Nothing' (Abandoned Mill)

Over the course of *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, the character and actions of both Sam Fischer and Fourth Echelon are constructed in direct contrast to both Kobin (a captured arms dealer, see Figure 71) and Sadiq (the leader of the 'Engineers'). The character of Kobin, who is presented as neither adversary nor ally, is morally complicated. He can be bought, which makes him somehow unacceptable to both *Fourth Echelon* and *The Engineers*.

Despite his prior involvement in the staged death of Fischer's daughter in *Splinter Cell: Conviction*, however, Kobin self-identifies as a better person than the other individuals connected to the series of attacks on American targets. He demonstrates particular outrage at the moral standards of the terrorist leader Sadiq, referring to the man as 'a monster. He's a fucking ghoul' (Safehouse). He defends his actions as an arms dealer, arguing that 'capitalism was around long before I showed up. Besides, compared to the other assholes in my line of work, I'm a saint' (Transit Yards). The character represents himself as a product of contemporary geopolitics – simply someone that is providing a service that is in demand. Furthermore, he self-identifies as a part of Fourth Echelon, frequently referring to himself as 'part of the team'. Despite this, he is frequently belittled by Fischer who

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Figure 71: Fischer begins the interrogation of Kobin (Splinter Cell: Blacklist)

threatens to 'take him skydiving' (Private Estate) and treats the man as an asset of little more value than a laptop. In the original extraction of Kobin during the Safehouse level, Fischer differentiates between saving Kobin and saving what he knows. He is treated roughly, made to walk on broken glass in bare feet, and lands hard after riding a makeshift zip-line. He is also afforded little meaningful agency, notably dismissed as 'too stupid to set that trap, and too smart to risk his life sending us into it' (Insurgent Stronghold). Splinter Cell: Blacklist, therefore, constructs a post-Event narrative of identity in which the Self is elevated to the near-superhuman and the external, violent Other is irredeemably different and dangerous. Individuals like Kobin, meanwhile, who fail to pick a side, are as shown as almost irredeemable.

Unlike *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, *Tom Clancy's The Division* does not ask the player to save the world, or even to contemplate how such a rescue might be achieved. Instead, the game asks the player to consider - after the occurrence of a catastrophic "Event" - 'what would it take to save what remains?' (Ubisoft, 2016b). In a clear inversion of the sleeper cell narrative that has been popularised by television shows such as *24* (2001-2010), *The Americans* (2013-) and *Homeland* (2011-), the members of *The Division* are highly trained, yet dormant agents that are inserted into the general public. The initial discussion suggests similar, familiar themes of self-sacrifice and duty to those discussed in the analysis of *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, highlighting that the members of the *Division* 'are your co-workers. We are your neighbours. We might even be your friends. But when we get the call… We leave everything behind' (Tom Clancy's The Division, 2016, Intro Cinematic). The player's involvement with the Division is portrayed as form of civic duty, undertaken in order to faciliate a return to normal, everyday life and to minimise the impact of any disruption to the prevailing political order:-

> 'It's hard knowing that you belong here – that your purpose lies amongst all this pain. But someone's gotta be there. To pick it up. To push back. To put the first piece back together.
> Put us all back together' (Ubisoft, 2014a)

Success, in this game, is measured by the ability of the player to return the city to the status quo enjoyed before the biological attack. Following one mission to stabilise the city's power supply, for example, one character can be heard to reflect that 'it looks like Times Square again, and that's going to mean something to a lot of people'. Another, meanwhile, remarks that his neighbourhood delicatessen is on the brink of reopening, reflecting that 'if I squint, I can see New York again'. Just before the completion of the final mission, Lau offers a similar summation of the progress that the actions of the Division unit have made towards achieving this objective: -

'[R]esidents are feeling safe enough to come out onto the streets again. JTF was able to

help CERA get their [medical] tents up and running. They've got people lining up around

the block, getting food and medical attention. We're finally starting to get some traction'

The representation of this process of state interventionism is, however, highly problematic. *The Division* are represented as trained personnel, rather than as surviving members of the general public, which has the effect of legitimising a military response to a threat to the established political order. Though described as being people that that are somehow supposedly "like us" - our co-workers, neighbours and friends – the game makes no secret of the fact that this unit is a covert military force with 'no rules, no limits… Our job is to protect what remains' (Tom Clancy's the Division, 2016, Intro Cinematic). This is, however, not a conventional battlefield or a zombie infested wasteland. Unlike games such as *Splinter Cell: Blacklist* and *Homefront: the Revolution*, in which the enemies are either terrorists, traitors or members of a foreign military, *Tom Clancy's The Division* pits the player against groups of American citizens - the player is called upon to shoot and kill the survivors of a biological attack. As such, the game notably lacks the veneer of legitimate military conflict, guerrilla or otherwise, that is evident within other similar titles. This representation of a post-Event America has consequences for the ways in which we are invited to conceive of the role of state and the use of state violence, a debate with broader resonance following high profile incidences of real-world police violence in the USA and an ongoing debate surrounding police militarisation. The Cleaners, for example, are a group of former sanitation workers, who aim to purge the virus from the city by any means necessary. The members of this faction are shown to congregate in large groups and are easily identified by their heavy armour, distinctive full-face gas masks and flamethrower weaponry (see Figure 72). The Cleaners are utilised as an analogy for religious extremism, espousing a doctrine of

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Figure 72: The Cleaners (Ubisoft, 2014a)

purity and cleanliness. The members of this group also visually Stormtroopers, as a representation of their status as adversaries. It is, however, unclear how their actions are in any way different to those of the *Division* members, as each side seeks to limit the spread of the virus through the use of violent action. This representation of the Cleaners, as resembling firefighters, also acts as a subversion of the hero narrative that is associated with the first responders that went into the Twin Towers following the 9-11 attacks.

A similar comparison can be also drawn between *The Division* and the members of the *Last Man Battalion*. This group were formerly members of a private military contractor that was hired by Wall Street firms in order to protect their assets during the smallpox outbreak. These were veteran soldiers, some called in from overseas deployments, who were diverted to Manhattan. Once the scale of the outbreak became apparent, the group originally opted for a diplomatic solution and requested extraction. When this was denied their commander, the charismatic Charles Bliss, disobeyed orders and executed a government official. Whilst the members of *The Division* regard the *Last Man Battalion* as predators, dispensing violence without trial, there is little to distinguish between the actions of the two groups. Like *The Division*, for example, the *LMB* claims to act in the interests of the stricken city, doing what is necessary to aid in its recovery. In one piece of found footage, for example, Charles Bliss can be heard to order the faction to 'do what the cowardly government and its fearful, weak soldiers were too afraid to do. To cut down all the liars, murderers and thieves that stand in the way of peace'. While the morality of this use of force is disputable, this doctrine is not a significant departure from

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Figure 73: Opening Fire on the 'Rioters' in Tom Clancy's The Division (2016)

that which the player embodies – through gameplay – as a member of the *Division* forces. The game's protagonist engages in a number of acts of sanctioned assassination and sabotage, including the killing of criminals, other soldiers, and business people. When the protagonist is sent to engage in supposedly humanitarian acts, these usually result in the killing of one group's members in order to redistribute resources to another. In one example of this, during an initial tutorial, the player is called upon to retrieve some medication from a group of "Rioters". Upon arriving at the scene, the player can see no direct evidence that a crime has been committed. Nevertheless, the player can open fire without warning and without consequence (Figure 73). This has the effect of not only legitimising the use of violence by the state, but also ascertains that the conventional rights afforded to the citizenry - such as the right to due process - are secondary to concerns of securitisation. Such a framework does not remain entirely unchallenged within the game. Paul Rhodes, one of the Division's engineers, reflects that 'the country is set up so that no one can run things by themselves. Balance of powers… And then some asshole decides to create the Division. It breaks everything. All of the power, none of the accountability. It's the opposite of everything this country stands for'. Here, the game offers a critique of the extent to which we have become prepared to surrender civil liberties to ensure our safety.

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Figure 74: Ashgate Yellow Zone (Homefront: the Revolution, 2016)

An alternative commentary is provided by *Homefront: the Revolution*, which advocates for the role of individual resistance and accountability. This video game highlights the potential utility of soft power and insider action, though ultimately depends on the use of guerrilla violence. The Korean military, for example, are shown to treat the captured Walker as a propaganda tool, trading on his former

celebrity status. This also becomes evident as the player is introduced to Crawford, who takes them to a collaborator district called the Ashgate Yellow Zone. This region of the city affords some of the American citizens a better standard of living, in exchange for their continued support of the occupation and assistance in suppressing the activities of their fellow citizenry:-

> 'Since they are so despised by the general populace, the authorities know they have to offer sufficient perks to make the job enticing'

Whilst this is discussed in the narrative, the player's experience of this level does suggest that the supposed distinction may be somewhat surface level. The region remains subject to stringent Korean controls, including military checkpoints, and the region's housing remains comparably ramshackle (Figure 74).

The American resistance also acknowledges the need for soft power, as a means by which to inspire people to rise up alongside them. This is all the more apparent following the capture of Walker, the group's leader, which has the effect of denying the resistance movement its charismatic figurehead. This sparks discussion about how best to incite ordinary civilians to engage in meaningful political resistance in his absence: -

> 'The people are ready to rise up, they just don't know it yet. I wish I could tell them, but I can't… I don't… I don't have the words. Walker does, he knows how to reach people – how to make them understand that fear is the only thing that's holding them back. Once they realise that, nothing's gonna stop them' (Parrish, Homefront: The Revolution)

This is represented in the game's side missions, which challenge the player to release prisoners, change radio stations to resistance frequencies, or take control of meaningful buildings in order to disrupt the Korea control infrastructure.

An alternative approach is offered by the group's doctor, Sam Burnett, a non-playable character who is shown to advocate a non-violent means of resistance, using what little power he possesses to help those around him. Burnett is shown to have developed a network of medical clinics and to have become involved in the distribution of aid. He notably also cautions the other characters against the mindless use of violence in pursuit of a cause, reflecting that he would 'rather be a good man enslaved, than a monster in the name of freedom'. Whilst this generates a place for the use of soft power, *Homefront: the Resistance* is driven by acts of violent resistance and is clear what it is expects the player to do: 'stand the fuck up! [Because] if you want out of this hell, we gonna have to fight our way out' (Brady). The player cannot, as is possible in *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, choose to use their own discretion in the level of the lethality of their violence. Here, the use of violence seems to serve as an

act of catharsis, offering a way in which to subvert feelings of powerlessness. The resistance member Dana is a key example of this. Readying herself for a raid on a resistance armoury, she reflects that 'at least we have plenty of… explosives ready. There'll be bits of NORK landing all the way over in Pyongyang'. Dana's violence is shown to be directed at *all* those connected with the occupation as, despite Burnett's caution, she expresses the desire to 'kill them all! Every lousy collaborator. Every NORK. Their wives, their kids… Just kill them all'. The use of violence, as a response to a future threat, is not entirely unproblematic. Whilst the game begins by showing the player the acts of torture that are committed by Korean forces in order to extract information, subsequent levels show the use of similar tactics by resistance members: -

> '[C]aptured a few wounded NORKs. I've been interrogating them. I don't speak Korean, but I'm sending back a message that's universal' (Dana)

This creates a problematic representational equivalency, however, as the resistance members are shown to act in much the same way as the occupying Korean military.

Conclusion

This chapter examines the extent to which the representation of future spaces and events within military-themed video games can be used to reinforce cetertain assumptions about the appropriate practices of both collective securitisation and individual action during times of crisis.

Section 7.2 focussed specifically on the backwards-looking process of remediation, examining the extent to which the representation of political spatiality in military-themed video games is constructed through an engagement with the frameworks, logics and cultural tropes that are already familiar from our prior engagement with different forms of popular culture, politics and everyday events. This section also examines one video game which explicitly undermines these common conventions, focussing on the representational practices utilised within *Spec Ops: the Line*. Here, our familiarity with the tropes and conventions that operate within more conventional military-shooter video games is used to call into question the repetitive and immoral nature of the actions and interactions that are commonly depicted as a part of warfare and counter-terrorism.

Section 7.3, meanwhile, examines the role of the premediation of the future in the construction of present-day notions of security and right action. The representation of future events within these video games often depends on the exacerbation of current, real-world fragilities, offering the player the opportunity to quite literally play at responding to the developing threats of chemical weapons, financial collapse and terrorist action. This has the effect of generating a representation of the future in which another attack is somehow inevitable, whilst also inviting discussion about how

best to defer the date of its occurance. Within this subsection, a range of different securitisation practices are evident. The representation of a counterterrorist campaign in *Splinter Cell: Blacklist* serves to demonstrate the effiacy of contemporary tactics, legitimising the use of violence against those that would do harm to the state. Such a framework is, however, indirectly problematised within *Tom Clancy's The Division*. In its representation of a post-Event Manhatten, this video game presents a traumatised civillian population as a legitimate target for extrajudicial state violence. This creates a framework which entirely neglects any discussion of the potential for negotiation, diplomacy or soft power, instead privileging the use of uniform and unreglated acts of violence in times of crisis. A more balanced represention of post-Event space, meanwhile, is offered in *Homefront: the Revolution*, which reinstates the distinction between the national Self and the foreign Other – a process achieved through the reimagining of the current emity between the USA and North Korea. Here, a doctine of civillian self-help is advanced, rather than a reliance upon a state or superstate entity. Whilst games such as *Homefront* and *The Division* can be seen to directly challenge the use of violence as a response to new security hazards, each can also be seen to affirm its efficacy through its successful deployment in the neutralisation of hostile targets. In doing so, these games expose a developing conflict between the values of the traditional Clausewitzean warrior and the need for pre-emptive or retaliatory violences which may transgress these norms of conduct.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Introduction

Within this thesis, I have argued that the representation of different forms of political space within military-themed video games can be seen to create specific geopolitical imaginaries. Chapter Two began by exploring some of the prevalent theoretical approaches to the examination of popular culture, engaging with analyses grounded within both International Relations and critical geopolitics. As these literatures demonstrated, 'it is simply no longer tenable to maintain that popular culture has nothing to do with world politics. The two are intimately and inextricably bound together' (Caso & Hamilton, 2015, p. 4). This relationship between politics and popular culture was, however, shown to have taken a variety of different forms. Analyses within IR, for example, have highlighted the role of popular culture in the furtherance of pedagogical practices, theoretical development and data gathering (see, for example, Nexon & Neumann, 2006, pp.9-17). Critical geopolitics, meanwhile, has sought to destabilise the deterministic construction of different forms of space, identifying a variety of alternate sites at which spatial meaning is made and maintained. One particular subfield, referred to as popular geopolitics, 'has provided rich insight into the ways in which our political world is mediated and made meaningful via a range of popular culture and media outlets' (Bos, 2018, p. 216). This analysis has been located at the intersection of IR theory and popular geopolitics, contributing to the increasing levels of interdisciplinary cooperation between these two fields. Here, I have found common ground in the discussion of popular culture as constitutive of politics, a perspective which suggests that the practices of representation that are utilised within popular culture are productive of particular, common-sense understandings of space and spatial order (Kangas, 2009, p.323; Muller, 2008, p.200; Nexon & Neumann, 2006, p.19).

It should, however, be noted that many such analyses of the representation of space within popular culture have focussed on the mediums of film and television. The representation of space within video games, meanwhile, is comparatively underexplored (Bos, 2018, p. 216; Grayson, 2018, p. 48). As outlined within Chapter One, this lacuna is surprising, given the high-profile, profitable and often overtly-political nature of the video game form (Graham & Shaw, 2010; Ouellette, 2008). This type of entertainment is also, notably, one which specifically depends upon its ability to make and sustain a variety of claims about the world through the creation of compelling and authentic-feeling simulations, which are often predicated upon familiar places, peoples or events. As Bos highlights, video games 'offer players escapism where they: enter historical, contemporary or futuristic conflicts; navigate and interact with simulated war-torn environments and virtually enact forms of military violence. Unlike other media, videogames present landscapes which players directly explore, interact

and perform in' (2018, p.216; see also Leonard, 2004; Power, 2007). A review of the surrounding literatures was used to highlight some of the diverse ways in which we might understand the content of such spaces, focussing specifically upon urban, rural and temporal themes. In applying these ideas to my own experiences with military-themed video games, I was then able to offer an understanding of some of the ways in which geopolitical imaginaries are produced by – and productive of – different forms of space, focussing on some of the common narrative and ludic mechanisms that are used to structure our interpretations (see Chapter Four). The findings of these different analyses are summarised in the following section. This chapter, and this thesis, will then conclude by examining some of the potential areas within which further analyses of the video game medium could potentially be undertaken.

8.1   Making a Contribution to Knowledge

Through an analysis of the representation of different forms of urban, rural and temporally-inflected spaces within military-themed video games, this thesis has generated theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions to knowledge. This thesis has contributed to the theoretical debates surrounding the deployment of popular culture in the analysis of political and spatial phenomena through the increasing imbrication of approaches grounded within the fields of International Relations (IR) and critical geopolitics. As Chapter Two highlighted, IR analyses have often addressed the relationship between political theory and popular culture. Critical geopolitics however, through its focus on popular sites of political meaning-making, examines the broader processes through which we perceive the surrounding world as spatialized. An interdisciplinary perspective, therefore, acknowledges not only the production of a form of political power, but also interrogates the everyday mechanisms through which the associated assumptions, biases and cultural tropes are reproduced as a form of commonsense spatial "knowledge". This examination of video game space has also resulted in a methodological contribution to knowledge, as a necessary response to the limitations that are associated with exclusively narratological or ludological approaches to the medium (see, for example, Aarseth, 2012; Jenkins, 2004; Juul, 2001; see also Chapter Three). The formation of an object-focussed methodological framework has allowed for the creation of a middle ground between these two different and often polarising perspectives, acknowledging both thematic and structural aspects to the representation of space within this medium (see Chapter Four). This thesis has also made an empirical contribution to knowledge, offering an examination of the different ways in which the video game medium both reflects, and develops upon, our prevailing conceptualisations of urban, rural and temporally-inflected spaces and spatial pheneomena. The following subsections provide an overview of the different empirical chapters, detailing how each of these diferent forms of spatiality were able to produce or preclude specific geopolitical imaginaries. These sections also reflect upon the ways in

which these encounters with military-themed video games illuminate – and even destabilise – the foundations of prevailing critical frameworks, offering the potential for introspection and future growth.

Chapter Five: Monuments and the Mundane

Chapter Five provided a detailed examination of both the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* franchise and *Splinter Conviction*. This analysis centred upon the ways in which the simulation of different forms of national space can be used to create specific geopolitical imaginaries. Here, I argued that one's experience of "national" space and a commensurate sense of situatedness or estrangement are constructed at different national scales, which range from the more collective experience of the international or national, through to the more localised and individually apprehended environments that recur within our everyday lives (see also Chapter Three, pp.56-72). A particular emphasis was placed upon three specific ways in which national spaces are constructed and ordered within these video games, noting the role of monumental spaces, everyday environments and individual spatial embodiment.

Section 5.2 focussed specifically upon the formation of different imaginaries of collective, "monumental" forms of spatiality. This subsection highlighted the production of national identity through the representation of both macro-level, cartographic representations of national space (Chapter Five, pp.147-150), as well as through the recreation of specific symbolic spatial sites (Chapter Five, pp.150-159). These different representational practices were shown to order space in different ways. The more macro-level, cartographic presentations of political spaces (such as the maps depicted in the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* franchise) were shown to create a conceptualisation of the Self as a part of a broader whole. These imaginaries are used to situate the player as both a national subject, as well as amidst a world comprised of national entities. In contrast, the representation of individual spatial sites – such as the White House and the Eiffel Tower – is shown to be more nuanced. Here, specific attention was paid to both the role of monumental structures in the organisation of urban space, as well as the manner in which such structures are symbolically representative of specific forms of national identity and territorial attachment. Monumental structures are shown to provide a form of spatial shorthand, used to locate the player within the boundaries of specific spaces (Chapter Five, pp.151-152). These structures are also shown to provide a sense of scale, generating the impression of a broader and more cohesive world (Chapter Five, pp.152-153). Monumental spaces can, however, also provide an ordering process through their conveyance of specific values and ideals, serving as "waved flags" of nationalism (Billig, 1995). The simulation of these environments provides the player with something to - quite literally - fight for, whilst also serving as a destination for the

player to reach through the act of gameplay. Whilst the destruction of such environments often serves as emblematic of the sacrifice of the Self (Chapter Five, pp.155-157), the reclamation of such spaces is key to the defence of one's identity and way of life.

Section 5.3 extended the focus on monumental evocations of spatiality, examining the production and destabilisation of specific common-sense forms of spatial order through the creation of a connection between individual bodies and the macro-level "national" identity. This analysis accounts for two specific interrelationships, noting the particular role of both "live" and "dead" national bodies in the production of a broader sense of Self. These different practices were shown to be interrelated. This subsection first highlights the specific role that is played by dead bodies in the construction of the national imaginary, focussing on the contrasting treatment of the characters of Shepherd, Ghost and Roach (*Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, 2009; see Chapter Five, pp.159-161). Here, the formal interment of the traitorous Shepherd was argued to be representative of a specific attempt to control which bodies are honoured. The place of this character within the broader narrative, however, problematizes this act of commemoration and lamentation and, in so doing, undermines the assumption that it is possible to present a singular, "correct" interpretation of historical events. This analysis suggests that this process of bodily reproduction is key to maintaining or challenging the *construction* of specific forms of nationalism, representing peoples and places as a form of environmental clutter that is to be either organised or exorcized. This subsection also problematized the production of the "national" identity through an examination of the different forms of rhetoric that are advanced by different "living" characters (Chapter Five, pp.161-164). These figures are used to problematize the ways in which we externalise the extremes of nationalistic sentiment, undermining attempts to structure different spaces around the binary division between the "patriotic" national Self and the "ultranationalist" Other.

Section 5.4, meanwhile, engaged with the construction of spatial order through the representation of the more mundane forms of domestic and everyday environments. Here, I argued that the representation of these spaces functions through an appeal to a more individual – but less consciously acknowledged – form of spatial knowledge, which is rooted in our ability to recognise everyday urban and suburban environments as being either *like* or *unlike* those that we encounter in our own lives. This subsection highlights two distinct ways in which such spaces are utilised within the games that are discussed within this chapter, differentiating between the structures that are present and the people that we would expect to inhabit them. Section 5.4.1 examines the role that is played by the house, which is treated as a physical extension of the Westernised notion of the home (see Chapter Three, pp.165-170). Whilst the home is understood more broadly as a personal sanctuary, such a space is rarely represented as anything other than a cluttered urban space within video games.

One of the few exceptions is evident in the interaction between Fischer and his daughter (*Splinter Cell: Conviction*; see Chapter Five, p.165), which is used to establish the use of force in the defence of familiar spaces and peoples. The representation of the home is, however, more commonly able to produce a sense of spatial situatedness through the reproduction of the clutter that we associate with our own lives, offering spaces within which "we" – as the player – are able to envisage (either directly or indirectly) the existence of the peoples, places and spatial flows that are familiar to us. The urban Other, meanwhile, is produced through the manufacture of a sense of spatial estrangement, as foreign spaces are represented in a way that places them beyond the remit of our own individual experiences. Section 5.4.2, meanwhile, examines the inclusion and exclusion of specific forms of spatial flow, highlighting the commonplace absence of civilians from the recreation of everyday urban environments (Chapter Five, pp.170-175). In removing civilians from urban areas, these video games render urban space a legitimate target for military violence. Foreign urban spaces are shown to be dangerous spaces, occupied only by adversarial and threatening bodies, meaning that they can be targeted by the extremes of military violence. Domestic urbanity, meanwhile, is shown as somewhere that is recognisable for a Western audience, necessitating the use of violence in the restoration of "our" way of life.

The above analysis has served to highlight some specific aspects of the representation of national and urban spaces that are potentially consequential for the ways in which we theorise the nature of such spaces within the real-world. The analysis of national space in Section 5.2, for example, has served to problematize the assumed centrality and inviolability of monumental structures and their associated symbolic meanings. This section also highlights the extent to which a preoccupation with monumental spatial structures can potentially generate a reading of urban spatiality that devalues individual interpretations, obfuscating the lives and lived experiences of the peoples that live within these environments. Within these video games, for example, the use of monuments allows for the presentation of warfare as a more straightforward clash of "good" against "evil", allowing the player to overlook the absence of humanitarian intervention within these environments. Furthermore, these video games expose the ease with which symbolic monumental spaces can be rendered vernacular. Whilst the *exteriors* of these buildings carry a particular significance, offering the player something to fight for or towards – the *interiors* of these buildings are reduced to a series of indistinguishable, banal forms of spatial practice.

Section 5.3, meanwhile, problematizes the distinction between the national, patriotic Self and the ultranationalist Other. Here, the monumental "embodied" signifiers of national identity are not representative of the values that we would willingly claim for ourselves, but rather of the extremes of national identity that we would more commonly ascribe to others. This section, therefore, invites a

heightened awareness of the role of different perspectives in the construction of shared national history and identity, calling attention to the behaviours that – whilst radical in the Other – might pass by unnoticed in the representation of the Self. This perspective offers a particular challenge to the assumption of objectivity that is often afforded to the representation of national history. Here, the representation of different national bodies – and the various processes of commemoration and lamentation that are afforded to them – are used to highlight the impossibility of a singular authoritative national voice, emphasising the need to challenge those that lay claim to the representation of a particular "truth". Instead we are encouraged to be aware of, and even seek out, the dissenting narratives that may lurk at the margins of a monumentally-presented representation of the national collective.

The final section of this chapter – Section 5.4 – highlighted the need for continued attention to the construction of space at a variety of different scales, going beyond elite-authored forms of collective national meaning. This section focussed specifically upon some of the smaller-scale ways in which individual identities are created, performed and internalised. This section also highlights the need for there to be an awareness of the different types of people or everyday spatial clutter that are included or excluded within the process of constructing "collective" notions of spatial meaning. This examination of the representation of everyday sites within video games – including the home and the surrounding dwellingscapes – emphasises the need to remain aware of aspects of the national Self that might otherwise pass unnoticed, subsumed beneath the more active performances of national "meaning" that are provided by formally structured, "monumental" spatial sites.

Chapter Six: Reading Rural Space

Chapter Six focussed on *Battlefield Hardline*, *Call of Duty: Ghosts*, *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Wildlands*, and *Homefront.* This analysis examined the extent to which the representation of different understandings of rural space can result in the formation of particular geopolitical imaginaries. Within this chapter, I argued that the rural periphery can be encountered in several different ways and that these can be seen to have varying consequences for the ways in which we perceive of both the Self and the Other. This chapter focused upon three particularly prevalent conceptualisations of rural spaces, distinguishing between the rural idyll, the backwoods and the wilderness (Chapter Three, pp.73-90).

Section 6.1 acknowledged the frequency with which the "idyllic" imaginary is made absent from the representations of rural space that are offered within military-themed video games, noting the lone example of the "Oasis" encampment (Homefront; see Chapter Six, pp.179-181). Though shown to be located within the bounds of suburban space, the Oasis encampment evokes several

idyllic signifiers: these include, for example, the natural protections that are offered by this space, as well as the ability of the occupants to live off the land. Whilst the player is potentially free to remain within this protected space, such an action would make it impossible to progress the broader narrative and would preclude any involvement in the commensurate resistance effort. This creates a specific imaginary within which the individual *must* leave behind any and all personal comforts in order to fulfil their duty to the broader national whole. Whilst this connection is made explicit here – through the characterisation and subsequent destruction of the idyllic, yet urban safe space – this interrelationship is more commonly *implied* rather than shown.

In Section 6.2, for example, this analysis examined the production of rurality as a form of untamed wilderness space. This section emphasises the externalisation of rural space, which is shown to lack the civilised systems and cultural values that one might expect within the urban core. These spaces are instead shown to be zones of decay - containing only decrepit buildings and failing industries – and are home to only criminals and wild animals. Such spaces are, however, also shown to be necessary for the formation of the hyper-masculine warrior identity – referred to within some of these video games as the "Ghost" identity. This identity, evoked through one's contact with the wilderness, was used to highlight the role of mobility and modernity in the creation of the rural imaginary. As Section 6.2.1 highlights, the Ghosts are shown to achieve control over the wilderness through their mastery of the terrain and their continued movement through it. These individuals are represented as near-mythical figures, conceived of as an extension of the protections that are afforded by the natural environment. These are shown to be professionals, free of the extremes of ideology and the pursuit of individual validation. The virtue of the Ghost, however, is shown to be threatened by a lack of individual mobility. The rural wilderness, whilst key to the evocation of national identity and the fulfilment of one's duties, is also shown to erode the civilised values that are associated with the urban core. A successful engagement with rurality, therefore, is shown to necessitate continued forward movement and one's inevitable departure, as this is not somewhere where civilised peoples should hope to remain. Rather, as outlined in Section 6.2.2, this is a zone which is to be entered into and controlled – by violent means if necessary (Chapter Six, pp.191-193).

Though rural spaces are shown to play a role in the construction of the national identity, these regions are also shown to contain a hostile and violent Other. Section 6.3 examined some of the ways in which these groups are represented, highlighting both external and internal adversaries. This section highlighted the frequency with which rural spaces are shown to allow for behaviours that are not permitted within the confines of "civilised" urban society. The analysis of *Ghost Recon Wildlands*, for example, highlighted the use of torture and sexual violence by the rural Other, which disciplines our expectations about what the encounter with the rural is like and how it contrasts with our own

values and identity. Within *Wildlands*, the game differentiates between the violence of the Western soldiers – which is seen as a necessity – and the more recreational violence deployed by the Mexican Other (Chapter Six, 193-196). Section 6.3.1 highlighted similar representational practices in the formulation of different internal Others, used in the marginalisation of specific aspects of one's own national community. Two specific examples were considered here, from within *Homefront* and *Battlefield Hardline*, which are each familiar as representations of the so-called "Prepper" movement. These groups do not utilise rural spaces to provide access to a better version of oneself, but rather as a means of isolation and the preservation of one's own individual interests. These representations of internal rural Others each show groups that are unwilling to work together in the service of the national whole, meeting attempts to do with violence, sexism and racism. The final part of this section, labelled 6.3.2, aimed to destabilise the assumed correlation between rurality and a profoundly negative, anti-modern imaginary. Here, through the further analysis of *Ghost Recon: Wildlands*, modernity and its associated acts of consumption are shown to be the *cause* of the disturbance to the social order. The various members of the Mexican cartel, for example, are shown to have co-opted both traditional practices (e.g. the 'narco-corrido' musical form) and more progressive forms of social and political discourse (Chapter Six, pp.200-202). Even the supposedly moral and modern American forces are shown to be in pursuit of revenge, rather than the protection of Bolivian spaces and peoples (Chapter Six, p.202). The rural Bolivian way of life, meanwhile, which is represented through the agrarian ideologies espoused by resistance fighters, is shown as that which is to be defended *from* the intrusion of modern, immoral and *fundamentally urban* practices.

These analyses have served to highlight several issues that are potentially consequential for the ways in which we theorise the nature and role of rural spaces. Thought of more broadly, these representations of rurality can be seen to reinstate a clear urban-rural binary that is often not available in the real-world (Chapter Three, pp.73-76). These images provide access to some of the prevalent ways in which we think about the relationship between the Self and the rural periphery, providing a common language through which it is possible to examine and interrogate different anxieties about these spaces. It is also made possible to examine how different, even conflicting, discourses of rurality and rural space can be applied to the same regions.

The different imaginaries that are examined within this section can also be seen to have critical import. Section 6.1, for example, highlighted the extent to which even an implied "idyllic" space may be consequential for the ways in which we conceive of the validity of a range of different actions and interactions. The analysis of the wilderness in Section 6.2, meanwhile, was used to highlight the extent to which our pejorative conceptualisations of external places can be linked to issues surrounding mobility and individual freedoms. Whilst one's entry into rural spaces is represented as a

key part of one's responsibilities as a national subject – acting as a space in which an individual is made able to fulfil their potential – we are nonetheless shown that it is necessary to leave such spaces and return to the urban core. This is used to expose the tension that exists between the representation of rural space as a masculine playground and the coinciding suggestion that these are spaces where this identity is at risk. The final stage of this chapter, Section 6.3, highlighted the frequency with which rural spaces are shown to contain the aspects of society that cannot easily be reconciled with the national identity and its associated values, facilitating the construction of urban and civilised spaces in juxtaposition to the people and places that are encountered within these realms. This section, however, also serves to problematize this commonplace cultural equivocation between rurality and anti-modernity (Section 6.3.2). This section serves to expose the artificiality of the distinction between urban and rural spaces, showing each to have been the product of specific imported social and cultural values that are ascribed both to people "like us" (from which the nation is composed) and the excluded Other (representative of the denied and subverted aspects of the Self that would seek to ensnare us).

Chapter Seven: Time, Temporality and the Event

This final substantive chapter provided an examination of *Spec Ops: the Line*, *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, *Homefront: the Revolution* and *Tom Clancy's The Division*. This analysis focussed on the logics of mediation that are evident within these military-themed video games, differentiating between the processes of remediation and premediation (Bolter & Grusin, 2000; Grusin, 2010; see Chapter Three, pp.93-104). This chapter argued that these different temporally-inflected processes of mediation serve to produce specific geopolitical imaginaries, manufacturing particular roles for both the state and the associated individual actors. The resultant analysis was divided into two distinctive sections, each with a different emphasis. Section 7.2 focussed specifically on the role of remediation in providing a form of temporal therapy, through the representation of the familiar and comfortable tropes associated with both past practices of mediation and past events. Section 7.3, meanwhile, engaged with the notion of premediation, examining how video games offer an incitement to action through the representation of unstable future spaces and events.

Section 7.2 focusses on the logics that are associated with the process of remediation. This subsection first highlighted the creation of a broader sense of immediacy (Chapter Three, pp.94-95), examining some of the ways in which these video games achieve a sense of authenticity and immersion through the denial of mediation. These techniques included, for example, the integration of the player-camera into the game-world as a physical object (Chapter Seven, pp.214-215). This subsection also examined the hypermediated production of these worlds, noting the use of a variety of different technologies of mediation. Some of these processes were shown to mirror the ways in

which we encounter political phenomena in the real-world, broadening the sense of spatial scale, including the use of online videos, phone calls and "breaking-news" television broadcasts (Chapter Seven, pp.218). Other examples highlighted the use of familiar forms of mediation as embedded narrative, including the variety of different collectibles that the player can retrieve from within the gameworld (Chapter Seven, p.218). The focus on remediation is extended in Section 7.2.1, which focuses on the similarities between military-themed video games and other forms of spatial representation, noting the influence of both real-world political events and other forms of popular culture. Examples of this process include the remediation of the visual and spatial language of both the 9-11 attacks and the "Dark Winter" military simulation, as well as the familiar cultural imagery that surrounds events such as the launch of Apple computer products (Chapter Seven, pp.222-223). These are shown to allow for the creation of a "compliant" geopolitics, predicated on past historical narratives, which allows for past imaginaries to be adapted for contemporary audiences.

This section also examines some of the ways in which these familiar forms of mediation can be subverted, drawing specifically upon the example of *Spec Ops: the Line*. Although ostensibly an outlier, as one of the few examples of an overtly critical mainstream military video game, the examination of this title served to expose some of the mechanisms that are commonly used to frame the act of gameplay. These include, for example, the manipulation of the player's sense of agency, as this title offers the player a series of choices that are not normally available within this medium (Chapter Seven, pp.223-228). This subversion of remediated themes and tropes allows for a critique of the supposed morality and efficacy of violent interventionism during times of crisis.

In Section 7.3, the focus moves to the process of premediation. This section examines the extent to which the representation of future spaces within military video games can be used to normalise specific behaviours as the "correct" response to future "Events". Within these video games, this future trauma is – like the "Judgement Day" of the *Terminator* universe – shown to be inevitable. It is not possible to stop the next attack from happening, but only to either endlessly defer its occurrence or else to soften the inevitable impact. There are several different representations of the future national "Self" that are considered here – these include, but are not limited to, the "heroic" counterterrorism officer, the state mercenary, and the traumatised soldier. An examination of these different characters and their actions is used to facilitate a closer consideration of the perceived role of national identity and duty within the post-Event space, informed by the premediation of different responses to events that have not actually happened in the real world (yet). The nature of these interactions varies from the overt reification of duty and sacrifice within Splinter *Cell: Blacklist*, to the devastation that is caused by simply following orders in *Spec Ops: the Line* (Chapter Seven, pp.230-237). In each of these cases, these video games present different roles for both the individual and the

state in future practices of securitisation, presenting a range of actions that we are invited to either undertake for ourselves or else sanction on our behalf. These representations not only serve to naturalise specific responses to the occurrence of trauma – including the unconstrained use of violent force – but also preclude futures within which traumatic "Events" can answered through diplomacy, negotiation or other non-violent means.

This analysis of military-themed video games offers several potential insights into the ways in which we mediate the world around us, in order to come to an understanding of our role in relation to present and future "Events". In Section 7.2, for example, the analysis of military-themed video games highlights the role of familiar practices of spatial mediation in creating and recreating the world for the future. This analysis exposes the role of backwards-looking practices of mediation, emphasising that the political space is constructed by looking at the world as it *was* and not as it *actually is* or could be. Such a perspective serves to highlight the continued role of the imagination in addressing potential or future sources of insecurity. Popular culture can play a role in this process, exposing the instances on which familiar narratives and conventions fail or are subverted.

Section 7.3, meanwhile, calls specific attention to the mechanisms that are used to solicit consent for acts of securitisation, including warfare, inviting clear consideration of the ways in which we both form and maintain our ideas about duty, national identity and belonging within everyday life. These video games are representative of broader processes which discipline the attribution of personal and political power, often overriding otherwise cherished freedoms in the name of protection and security. This final section also exposes the limitations that are imposed upon present day discourse through the overwhelming representation of specific forms of action as an "inevitable" part of the future. In these video games, for example, the assumed centrality of violent action precludes the possibility for peaceful negotiation and diplomacy within this future space, exposing the tensions between the role of the more conventional soldier in symmetrical warfare and the role of pre-emptive violence in the prevention and deferral of future catastrophe.

8.2   New Directions for Future Research

By way of conclusion, this final section will highlight some of the other potential areas within which further research into the video game medium could be carried out.

The Exploration of Alternative Genres

My own analysis has focussed specifically upon the representation of different forms of space within the military-themed subgenre of video games. Whilst such an approach has facilitated the examination of a number of overtly political cultural artefacts, a similar approach could examine the

function of these spatial themes within other video game genres. Such an analysis could, for example, extend the focus on the role of different rural spaces (here discussed in Chapter Six) to encompass the various ways in which adversarial and hostile spaces are represented with the horror genre of video games, including titles such as *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* (Capcom, 2017). Such an approach would resonate with critical examinations of the role of rural spaces in film and television, including those of Clover (1992) and Murphy (2013). Another alternative approach, meanwhile, could expand upon the mediation of the future "Event" (here discussed in Chapter Seven) to encompass the representation of a post-apocalyptic form of identity formation within *Fallout 4* (Bethesda Softworks, 2015). This particular title would, through its representation of the aftermath of nuclear warfare, allow for an examination of a world in which concepts of duty and sacrifice are necessarily separated from one's allegiance to the state.

The Exploration of a Broader Cultural Intertext

Within this analysis, I have focussed on the ways in which specific understandings of political space are produced by the various representational, narrative and ludic functions of the video game text. This is, however, only one of the potential ways in which the "meaning" of a cultural text is established (see Chapter Two). Further research could, for example, seek to examine the extent to which our understandings of political spaces are produced by the intertextual relationship between video games and other forms of popular culture. The characters and spaces contained with video games are, for example, now frequently adapted into films, television series and comic books. Future analyses of video game space could, therefore, consider the extent to which the understandings of the audience are manipulated by this broader assemblage.

Other analyses, meanwhile, could potentially account for the ways in which our understandings of political spaces are produced through the broader paratextual resources that surround such releases. These might include, for example, the role of video game journalism and fan made videos, each of which can be seen to construct their interpretations of particular characters and environments in relation to other cultural and political phenomena. Such an examination would, once again, correlate with an increasing interest in the role of the audience in the production of textual meaning, broadening the range of sites at which interpretations of political space are sought and studied.

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