

MAGAW 2017

Environment Design as Interactive Background and World Building

Casilda de Zulueta

I propose to analyse how game environments are interactive, and where they are interconnected.

Defining environments as everything that is not the player character in the game space means all pretended sentient objects in the scene need to be taken into account. Some NPCs will inevitably interrupt your travel to give you hints in Ocarina of Time, whilst Turians and Asaris stand in front of each other doing nothing in the original Mass Effect. The latter accomplish the same function as the trees behind them: they are *atrezo* that, if inexistent, would make the space feel even more absurd.

Whether furniture or humanoids, game objects have a degree of interaction defined by comparison. One interacts with tomb stones in Proteus by walking by, at the same time, this action has functionally no effect on regular stones. This conceptual opposition has therefore different outcomes depending on the game: walking over bushes in Skyrim makes them shake, but in order to *interact* with them and collect their berries you have to press a specific button.

Often, games provide more than one environment whose interconnection also gives meaning to the environments themselves, such as the mental link between rooms in Silent Hill 2's Lakeview Hotel, where doors are sequential spaces delimited by visible ellipses. Resident Evil's (1996) change of environments is also made by a simple, film-like cut.

This method could clarify the relation between background elements and gameplay.