

Escape from C-D Road: On the value of boredom in *Euro Truck Simulator 2* multiplayer

Olli Tapio Leino, School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong

Introduction

In this paper I focus on boredom in computer games, and explore how games could be theorized, analysed, and critiqued from the perspective of boredom. Drawing on phenomenology, existentialism, and the philosophy of emotions, and using the mundane vehicle simulator *Euro Truck Simulator 2 Multiplayer*¹ (later: *ETS2MP*) as the main case study, this paper will analyse the conditions of possibility for and value of boredom in computer games like *ETS2MP*. In this paper I will not only acknowledge boredom as a part of the player's experience in *ETS2MP*, but go further to postulate that profound boredom and the meditative and reflective experiences it can evoke, and the self-realization it can lead to, can constitute the experiential attraction *ETS2MP* and the other games of the same type offer to their players.

Arguing that a game could be meant to be boring may seem initially controversial, as it does indeed go against the grain of 'traditional' notions in game design and player experience. However, notion of 'boring game' is timely, given the advent of new types of computer games challenging the traditional ideas of computer games as fun and challenging. Consider for example "idle games" with 'automated play' (e.g. Fizek 2017; Fizek 2018) and "walking simulators" or "first-person walkers" with no challenge and/or ambiguous goals (e.g. Carbo-Mascarell 2016; Muscat, Goddard, Duckworth & Holopainen 2016). Thus, boredom in *ETS2MP* may be an interesting 'test case' regarding novel types of ludic entertainment, and may tell us something about boredom in computer games in general.

In philosophical and phenomenological literature, boredom is conceptualized as permeating the layers of concepts we may use to describe our mental life and being in the world. From a phenomenological perspective, it can be theorized at least as resembling an emotion (i.e. with an intentional relation to its object), as a totalizing mood (which, if described as intentional, assumes the whole world as its object), and, as a kind of Heideggerian attunement, or an 'existential orientation', a backdrop for being in the world which makes some experiences possible, others impossible. All these perspectives seem to apply on computer games, like they apply on other

¹ With *ETS2MP* I refer to *Euro Truck Simulator 2* (SCS Software, 2012) with the third-party multiplayer mod *TruckersMP* (Truckersmp.com, 2014). The *TruckersMP* mod involves a series of servers, to which players connect

avenues of human activity. This, combined with games being both objects in the world, and worlds in themselves, creates challenges for talking about boredom and games.

I will argue that in order to focus the argument on the technological-material specificity of boredom in computer games instead of treating computer games as just another possible source of boredom, it is worthwhile to initially distinguish between boredom ‘about a computer game’, *i.e.* something which the player experiences right before quitting, which should actually be referred to as ‘resignation’ instead of boredom, and, boredom ‘within the computer game’, *i.e.* something which the player experiences while continuing to play. Conventional game design writing, in particular, has missed this distinction, reduced boredom to ‘the opposite of fun’, and thus missed the expressive potential of boredom has for game design.

To conceptualise boredom *within* the game, the paper will make use of Heidegger’s three levels of boredom ranging from reactionary and situational boredom to profound boredom. Building on Möring’s (2014) application of Heidegger’s levels of boredom in his study of freedom, fear and boredom in computer games, and through an analysis of *ETS2MP*, I will argue that it is the third level, profound boredom, which has the world-disclosing potential: the technological-material affordances for profound boredom in a computer game are affordances for the computer game to be experienced first and foremost as something ‘in which to exist’, and perhaps only subsequently as something ‘to be played’. In other words, boredom is important, if not essential, for the disclosure of the ‘worldness’ of computer games, and, that this ‘worldness’ can be described as distinct from their ‘gameness’.

With its specific technological and material conditions of possibility, profound boredom in *ETS2MP* can be distinguished from being bored while interacting with a virtual world, art game, a walking simulator, or a traditional computer game. Following Möring (2014), I suggest that boredom appears to be an integral part of the inner workings of authentic self-realization in computer games: boredom should not be considered only as the ‘last feeling’ the player has before quitting, but, also as the ‘first feeling’ on the player’s way of establishing themselves in the game world.

From resignation to boredom in *Euro Truck Simulator 2 Multiplayer*

ETS2MP belongs to the genre commonly referred to as ‘mundane vehicle simulators’ and considered as including also titles like *Warehouse and Logistics Simulator 2014* (App4Fun, 2014) and *Farming Simulator 2018* (Giants Software, 2017). The genre is characterized by, on the one hand, the player being required to drive a vehicle and to complete a series of repetitive and/or monotonous tasks like making deliveries, harvesting crops, or, cleaning streets, and, on the other hand, by the relative lack of game-like scaffolding to lend meaning to player’s actions (e.g. scores, levels, “juiciness” [e.g. Juul & Begy 2016] of interface) Some commentators, like Cobbett (2017), describe games in this genre as simulating “really, really boring things” (Cobbett 2017).

Having done a few deliveries in *ETS2MP* myself, my intuition is that Cobbett’s statement has a grain of truth: there is nothing particularly challenging in *ETS2MP*, and the gameplay activity is best described as monotonous. While *ETS2MP* and the so-called walking simulators have certain structural similarities, not least the lack of conventional challenge, significant differences also

exist. Perhaps due to the lack of any meaningful narrative content, *ETS2MP* does not appear to afford the pleasures of “derivé” which Carbo-Mascarell (2016) associate with games in the walking simulator genre. In the low-detail environment of *ETS2MP* in which cities are distinguished from one another only by their single most prominent landmark if by anything at all, delivering white phosphorus from Glasgow to Berlin is not significantly different from delivering a yacht from Stockholm to Milan.

In terms of gameplay activity, *ETS2MP* is very quickly learned: the “kinaesthetic challenge” (Karhulahti 2013) of steering is trivial and following the route on the GPS-like minimap is not mentally taxing. While players can ‘level up’ and earn achievement badges by completing missions of particular length, type, *etc*, their level or the badges are not disclosed to others, making this goal idiosyncratic at best. Furthermore, *ETS2MP* allows the players to edit their savegame files stored on the local hard disk. Players can thus alter not only the appearance of their trucks, but also the level of their driver-avatars, and the amount of currency on their bank accounts, and other such details. While the original *Euro Truck Simulator 2* afforded experiences of having to think of the relationship between time, distance, and money (e.g. a player can only accept light and/or short-distance deliveries until earning enough cash to upgrade the truck chassis in order to accept heavy cargoes), the ‘legitimized cheating’ of savegame editing has removed all traces of resource management challenges from *ETS2MP*. Finally, in response to widespread vandalism on the multiplayer servers, such as intentional ramming of other players’ trucks, the moderators introduced a ‘/fix’ –command, which, when typed into the console view, repairs the player’s truck completely. Thus, even the health of the truck-avatar is no longer a concern.²

These affordances result in a lack of what is conventionally known as ‘challenge’ in computer games and lead to what one could call a ‘meditative’ mode of play. It may indeed seem boring, but perhaps boredom is the very attraction of *ETS2MP*. While this claim seems initially controversial given that games should be the cure to and not the cause of boredom, it points at the multifacetedness of boredom that is perhaps not accurately captured by conventional game design writing, where boredom is often reductively conceptualized in relation to fun.

For example, drawing on Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory (1990), Juul (2007) asserts a strong connection between challenge, fun, and boredom: “It is the mental challenge of a game that provides the fun. If the challenge is too easy, the player is bored, if the challenge is too hard, the player is frustrated.” According to Koster (2004, 41-2) fun involves learning and boredom in games occurs when the “game stops teaching us” – boredom is the opposite of fun. But perhaps Koster is (in the spirit of Juul’s “mental challenge”) really talking about the kind of fun that it is underpinned primarily by meaning, sense-making, or discovery, and not fun in general. Here it is relevant to mention Erfani (2004, 304), who distinguishes between boredom and resignation and suggests that boredom is related to an originary contingency:

"It is because life is full of potentialities - and that any actuality is a pre-given narrative — that we can be bored. This is the ultimate paradox of boredom and it is counterintuitive. If

² However, at the time of writing the status of the /fix –command is somewhat ambiguous, as it appears to be in beta, sometimes fixing both the truck and the cargo and sometimes only the truck (leaving the player to bear the financial responsibility of damaging their cargo), and sometimes not working at all.

life were essentially given to us, then there could be no boredom. In everyday parlance, we associate boredom with continuity and sameness. But this is only so because we always experience ‘sameness’ with a skeptical eye, because we know that it could be otherwise. Absolute continuity would preclude boredom: it would entail resignation.”

Erfani’s idea of resignation in the face of absolute continuity is not only reminiscent of the angels in Wenders’ movie *Himmel über Berlin* (1987), but also appears to resonate with much of the kinds of gameplay situations which the game design writers refer to as ‘boring’. Consider the situations where the content of the game has been consumed, (compare also to the feeling of ‘unemployment’ at the end of the game described by Aarseth [2004]), or, where player’s skill has developed to the point where the game is no longer able to provide a challenge: when the ordinary contingency has been exhausted, resignation appears to be a sensible response. Thus, perhaps Koster and Juul are talking about resignation instead of boredom.

However, while ‘resignation in the face of exhausted meaning’ may work for describing some gameplay situations, it does not quite capture the attraction of *ETS2MP*. *ETS2MP* will disappoint those seeking ‘to be taught’ by the game (cf. Koster 2004.) While staying alive is non-trivial it is not difficult either – in fact it is so easy that it will soon become very boring. However, it would not make intuitive sense to suggest that *ETS2MP* was ‘not fun’ or ‘lacked meaning’. Seems that in addition to boredom as the opposite of fun, there is more to investigate in boredom in *ETS2MP*.

From being ‘bored about the game’ to the ‘boredom of the playing I’

Looking back on the discussion about game design writing on boredom, quite likely from the Csikszentmihalyi applied, the discourse on boredom inherits a rather general approach: it might as well be boredom as a reaction to riding a bike or boredom about reading a book. A computer game appears as just another ‘boring object’, just another device affording a balance of boredom and frustration, where also a horse would do. However – this boredom *about* a computer game, or, following Erfani (2004), more accurately ‘feeling resigned about a computer game object’ (as opposed to feeling entertained by a computer game object), is by no means all there is to the technological-material specificity of computer games and boredom.

I noted previously that boredom can be conceptualized on multiple ‘levels’, ranging from an intentional state, to a mood, and to an ‘existential orientation’. I noted also that computer games are not only objects in the world but also worlds in themselves. It is through these observations that I seek to conceptualise boredom in computer games not only as the ‘last feeling’ the player has before quitting as the game design discourse portrays it, but, also as the ‘first feeling’ on the way of establishing oneself in the game world.

In phenomenology, emotions are conventionally understood as “interpretations of (things, events, encounters, ideas, etc, in) the world”, i.e. characterized by an intentional relation to their objects. The discussion on emotions and computer games (e.g. Perron 2005, Frome 2007, Leino 2010), and the recent discussion on phenomenology, existentialism and game worlds (e.g. Kania 2017, Leino 2009, Möring 2014, Vella 2015), has already established that players can have emotions not only about the game as a whole, but also about events, objects, and encounters inside the

game. In other words, player's intentionality may acquire targets that are located 'within' the games. For example, while a game as a whole may be a source of pleasure, a particular monster may be frightening. To our discussion on boredom, this means for example that while an individual repetitive task in a game may be boring (e.g. 'grinding'), the game as a whole may be experienced as rewarding and fulfilling. However, boredom is not "only" an emotion: in the literature on emotions, boredom is most often conceptualized as a mood: meaning that it lacks an explicit intentional relation to an object, and thus if we are to explicate an object for boredom, we must admit that it is the subject's whole being in the world. This is perhaps the most interesting feature of boredom, as it justifies talking about it as separate from emotions in general. Thus, two observations, or, mission statements, are due. On the one hand: the analysis of the technological-material specificity of boredom in computer games should be receptive to boredom that is not targeted at the game as a whole but at discernable aspects of the game. On the other hand: the analysis of the technological-material specificity of boredom in computer games should be receptive to boredom that is not emotion-like at all. In summary, the analysis should be able to account not only for situations described by the statement "I am bored about this game, I quit!", but also to the myriad of emotions, moods, and existential orientations falling under the statement "I feel bored within this game".

Perhaps this boredom *within* the game could be conceptualized as boredom experienced by the player as an ontologically hybrid subject, in relation to the game world delineated by the gameplay condition. Let us explore this option by unpacking the two concepts: gameplay condition, and, ontologically hybrid subject.

Previously I have used the notion of "gameplay condition" (Leino 2009) to refer to that which defines the freedom which the player enjoys but of which the player is also responsible in their actions. To speak of player's emotions as interpretations of (things in) the game world, it is the gameplay condition from which these objects lend their intersubjective significance (Leino 2010): the frightening monster is equally frightening, or a boring task equally boring, to all players of similar skill or progress level, who are interested in persisting as players of the game in question. To speak of the moods of a player, it is the gameplay condition that delineates the player's being in the game world, which makes up the object-correlate of the mood in question.

With ontologically hybrid subject, I refer to a subject "co-constituted by both human and technology to the extent that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between its constituent elements" (Leino 2017). The computer game gives its players not only the objects of experience, but also the modes of experience. To illustrate the co-constitution, consider the explosion of a flashbang grenade in an FPS game: it would be correct to describe its effects as the screen going all white and the speakers emitting a high-pitched tone, but this seems to somewhat miss the point. Becoming blind would be a more accurate description, but some disclaimers are necessary: while the human player continues to and hear see perfectly well despite the flashbang grenade explosion, it is the co-constituted player, whose sight and hearing are temporarily impaired (Leino 2010, 171-7). This co-constitution is not idiosyncratic or plastic, but happens according to conditions hard-coded in the material game artifact, i.e. the gameplay condition.

It must be acknowledged that the distinction between boredom about the game-as-an-object and boredom within the game-as-a-world is assumedly fluid, and these experiences are likely to overlap. Furthermore, it must also be acknowledged that the argument of co-constitution is a two-

way street, also the game as the object of experience is co-constituted: the player themselves is always already an indispensable part of the game as played. (Leino 2012). Consider for example the moment of ‘ragequit’³: the player’s own contribution to the game as played can make up the object of anger at least as much as the material game artifact and other players can. This overlap may be addressed with Vella’s (2015) duality of “ludic subject” and “ludic self”: just like the player temporarily blinded by the flashbang grenade “can ‘see [their] blindness’ and ‘hear [their] deafness’ from the outside” (Vella 2015, 228), also the bored truck driver in ETS2MP can consider their boredom within ETS2MP from the outside and reflect upon it in various ways, perhaps even derive fulfilling experiences out of their boredom, such as self-identification as a hard-working long-distance truck driver.

Despite these ambiguities, in order to get at the specificity of boredom in computer game play, and distinguish it from boredom involved in, say, riding a horse, it appears productive to initially distinguish between boredom *about* a computer game and boredom *within* a computer game, and, focus on the avenues opening from the latter. With boredom *about* a computer game, I refer to the emotion-like intentional state with the game as its object, the ‘last feeling’, the ‘resignation in face of exhausted contingency’. With boredom *within* the game, I refer to a sustained feeling of boredom experienced by a subject co-constituted by the human player and the technological-material game artifact, in relation to the game world, or any events, objects, or encounters it encompasses, delineated by the gameplay condition.

From carnival on the C-D road to profound boredom

We have now distinguished between boredom *about* the game and boredom *within* the game. To describe the latter in ETS2MP, I will follow Heidegger’s three levels of boredom all the way down to profound boredom. In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1929/30 / 1995), Heidegger introduces three ‘levels’ of boredom. Characteristic to Heidegger’s notion of boredom is that it involves passing of time, and, has the structural features of “being left empty”, and, “being held in limbo.”

First level is the reactionary boredom - “becoming bored by something” – which one may feel for example when waiting for a train at the station. Slaby (2010, 8) describes the first-level boredom as involving a discernable intentional object, such as the train station. Heidegger’s account of reactionary boredom could be used to describe what we called boredom *about* a computer game. Consider a new player encountering ETS2MP for the first time, expecting that it would be like a conventional computer game, but soon finding out the true state of affairs. This is the reaction of Cobbett (2017) and other commentators who describe mundane vehicle simulators as boring. Slaby (2010, 8) continues to assert that

“the thing or person bores us because, although we are somehow bound to that item in expecting a specific fulfilment, the item withholds that fulfilment and thus leaves us empty – what is boring in this sense enchains us, keeps us fixated upon it without granting us what we want.”

³ Urbandictionary defines ragequit as: “To stop playing a game out of an anger towards an event that transpired within the game.” (<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=ragequit>)

The player approaching ETS2MP as a computer game is longing for ‘gameness’ but it is yet nowhere to be found. However, the player plays voluntarily and can quit any time: there is no ‘fixation’. Thus, the boredom can turn into resignation - this is the boredom “about” a computer game, the last feeling. This, however, is not very interesting: nothing in the above description is specific to computer games, and, we shouldn’t be talking about the quitter’s boredom (the “last feeling”) but about a player’s boredom. Hence, let us assume that the new player persists in *ETS2MP* through their initial confusion, long enough that boredom *within ETS2MP* can begin to emerge.

To stave off first-level boredom, the player may engage in chaotic and carnivalesque activities such as driving along the Calais-Duisburg road, a.k.a. C-D road, infamous for its crowdedness and disrespect for traffic rules. In this activity we can find the most game-like element in ETS2MP: to experiment with how much chaos can one cause without being kicked and/or having their IP address banned by the moderators. This ‘game’ is in effect a form of grieving and can be played for only so long. Let us consider the new player not pushing the boundary enough to be banned. The player may also divulge in “communitas” (Henricks 2015) in the form of truck convoys. Truck convoys can be joined by showing up at the right place at the right time, and, once the player has joined a convoy, a certain code of practice must be followed. The meeting times and places, and requirements are posted online in advance, and the organizer might for example require all players to have a similar skin on their truck, set a maximum speed, or forbid the use of beacons, horns, etc.

Of course not everyone is interested in these types of activities, but one can imagine them being very attractive for a “socializer” (Bartle 1990) type of players. It wouldn’t be too bold to suggest that they are the most common socially acceptable form of getting together with old friends and making new friends in ETS2MP. However, no amount of social construction and role-play can change the materiality of ETS2MP into a traditional computer game. The lack of goals and challenges remains, and in light of the gameplay condition of ETS2MP the convoys are superficial: apart from standard recognition of clocking in more kilometers, ETS2MP does not reward or even in any way recognize the player’s participation in convoys.

Here it is relevant to mention Heidegger’s second level of boredom, the situational boredom: boring oneself with something. According to Slaby, in contrast to Heidegger’s first level of boredom, situational boredom is “not focused on some item or other in such a straightforward way.” (Slaby 2010, 8). Heidegger (1995, 109) uses the example of being invited to and attending a dinner party, where everything goes well but nevertheless upon coming home one realizes that “I was bored after all this evening, on the occasion of this Invitation.” The dinner party is ‘casual’ and provides no fulfillment: it is “not something crucial to our lives. Thus, although we seem heartily engaged in it, this engagement remains shallow” (Slaby 2010, 110) Nevertheless, one voluntarily accepted the invitation and attended. Thus, according to Slaby “it makes sense to say that this emptiness is of our own making”.

If our focus was on boredom *about* ETS2MP as played, we could describe the game as a whole as a dinner party on Heidegger’s second level. Like most computer game play, it is, by definition, “casual” and “voluntary” in relation to human’s being in the world – if it is not, we would be talking some kind of work or otherwise productive activity with ramifications, which happens to involve ETS2MP (e.g. e-sports or other professionalized form of computer gaming). However, it

seems more insightful to consider Heidegger's second-level boredom *within* ETS2MP, for which the convoys provide an interesting example.

It is perfectly possible that our player has a similar reaction to the convoys as Heidegger had to dinner parties. Consider our player, after being heartily engaged for a good few hours, driving from Calais seaport to Berlin with 145 others, bantering on the virtual CB radio about truck mods, newbies and trolls, finally reaching the destination - the convoy is over, the trucks disperse, perhaps agreeing to meet again at some point in the future: it was fun, but what was the point? For some, convoys may be an enjoyable way to spend time in ETS2MP, but in light of gameplay condition they have no meaning: they are not crucial to player's being in the world of ETS2MP. Convoys are 'dinner parties inside a dinner party.'

In Heidegger's second level of boredom we slip away from ourselves and create a space for emptiness – we choose to take time, to bore ourselves with the dinner party, thus allowing “time to be transformed into a standing Now” (Slaby 2010, 111) Our player checked the website ets2c.com for convoy meeting times and planned their personal schedules around this event: took the time to bore themselves with participating in a convoy and could “slip away” (Heidegger 1995) from their usual existence in ETS2MP, the relatively pointless position of a “ludic subject” (Vella 2015) offered to the player by ETS2MP.

Regarding Heidegger's first level of boredom, we had no trouble pointing out that the reason for our boredom was outside ourselves – the train we needed to take was late, and the train station offered no diversions to kill time. On the second level, however, the object and its exteriority are less defined: it is the dinner-party evening “with which we are bored, and simultaneously, what we are bored with here is passing the time.” (Heidegger 1995, 113) The example here about second-level boredom in ETS2MP was about convoys, but it could as well be about any other form of “communitas” (Henricks 1995) ETS2MP affords: what they all have in common that they are engaged ‘just for fun of it’, i.e. just for the purpose of passing the time.

Let us assume that our player still has not quit, despite their recent discoveries of the meaning of convoys, or lack of any thereof. Ultimately, after trying everything from getting kicked for ramming others on C-D road to decorating their truck with the latest mods and attending a meet-up for their favourite truck brand, finding the last missing stretch of road to get 100% coverage on the map of all DLCs, there is nothing left to bore oneself with any more.

Heidegger's third level of boredom, profound boredom, also relates to total emptiness: “there is nothing in particular that is boring here – it is a profound, unconditioned boredom expressible in the puzzling phrase ‘one is bored’ (Es ist einem langweilig) (Slaby 2010, 107). The ‘one’ here refers to a total reduction of self, or, an “undifferentiated no one” (Heidegger 1995, 135), and its “utter anonymity” fuses together with meaningless and unrelated world, “to create an existential extreme”. (Slaby 2010, 113) The boredom is, in fact, so extreme that according to Heidegger (1995, 135), no example can be provided. However, Heidegger sees possibilities in the third level of boredom. Let us follow how Slaby (2010, 114) describes these possibilities emerging: while in profound boredom everything has lost their significance, the situation “is nevertheless still boredom”, with a pronounced negative existential quality.

“This negativity of the existential orientation in the absence of anything specific to focus

on or turn away from inevitably creates a state of ‘responsiveness’ in which the profoundly bored person is open, probably for the first time, to grasping basic truths about her existence.”

Here is the ‘saving power’ and world-disclosing potential of profound boredom: it forces what is left of one to confront what is left of the world. Similarly, the player who started out in *ETS2MP* with the idea of ‘playing a game’ has now confirmed that there is no game: what they found was only second-level diversions to pass time and in doing so ‘deal with’ their existence in *ETS2MP*. This, however, is an opportunity: profound boredom, as an “existential orientation” (Slaby 2010) enables experiences that would otherwise be impossible – it is a transformative attitude (Elpidorou 2015) not unlike emotions as described by Sartre, leading to a “magical transformation” (Sartre 2001) of *ETS2MP*.

So, after succumbing to third level of boredom, what is left of the world of *ETS2MP*, and, of the player who is to confront it? The situation of profound boredom reveals *ETS2MP* as a bare “gameplay condition” (Leino 2009) against which the player exists as a co-constituted ontologically hybrid being. The very same extreme openness and lack of rules, goals, and challenges which to those searching for gameness rendered *ETS2MP* initially an “item withholds that fulfilment and thus leaves us empty” (Slaby 2010) *i.e.* ‘boring game’, now appear as constituting a context for the player to inhabit. *ETS2MP* is an environment, an “extended facticity” (Leino 2010) – or a “game world” in the emptiest possible sense of the word. While there is no gameness, in the sense of goals, challenges, scores, *etc.*, it is not a “virtual world” like *Second Life* or a MOO – there still is death and failure, even if they are trivialized into almost to the point of disappearance: any crash, death or bankruptcy in *ETS2MP* is a “temporary setback rather than an ultimate consequence” (Lee 2003)

Hence, on the one hand, there is myriad of objects, events, encounters, environments, and their interrelations, to which a functional instrumental-rational logic (Leino 2013; 2016) lends significance: not only that things exist, not only that they affect each other, but also that some of them, more than others, are relevant to player’s persistence in the game world. On the other, the player faces all this as a co-constituted ontologically hybrid being. For example: GPS minimap shows their current location, arrow keys, gamepad, or a dedicated steering wheel allows controlling the truck. Using the company view the player can jump from one garage to another. Truck needs to be fueled and repaired, which costs money that has either to be earned or save-edited. Delivering the cargo will help the player level up, but if that task proves too tedious, the mission can be aborted and the penalty fee paid, and the leveling-up handled by save-editing. However, note: there still is no point – the “boring game” remains. Gilliam (2013, 255) describes that on Heidegger’s third level of boredom,

“(…)all activities and purposes cease to matter and one is left with the idle question of ‘what is the point?’ In continually asking this question, we are met with nothingness for we realise that nothing is worth it as an a priori.”

In the movie *Wings of Desire* by Wim Wenders, a story of angels growing bored of their immortal existence and seeking to cure their boredom through embodiment, one angel, Damiel, who had only recently become a human, asked Peter Falk, who also used to be an angel, for advise on being a human. Peter Falk replied: “You need to figure that out for yourself. That's the

fun of it.” I intend this parallel to further illustrate Gilliam’s observation, and, to suggest how it would be sensible to consider *ETS2MP* as encountered through profound boredom, as first and foremost a platform, as something *in which to exist* rather than as something *to be played*: after coming to terms with their ‘bare existence’ and all it entails in terms of embodiment, objects, events, and their interrelations and instrumental significance, it is up to the player to decide what to make of this opportunity. Slaby (2010, 102) notes that

“(…) the experience of profound boredom, understood in its full existential depth, makes manifest that a human being is the free and responsible creator of whatever meaning there is in one’s life. Not only that, but profound boredom moreover amounts to a call to actively take charge of one’s existence so as to endow it with meaning, and thereby effect a fundamental change in existential temporality.”

This is the boredom as the “first feeling” on the way to self-realization. Some players may go back to trolling on the C-D road, personally I prefer driving in the tunnels of Norway, but some may seek to take on larger projects of their own making. In his analysis of freedom, fear, and boredom, Möring (2014), echoing Slaby’s reading of Heidegger, describes how after this “radical turn” provided by the profound boredom, the players discover the opportunity to pursue authentic self-realization in the game, which in the context of Möring’s chosen example, *Minecraft* (Mojang, 2011), can refer to, for example, building things that have not been built before. Previously I have talked about three levels of discovery in computer games, and suggested the first level being the discovery of ontology, second level of instrumental-rationality in this ontology, and third of the possibility of self-realization (Leino 2016). It now appears that profound boredom is what takes one from second to the third level: from merely knowing how to play the game, to, playing the game in *my own way*.

On the possibility of profound boredom in computer games

I have now described instances of boredom in *ETS2MP*. The question remains, whether profound boredom is exclusive to games like *ETS2MP*, or, whether afforded also by other games.

Virtual worlds, as discussed in previous sections, could possibly also afford profound boredom. However, as they, by definition, lack the gameplay condition and the resulting instrumental-rationality found in ‘computer games’, there would be little sense in talking about profound boredom *within* Second Life. It would just be profound boredom from first life leaking into *Second Life*. Walking simulators, as mentioned before, share some similarities to *ETS2MP*, and it would be relevant to investigate them from the perspective of boredom within and about computer games. However, I can only speculate that the pre-defined narrative would come in the way of encountering emptiness, not unlike it would be difficult to imagine that a devout religious person could be profoundly bored: there would be no emptiness in a world where every occasion is vested with meaning from god. “Art games”, a genre related to if not overlapping with that of walking simulators, are another relevant example, as many of them contain emptiness and meaninglessness as their key trope, carefully dispensing what may initially seem like boredom to their players. Consider for example Molleindustria’s *Every Day the Same Dream* (2009) (later EDTSD), or Frank Lanz’s *Universal Paperclips* (2017), which both first engage the player in a loop consisting of actions, which soon become repetitive, empty, and meaningless, but later offer the player a chance to break out from this spell. Here it is important to observe that *EDTSD* and

Universal Paperclips “use” meaninglessness and emptiness metaphorically (cf. Möring 2015), to convey the meaning the artist chose to convey, instead of for letting it go as far as profound boredom and thus having to reveal to the player any chances of self-realization. In art games, our being-bored serves the aims of making the artist’s point, rather than our own. Commercial clicker games of the free-to-play sort, like *Pocket Planes* (Nimblebit, 2012) also “use” (the threat of) boredom, but to extort cash from their players: without paying, you can’t *really* play, they say, but even after paying, there is no chance to succumb to profound boredom and discover the possibilities for self-realization. (Leino 2014, Möring & Leino 2016)

In ‘traditional’ computer games as played, including also art games and walking simulators inasmuch they can be described as ‘traditional’ games, the meaning designed into the game by the game designer obscures the player’s possibilities for discovering emptiness and the ‘bare existence’ follows and thus prevents the player from succumbing to profound boredom. In computer games, everything has a purpose and there is always something “meaningful” to do – if there is not, we are doing it wrong, or, have chosen to lead an eccentric life in the game, or have found a “bug” (Leino 2012). A situation of profound boredom similar to the one described here could possibly be found at the ‘endgame’ of a ‘traditional’ computer game: when the player has leveled up, and acquired kinaesthetic and cognitive skills specific to the game to the point where every challenge has become trivial. The crucial affordance here is whether the game allows the players to exist in the game after all missions and the like have been completed. In some cases, the affordance of profound boredom may be facilitated also by not completing the last mission whose completion makes the player a non-player. However, this scenario of boredom at the endgame would appear as a bourgeois problem, very much like the boredom of Roquentin in Sartre’s *Nausea* and the boredom of Johannes in Kierkegaard’s *The Seducer’s Diary*, as described by Erfani (2004). Only those who are well off (in our case in terms of skill, in-game capital, etc) can afford being bored. “I have money like a capitalist, no boss, no wife, no children. I exist, that’s all”, Erfani (2004, 307) quotes Roquentin in *Nausea*. This kind of bourgeois boredom is an in-game diversion, something that can be stepped in and out of, not profound boredom.

We can now answer the question of whether other kinds of computer games afford profound boredom like *ETS2MP* does: seems that *ETS2MP* is relatively unique in terms of the kinds of boredom it affords.

Conclusions

I begun by arguing that the boredom “about” a computer game, the reductive account of boredom as the ‘opposite of fun’ as employed in game design discourse as the ‘last feeling’ the player experiences before quitting, is unable to capture the experience of playing *ETS2MP*. I suggested to complement it with accounts of boredom “within” the computer game, and provided one such account, of succumbing to profound boredom in *ETS2MP*, describing it as the ‘first feeling’ the player has on the way to self-realization.

I mentioned ‘new types of computer games’, such as idle games, automated games, and walking simulators, and suggested that by looking at *ETS2MP* we may learn something about boredom in computer games in general. I briefly discussed the possibilities for profound boredom in virtual

worlds, walking simulators, art games, and traditional computer games, and found out that ETS2MP indeed appears to have unique qualities in terms of affording boredom.

We may now note that *ETS2MP* acknowledges the emptiness and meaninglessness of computer game play, and in doing so creates room for the player to create meaning in the game. *ETS2MP* affords profound boredom, and thus allows the player to authentically experiment with the conditions of their (in-game) existence. This is perhaps what many art games have tried to do but failed. Many games flirt with boredom, but only a few allow the player to use it to clear the ground for player's own projects. This is understandable, since conventional game design discourse appears to think of boredom (unless it is of the orchestrated kind as in *EDTSD* or *Universal Paperclips*) as the evidence of the game designer's failure. This is understandable, as profound boredom within a game is player's first step from claiming the game from its designers, and authentically 'owning' it. In this connection, it is possibly worth investigating in the future whether *ETS2MP*'s 'accidental' origin, as a third-party mod for an indie title, has something to do with the emergence of the affordance of profound boredom, and, whether the possible incorporation of the mod into the 'original' game product will involve changes that would affect the affordance of profound boredom in the game.

Games

EURO TRUCK SIMULATOR 2, SCS Software, PC, 2012
EVERY DAY THE SAME DREAM, Molleindustria, browser, 2009
FARMING SIMULATOR 2018, Giants Software, PC, 2017
MINECRAFT, Mojang, PC, 2011
SECOND LIFE, Linden Lab, PC, 2003
UNIVERSAL PAPERCLIPS, Frank Lanz, browser, 2017
WAREHOUSE AND LOGISTICS SIMULATOR 2014, App4Fun, PC, 2014

References

- Aarseth (2004). "Genre Trouble: Narrativism and the Art of Simulation." In: P. Harrigan & N. Wardip-Fruin (Eds.): *First Person: New media as story, performance, and game*. MIT Press.
- Bartle, Richard (1996) 'Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit MUDs'. *The Journal of Virtual Environments* 1(1).
- Carbo-Mascarell, R. (2016). "Walking Simulators: The Digitisation of an Aesthetic Practice." In *Proceedings of 1st International Joint Conference of DiGRA and FDG*.
- Cobbett, R. (2017). "The most boring sims on PC." *PCGamer.com*. (URL: <https://www.pcgamer.com/the-most-boring-sims-on-pc/>) Retrieved July 20 2018.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. HarperCollins.
- Elpidorou, A. (2015). "The Significance of Boredom: A Sartrean Reading." In: D. Dahlstrom, A. Elpidorou, and W. Hopp, (eds.): *Philosophy of Mind and Phenomenology: Conceptual and Empirical Approaches*. Routledge
- Erfani, F. (2004). "Sartre and Kierkegaard on the Aesthetics of Boredom." *Idealistic Studies* 34 (3), 303–17
- Fizek, S. (2017). "Self-playing Games: Rethinking the State of Digital Play." In *Proceedings of Philosophy of Computer Games Conference 2017*.

- Fizek, S. (2018). "Interpassivity and the Joy of Delegated Play in Idle Games." *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association*. 3(3), April 2018, 137—63
- Frome, J. (2007). "Eight ways videogames generate emotion." In *DiGRA '07: Proceedings of the 2007 DiGRA International Conference: Situated Play*.
- Gilliam, C. (2013). "Boredom Re-examined: Boredom as Authenticity and Life-Affirmation." *Existential Analysis* 24(2), July 2013.
- Heidegger, M. (1995). [1929/30]. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Indiana UP.
- Henricks, T. (2015). *Play and the Human Condition*. Illinois UP
- Juul, J. (2007). "Without a Goal". In: T. Krzywinska & B. Atkins (eds): *Videogame/Player/Text*. Manchester UP.
- Juul, J. & Begy, J.S. (2016). "Good Feedback for bad Players? A preliminary Study of 'juicy' Interface feedback." Poster presented at DiGRA/FDG 2016.
- Kania, M.M. (2017). *Perspectives of the Avatar. Sketching the Existential Aesthetics of Digital Games*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej / University of Lower Silesia Press.
- Karhulahti, M. (2015). "Defining the Videogame". *Game Studies* 15(2).
- Koster, R. (2004) *Theory of Fun for Game Design*. O'Reilly Media.
- Lee, S.S. (2003). "'I Lose, Therefore I Think' A Search for Contemplation amid Wars of Push-Button Glare". *Game Studies* 3(2)
- Leino, O.T. (2009). "On the logic of emotions in play" In: *Learn to Game, Game to Learn; the 40th Conference ISAGA 2009*. Singapore: Society of Simulation and Gaming of Singapore.
- Leino, O.T. (2010). "Emotions in Play: On the constitution of emotion in solitary computer game play". PhD Thesis. *IT University of Copenhagen*.
- Leino, O.T. (2012). "Death Loop as a Feature". *Game Studies* 12(2)
- Leino, O.T. (2013). "Playability and its Absence – A post-ludological critique" In: *DiGRA '13 - Proceedings of the 2013 DiGRA International Conference: DeFragging Game Studies*. Atlanta, GA: DiGRA & Georgia Tech.
- Leino, O.T. (2014). "∞ min to Oasis of Happiness: Promises of Freedom and Play in Pocket Planes". In *Proceedings of Philosophy of Computer Games Conference 2014*.
- Leino, O.T. (2016). "STONE+LIFE=EGG – Little Alchemy as a limit-idea for thinking about knowledge and discovery in computer games". In *Proceedings of Philosophy of Computer Games Conference 2016*.
- Leino, O.T. (2017). "Chaos at the Europort: Performance, Empathy and Materiality in Euro Truck Simulator 2." In *Proceedings of Philosophy of Computer Games Conference 2017*.
- Möring, S. (2014). "Freedom in Games – Between Fear and Boredom". In *Proceedings of Philosophy of Computer Games Conference 2014*.
- Möring, S. (2015). "What Is a Metaphoric Artgame? A Critical Analysis of Metaphor in the Artgame Discourse and in Artgames." In K. Fahlenbrach (ed.): *Embodied Metaphors in Film, Television, and Video Games Cognitive Approaches*. Taylor & Francis.
- Möring, S. & Leino, O.T. (2016). "Beyond Games as Political Education – Neo-liberalism in the contemporary computer game form." *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds* (8)2, 145—61
- Muscat, A., Goddard, W., Duckworth, J. & Holopainen, J (2016). "First-Person Walkers: Understanding the Walker Experience through Four Design Themes". In: *Proceedings of 1st International Joint Conference of DiGRA and FDG*.

- Perron, B. (2005). "A Cognitive Psychological Approach to Gameplay Emotions." In: *Proceedings of DiGRA 2005 Conference: Changing Views – Worlds in Play*.
- Slaby, J. (2010). "The Other Side of Existence. Heidegger on Boredom." In: S. Flach & J. Söffner (eds.): *Habitus in Habitat II: Other Sides of Cognition*. Peter Lang.
- Vella, D. (2015). *The Ludic Subject and the Ludic Self: Analyzing the 'I-in-the-Gameworld'*. PhD dissertation. *IT University of Copenhagen*.