

# Making and Unmaking Place in The Darkness

Bobby Schweizer

## Introduction

The 2007 Xbox 360 and Playstation 3 title *The Darkness*, developed by Starbreeze Studios and published by 2K Games, is based on a comic of the same name that takes place in modern-day New York City. Its depiction of New York City is unique in the landscape of modern games that try to construct lifelike cities. The game reproduces a relatively small space but extends it in surprising ways. In this essay, I argue that the use of space in *The Darkness* plays on expectations of familiar and unfamiliar places in order to physicalize the protagonist's journey through the world of New York and the mythical Hell into which he is cast.

The digitally rendered city has become a staple of games and designers have developed ever more vast urban environments that live and breathe. The *Grand Theft Auto* series is perhaps the most well known example of the simulated city. *Grand Theft Auto III's* Liberty City defined the "open world" city, representing New York City as not merely a collection of locations but a whole environment traversable by the player. Rockstar Games' *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* expanded upon the open world with their rendering of 1980s Miami, while *San Andreas* tackled putting together three cities—Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Las Vegas—connected by freeways and rural areas. Seven years later, Rockstar turned back to Liberty City and created one of the most highly detailed single player worlds in *Grand Theft Auto IV*.

The *Grand Theft Auto* city—and the many games it inspired—work within a scale model of the real, eschewing one-to-one mapping for iconic. This design methodology privileges the recreation of the whole, but rarely do individuals experience the city in totality. People tend to live highly localized experiences. A sense of place is developed through repetition: the places we spend the most time and the paths we commonly traverse shape our understanding of the world.[141]

Given the videogame's penchant for exploration and adventure, however, it is not surprising that it is more common to see games that take place in expansive worlds. It is much more difficult to transform a familiar space into a place of adventure because we have specific understandings of what these kinds of tangible places offer.[142] We can

identify their rules, patterns, dynamics, and construction because of our everyday experience.[143] This is accomplished in *The Darkness* by contrasting the player's expectations of the familiar and unfamiliar in the protagonist's lived experience.

What is Place?

If space is the plane of existence, then place is the plane of experience. Experience, according to Tuan, is "a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs a reality." [144] As such, there is no quantifiable way to judge something's "placeness." Instead, we must consider place from numerous perspectives. Tuan identifies a range of ways we experience different kinds of space. We construct place through our physical body, relationships with others, cultural values, mobility, architecture, time, attachment, and even our imagination.[145]

Space and place are, of course, not stable binary concepts. Anthropologist Marc Augé uses the term "non-place" to describe two realities: "spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces." [146] Places involve dwelling, crossroads, and the traveler, while non-places involve transit, interchange, and passengers.[147] We spend time in non-places but develop little attachment, seeing them as functional entities. Augé's classic example of non-place is the metro/subway. It is a transportation hub better suited to a functional or geometrical description[148] and a "common point in an invariable series." [149] Yet, we feel the need to transform non-places into places. Individuals develop a history with stations through use, but this is merely the shared identity of non-place.[150] After all, the metonymic phrase "this is my stop" is negated when hundreds of other passengers disembark simultaneously.

Making Place in Games

Spaces and places in videogames are developed through action—the player enacting the mechanics and rules that define what they can, cannot, should, and will do.[151] Playing as a character standing in the middle of a highly detailed city is meaningless unless involved in action. The experience of place for Spider-Man in Manhattan will be drastically different from Niko Bellic in Liberty City. Spider-Man swings and jumps from building to building while Niko Bellic commutes by foot, subway, and automobile. Spider-Man rescues people in distress, fights with thugs and supervillains, and ensnares criminals in his web. Niko, on the other hand, escorts people in cars, fetches and transports items, steals vehicles, and engages in shoot-outs and murder. Regardless of tone, plot, or

technical accomplishments, the player's sense of place will be affected by what they do in the game over time.[152]

Two definitions—one from Yi-Fu Tuan, the other from Michel de Certeau—inform our understanding of space and place. While it may seem that each writer's explanation of the pairing are at odds, they actually complement each other. First, Tuan describes place as space transformed by shared and negotiated cultural understandings and specific action, whereas space is understood as the three dimensional structure of the world which contains objects and general actions.[153] On the other hand, de Certeau describes place as location, and space as the trajectories of velocity and time.[154] In de Certeau's pairing, a place cannot coexist with any other place because it occupies a physical spot in the world, while a space is the movement afforded by that place. Combining these two definitions, space is first transformed into physical location, then practiced experience, and finally lived place.

For the purpose of clarity, this essay uses Tuan's definition as our understanding of "place," though de Certeau's definitions have been adapted to complement Tuan's pairing. Place is thought of as that which is familiar, secure, understood, valued, and lived. However, even if the determination of placeness lies in the individual, it is possible to employ techniques that encourage attachment. Strong narrative environments resonate with people's imaginations because of the imaginative capital contained in the visual grammar of iconographic places.[155] It involves constructing places that are like other places, relying on allusions to create the familiar. Building a city is no simple task—a multitude of factors need to be considered. Designers cannot merely code a landscape with signs and expect meaning to emerge.[156] The level and world designers who work on a game do not construct buildings and streets—they create experiences.[157]

Additionally, place can be made in videogames by referring to the familiar structures of the real world. These places refer to locations where we have a natural tendency to develop attachments. Examples include our homes, the houses of friends and family, "Third Places" like coffee shops and bars, and parks and playgrounds.[158] Other referents include places we have not been to in person, but exist in the popular imagination. These might include landmarks (famous buildings, statues, landscape features), common architectural structures (bridges, churches, graveyards), and even mythical/fictional spaces only perceived by our imagination (Heaven, the land of Oz, other game worlds).

Introducing the Game

To understand how *The Darkness* plays with familiar and unfamiliar spaces, one must understand the basic mechanics and plot of the game. The city of *The Darkness* is approached through the everyday lived experience of the protagonist, Jackie Estacado. At the game's opening, Jackie, a young mafia gangster who grew up in an orphanage, is celebrating his 21st birthday. He, however, is unaware that his "Uncle Paulie" (who is not a blood relative but rather the head of a mafia family) has ordered his assassination. After a failed attempt, Jackie believes that his Uncle wants him dead because he's a nuisance. Yet both he and the player quickly learn that it is because at midnight on his 21st birthday he becomes possessed by the Darkness, a demon curse passed down through the males of his family. The Darkness, wanting its host body to live, possesses Jackie and compels him to go after his would-be murderers and enemies.

The curse manifests itself in giant tentacles that come out of Jackie's back that give him augmented abilities such as increased body strength and the use of special dark powers like the "dark tentacles" which can be used to impale enemies or the "creeping dark" tentacles that slide across the ground, allowing the player to attack enemies from a distance with an out-of-body weapon. These grotesque monstrous tentacles slither and hover over Jackie's shoulders, which places them around the periphery of the screen in the game's first person point of view. Finding dark areas to increase the Darkness power becomes a basic combat strategy.

Most of the game takes place at night, so the player is taught to knock out streetlamps when outside, and lamps and ceiling lighting while inside buildings, to increase the strength of the Darkness powers while reducing damage taken. This reverses common expectations of the function of lighting in the city—light no longer means safety, and nighttime is privileged over daytime. Unlike *Grand Theft Auto*, the New York City of *The Darkness* is not a clockwork city, so passing in-game time does not affect the time of day. There are only passing references to the progression of time and the player has no way of knowing exactly how long it has been since the night of Jackie's 21st birthday. It can be assumed that the first part of the game takes place through the course of that night, but there is a disorienting mapping of play-time and narrative-time.[159]

The persistence of the characters in the subway stations gives the illusion of time progressing much slower underground than on the surface. However, as Michael Nitsche writes, "we can deal with these complex temporal settings in video games because of our spatial

understanding.”[160] Time of day in the game does not relate to the passing of real world time, but is rather triggered by events that come about through the movement and action of the character. The lack of temporal reference is disorienting in a way that also complements the narrative—giving the sense that everything following the murder attempt on Jackie is a blur and foreshadowing the surreal narrative and spatial turns later in the game.

#### Use of the City

##### Small Space

The scale of New York City in *The Darkness* is small. It consists primarily of the neighborhoods of the Lower East Side and Chinatown, which has buildings like the real Trinity Church and fictional St. Mary’s Orphanage, and locations such as City Hall, Gun Hill, the Turkish Baths, and the Pier. The two neighborhoods, the church and the orphanage, are accessible directly from the subway stations, while the other locations are accessible through underground service corridors and abandoned train tunnels. During the course of the game, goals are presented either through events triggered by the narrative or by accepting tasks from the non-player characters that populate the game space. Not all areas are available immediately to the player, but are made accessible by completing missions and progressing through the game. The neighborhoods are revisited throughout the game, but other more distant places such as the Turkish Baths are only visited once. The subway stations act as the game’s transportation hub and the player returns to them countless times as both a home base and to gain access to new areas. By creating a small space, the designers helped encourage a sense of place with a manageable quantity of spatial knowledge. There are not so many locations that the player cannot keep track of them all and “movements and changes of location can be envisaged.”[161]

Because the space is restricted, *The Darkness* cannot rely on the common symbolic perceptions players might have about New York City as represented in other media. The *Grand Theft Auto* series relies on these perceptions to construct the world not as it is, but as it is most popularly imagined.[162] The Manhattan of *The Darkness* features no obvious landmarks or symbols that are easily identifiable as New York. Instead, its New Yorkness must come from the naming of places, the construction of believable environments, and the aggregate media portrayal of the average lived experience in New York.

##### Player Movement

The size of the game's world means that players are able to travel on foot. Michel de Certeau recognized pedestrian movement as the spatial practice that defines the city.[163] Walking illustrates choices in navigation and attention, how the world is constructed, and how objects and places are related to each other.[164] However, it is not just walking that defines spatial practice in games. Walking is rarely the singular activity of the player moving through space. In *The Darkness*, the player is required to manage a firearm and use the Darkness powers while walking. Spatial practice is as much about how and where these actions are used as it is about the player traversing the world.

### Subway

Jackie is dark and troubled and feels most at home in the subway stations where he spent much of his youth. The two stations, Canal St. and Fulton St., lead to the streets of Jackie's neighborhood. Because it is nighttime during the bulk of the game, the Canal and Fulton Street subways stations are not bustling hubs of commuters but rather home to an interesting group of characters. Jackie talks with some familiar faces and also meets a group of breakdancers, a crazy tourist lady, a few homeless people, a street performer, and countless others. These characters provide color to the environment and actually make the subway stops feel more alive than the darkened city streets. Subways are also non-threatening—the game mechanics forbid the player from engaging Darkness powers while inside the subway stations.

Loading scenes in the game feature videos of Jackie lit by a spotlight but surrounded by blackness—reminiscent of a confessional or police interrogation—telling an unidentified audience about his memories growing up. A number of these are stories of the subway and his fondness for it. After leaving the orphanage, it seems Jackie found the subway to be a home even though he had other places to live. This is counter-intuitive because public places like subway stations are generally viewed as non-places where the inhabitants are in a state of perpetual transit.[165] Yet, Jackie is in a state of perpetual transit, so his temporal experiences parallel those of the subway station and relatively align him with the spatial embodiment of the subway.

Architecture can be imbued with metaphorical connotations. By structuring, organizing, and enabling space, architecture represents experiences. George Lakoff illustrated the relationship between metaphors and body experience—typified by up is good, down is bad.[166] Laure-Marie Ryan discussed these metaphors at work when children play, in which an object comes to represent an imaginative concept (tree stumps as

bears).[167] Videogames take advantage of the power of metaphor to create meaningful places. During one of *The Darkness's* repeated loading scenes while Jackie is riding the subway, he describes the infrastructure: "When I was a kid, I used to look at the New York subway maps, and pretend it was a big old plate of spaghetti. All the lines were noodles, and the stations were huge meatballs. Heh, I told that to Uncle Paulie once, and he smacked me inna back of my head." Here Jackie has given the structure of the subway system a metaphor related to his Italian heritage. It is an image that takes our assumptions of the subway as a well-gridded course and reveals it as a tangled mess that represents the interconnected lives of people and places.

#### Jenny's Apartment

The player never visits Jackie's home. Presumably, as motivated by the narrative, this is because the mafia thugs who want to murder Jackie would be looking for him at his house. But the player also gets the sense that Jackie doesn't spend much time at his apartment anyway—and even if he does he considers it more of a shelter than a home. The tension between public and private spaces is illustrated in Jackie's reaction to his girlfriend moving into a new apartment, which happens at the same time he becomes possessed by the Darkness. Despite his girlfriend's excitement, there seems to be something impermanent about the new apartment; the warmth in the scene comes not from the ownership of space but from their proximity as a couple. This apartment is one of the many places Jackie spends time but does not live.

While watching television, the game's viewpoint doesn't change to show the contents of the screen. Rather, the player watches from the character's point of view. Sitting on the couch watching *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the player can move their camera around, looking at the objects in the room. Yet this seemingly cozy scene elicits feelings of alienation and uneasiness. Looking to the left, the player sees Jenny curled up against their arm in what should be an intimate moment. But the unpacked boxes stacked around the room show it as a place with no history. The room is dark and cramped, unlike the warm well-lit subway. And it is not only the visual environment that feels out of place. Rarely do games require the player to sit and do nothing, especially games about evil curses and fast-paced gun combat. Jackie has more pressing matters than watching a movie with his girlfriend—matters which he cannot discuss with Jenny. Jackie's desire to get to the bottom of the mystery mirrors the player's desire to get on with the action. So, while the

scene is recognizable on the surface as an intimate place, it plays out with quite the opposite effect.

#### Streets/Neighborhoods

The buildings around the player on the surface streets are tall and confining. Rather than walk off in any direction, as one would be able to do in a real city, the neighborhoods are enclosed on all sides. While unrealistic, players have come to accept this videogame convention. In addition to the main streets that run through the neighborhoods, the game makes use of alleyways and the open spaces that traditionally surround buildings. The arrangement of these spaces is important because it distinguishes it from a game like *Max Payne* that uses the streets and alleyways of New York as corridors through which the player is funneled.

The buildings of *The Darkness* feel authentic—the facades of buildings match the kind of neighborhood being portrayed. The scale of the streets and buildings are relatively accurate—roads are wide enough for cars, doors and windows have an appropriate scale, and objects in the environment are sized correctly. There is not a lot of variation in the architecture nor are the exteriors of the building finely detailed, but the appearance goes beyond the often relied upon method of using the same texture on many buildings.

#### Building Interiors

Most scenarios in which Jackie enters buildings in *The Darkness* are invasions—the player infiltrates somewhere where they do not belong. As a result, private interior spaces generally regarded as safe become threatening. The majority of missions in *Grand Theft Autos III* and *IV* take place outdoors, which geographically extends the space of play. However, because there are so few surface streets in *The Darkness*, the area of play needs to extend into the interiors of buildings. The player also needs to seamlessly travel between indoors and out, so, unlike *Grand Theft Auto IV*, there cannot be a noticeable transition between spaces (like loading screens or change in quality of models or textures).

Many of the interior apartment spaces are run-down, vandalized, and emptied of personal possessions. The player, of course, does not have access to all of the rooms inside of these buildings because they are private locked spaces. The action often takes place in the hallways that pose the threat of confined space. Contrasted with the subway, where *The Darkness* refuses to let Jackie engage its powers or weapons for fear of making itself known to the public, building interiors become corridors for shootouts with pursuing gangsters. Other threatening interiors include

the orphanage, church, warehouses, a meatpacking factory, and the abandoned tunnels of the subway.

Two of these interiors in particular should represent safety and security, but are transformed into places of violence. The interior of the orphanage, which the player visits after learning part of it was destroyed in an explosion, triggers flashbacks in Jackie, who remembers his youth with a mix of fondness and regret. These flashbacks reveal the roots of his relationship with Jenny, who was also under foster care, and reveal his weakness: deep under the rough exterior of a man cursed lives a soul that wants only to love and be loved. It also shows how easily the few things he feels have a sense of place can be taken away. At the conclusion of the scenario, having weaved through the rooms and memories of the orphanage, the player is left helplessly standing on the other side of a glass window as Uncle Paulie murders Jenny in front of Jackie's eyes.

The church, which is typically assumed a safe-haven, is actually the setting of an intense shootout in which Jackie is set up for capture and subsequently tortured by the police captain. The scene is based around the interplay of light and dark. Jackie, who needs darkened spaces to engage his powers, is caught under the floodlamps set up around the balcony of the congregation hall. The player must destroy the lights while fending off a rain of bullets from attackers on all sides. Returning the church to its darkened state has symbolic implications: it addresses the mythical Hell visited in the previous chapter of the game, allies the goals of the gameplay with religious practice, and equates darkness (and therefore the Darkness curse) with spirituality. Controlling the Darkness, and therefore Jackie's destiny, must be an internal and personal journey that cannot be helped by the two institutions of justice and sanctuary. The police and the church are uncovered as corrupt and dangerous, which raises questions about the player's beliefs in the traditional order represented by familiar places.

#### Establishing Familiar Pieces

Place is not just familiar locations but the set pieces that construct the narrative environment.[168] They establish a sense of permanence and belonging while connecting players to their own world.

#### Familiar Faces

We recognize our belonging in a place is through other's interactions with us. At the opening of the game, the subway is depicted as a secure place because the player encounters the first non-threatening character Jackie knows. Enzo Scardina hails the player passing through the turn-styles, commenting on the news that Uncle Paulie has put a hit out on

Jackie. He also makes a joke about Jenny, offering to take her off of Jackie's hands. This interchange is important because it establishes the connected network of characters that existed before the player picked up the controller.

The subway is also filled with characters that do not know Jackie, but stand in for strangers we expect to pass in places of transit. The player can even do good deeds for some of these characters, like scaring off the bully who refuses to let the harmonica man play his music. Contrary to the real experience of the New York subway, most commuters in the stations are cordial and acknowledge the player when they approach them, making the subways an even friendlier place.

When the player engages in conversation with a character, the camera changes from a first-person to third-person perspective based on the over-the-shoulder cinematic framing. The character's name is displayed on the screen, which may seem like a strange approach given the player/avatar dynamic, but it lets the player know that it is somebody that they (as Jackie) already know.

#### Third Places

Typically, an individual's primary places are their home and place of work. "Third places," a term from Ray Oldenburg's book *The Great Good Place*, are another location where people invest their time—a place that is neither home, nor work.[169] One of the most common third places in the United States is the tavern or bar.[170] The bar is not just a place of leisure activity, but also a place for socialization and connecting to one's neighbors. There are two typical third places used in *The Darkness*, each to a different end. The Green Olive Grove restaurant is the site of an after-hours meet-up between the player and a friendly character known as Butcher Joyce. While meeting with the Butcher, police storm the restaurant in an attempt to kill Jackie and its interior is destroyed in the ensuing shoot-out. Later, the player goes through the Whitefish Pool Hall on their way to meet up with another character. The dingy pool hall is depicted as a dive bar. A pair of characters plays pool while another pair discusses a humorous proposition involving a moose. Nobody in the pool hall recognizes Jackie, but they are not hostile toward him. Unless the player commits a violent act, this third place can go entirely undisturbed.

#### Real World Assets

As stated previously, the player can sit down as Jackie with his girlfriend on the couch and watch the entirety of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Other televisions in the game world show movies like *The Man With The*

Golden Arm and His Girl Friday, television shows like Flash Gordon and The Three Stooges, and a handful of Popeye cartoons and music videos.[171] Most of the media used by Starbreeze for the game are public domain, meaning they did not have to pay royalties for their use. Unfortunately, this means they are not as relatable to the audience as contemporary media might be. Regardless, these real world media assets were not a selling point but rather an interesting technique to forge a bond with the real world. As someone who has seen *To Kill a Mockingbird* numerous times, watching the movie on the couch as Jackie in the game bridged the game world and my living room. Even if players are unfamiliar with some of the media in the game, it is apparent that it is something from their everyday space—the same space Jackie is intended to occupy.

#### Phone System

The Darkness uses a phone system for two forms of communication: the exchange of information between characters and the creation of a world that exists outside of the player's immediate needs. On the one hand, the player makes directed calls to other characters in the game at specific moments. At the beginning of the game when Jackie first enters the subway station, the player gets a message on their pager that prompts them to use the pay phone to call Jenny. Dialing Jenny is as simple as choosing that menu option from the context-sensitive on-screen prompt. This establishes a gameplay mechanic that is used to connect the player to events and information outside their immediate area. Like other games that employ this same technique, *The Darkness* most commonly uses phone calls to trigger missions and tasks. During the first call with Jenny, she tells Jackie how to get to her new apartment, giving street names and landmarks. Phone calls with other characters direct the player to come see them in person or go elsewhere to do something.

Yet, unlike most games where players use the phone, Starbreeze Studios built in a phone system that connects with people the player will never meet. Scattered throughout the game are little slips of paper with phone numbers on them. Dialing these numbers connects Jackie to other personalities that color the world. Because it is nighttime, most of the calls do not connect to people and the player is left listening to humorous answering machine messages. These recordings serve two immediate functions: to lend levity to an otherwise serious game and satisfy the common trope of collecting objects (extra-textual gameplay). Yet it does something more important that is less apparent. A phone call between

two people is an immediate action that can only take place in the present moment. This serves its purpose in games as a way to transfer information or direction. A single answering machine might be used to relay the same kind of information, but the large quantity of random numbers the player can dial in *The Darkness* establishes a real phone network with a sense of permanence. It is not merely in place to serve the player's needs, but rather exists to establish Jackie's New York as a persistent place—a world that existed before the player entered it and one that will continue after the credits roll.

### Hell

At the end of the first chapter of the game, Jackie, after witnessing the murder of Jenny, takes his own life and finds himself in what can only be described as Hell. It is a mythical space that can be immediately identified as a World War I battlefield. Before being able to regain control of Jackie, the player witnesses a German soldier speaking in a demonic voice to three American soldiers tied-up while pleading for their lives. Looking around, it is clear the player is in a trench and the sky is filled with the light of exploding shells.

Hell represents a strong sense of place because of its vivid depiction, yet, is understandably threatening in a way the subway is not. It serves as a transitional space that plays with the conventions of place-making previously experienced in the game. In Hell, the player does not have the kind of direction provided by other characters in New York City. The singular goal—escape—is clear, but the means are not as obvious. Unlike Manhattan, the space of Hell is explored in a forward trajectory. The designers are forced to find alternate means establishing a sense of place because the player spends only short periods of time in one location. Instead, the game must draw on vivid imagery while reimagining the techniques used to make place in Manhattan.

### Familiar Spaces With New Twists

In Hell, the interior/exterior dynamic of Manhattan persists. The corridors of the trenches act like the hallways of buildings and narrow alleyways of the streets. Other interiors include bunkers, bombed out ruins of other structures, and a central village that acts as Hell's version of the subway stop. The battlefield, on the other hand, inverts the street-level experience of New York. Both confine the player to a restricted space, but Hell has two manifestations of boundaries.

The initial battlefield encountered is surrounded by a deep abyss (though the player cannot fall off the edge). However, in the second battlefield location, known as The Hills, the plain extends infinitely in all

directions except toward the goal. If the player ventures outside of an invisible boundary, they will be teleported automatically back to their starting point and have to retrace their steps along a prescribed path.

A central village, which is visited in both Hell chapters, acts like the subway station. A handful of non-threatening characters with which Jackie can converse populate the small town. The most familiar of these characters is Anthony Estacado, his great-great grandfather. Anthony explains it was he who brought the curse into the Estacado family and tells Jackie how to destroy the Darkness. Jackie sees this as his opportunity to be rid of the curse, leave Hell, and regain control of his life. This establishes two parallel goals in the game: kill the Darkness and kill Uncle Paulie.

### Stable Objects

Hell uses the interplay of stable and unstable objects to define a number of its spaces. Stable objects, according to Yi-Fu Tuan, are whatever catches our eye in a scene; the subsequent image creates place.[172] Manhattan's stable objects are Jackie's friends in the subway, the landmark pieces of architecture, and the visual design of building facades that form the boundaries of the space. In Hell, before entering the first battlefield, the player approaches a periscope in the trench, which is pointed at a bird-like statue off in the distance. As the only landmark in the battlefield, this bizarre image draws the player toward the goal located on its opposite side. Yet the statue that defines this place attacks the player if they stand too close. Stable objects in Hell represent a double-edged sword: they are necessary for way-finding but are ultimately threatening.

### Mythical Space

Walking in the battlefield, the Darkness power speaks with voice-over narration and on-screen text. "Hell has no form," it says, "it bends to my whim. This is my dream of you." Hell, as the Darkness describes, is a conceptual place influenced by Jackie's psyche. It represents his inner mania—loss, revenge, and violence shape its contours. Mythical space ignores the logics of exclusion and contradiction, though it relies on internal consistency.[173] However, as Tuan writes, "myth is not a belief that can be readily verified or proven false by the evidence of the sense."[174]

While it would seem obvious that this world is the manifestation of Jackie's personal Hell, it is later revealed that it is actually a Hell shaped equally as much by the history of the curse. The Darkness, in its current incarnation, possessed Jackie's great-great-grandfather during World

War I. Jackie overpowered the Darkness' will when he took his own life, so it sent him to Hell so he would be forced to make The Darkness grow stronger (obtaining new weapons and powering up by eating the hearts of the dead). The validity of the actions taken while in Hell are put into question as the player is forced to negotiate the awesome powers of the Darkness and their role as Jackie. Hell is experienced in multiple acts in the course of the game. Jackie escapes Hell the first time by going after a weapon that can destroy the curse. When Jackie obtains this weapon the Darkness sends him back to the world of the living. Jackie will have to go back to Hell to finish the job, but he must also seek revenge on Uncle Paulie for killing Jenny.

#### Back from Hell

After witnessing Hell, place takes on new meaning. When Jackie comes to consciousness after coming back from Hell, he is riding on a subway train and is dumped onto the Canal Street platform. The first place the player is instructed to go is Jackie's Aunt Sarah's house in the Lower East Side, where the game introduces a face that is new to the player but old to Jackie. By virtue of family relation, Aunt Sarah's house becomes a safe place.

Motivated by the plot, new areas of the game become available. The subway stations, first used to access the neighborhoods above, open into new spaces accessed by underground tunnels. The player travels to other nearby locations in Lower Manhattan like Gun Hill, the Turkish Baths, the City Hall subway station, a few new buildings, and a ship docked in the harbor. The challenges posed by Hell bear new light on Jackie's quest and it becomes clear that killing Uncle Paulie and ridding himself of the curse will be no small task. The subway station is confirmed as the only fully secure place in the game. Jackie converses with a woman in the subway whose husband he met on the battlefield, delivering sentiments of love from the grave.

Three climactic sequences in the game illustrate the evolved sense of place caused by the visit to Hell. When Jackie returns to Hell the second time, he and Anthony Estacado storm the Castle of the Darkness. The player is made to give up the Darkness powers to the evil force that originally possessed the family bloodline and do battle with the evil in a scenario that involves more puzzle solving than combat. After defeating the evil, Jackie regains control over the Darkness power and reestablishes the weapons he will need to kill Uncle Paulie. However, the Darkness tells Jackie that for every person he uses the powers to kill, the curse will grow closer to regaining control of his mind and body.

This dynamic is played out in a shootout at Aunt Sarah's house. Here, Jackie's allies gather to protect the house from a police siege—the same corrupt officials who have been pursuing Jackie. Even Aunt Sarah takes up a shotgun to fire at the intruders. Jackie does not use the Darkness powers during this fight, so the player is left to fend for themselves with only guns. Following this, Jackie is driven by boat to Uncle Paulie's light-house mansion. For the first time in the game the sun comes out, leaving the player vulnerable. However, as they ascend the steps along the side of the island toward the mansion, the moon slowly eclipses the sun, strengthening the Darkness powers again. Fighting their way through the mansion using the Darkness powers, the player intrudes on Uncle Paulie's space just as he had destroyed Jackie's. During the final showdown, Jackie is presented with a dilemma: in order to finish off Uncle Paulie, he must kill him using the Darkness, but doing so will mean the curse will once again subsume him. In one final violent act, the player takes the life of Uncle Paulie and succumbs to the Darkness. The screen goes black.

When the next scene fades in, Jenny delivers a voiceover saying, "there's always light in the darkness." Jackie awakes, laying on a park bench with his head on Jenny's lap, the city skyline in the background. The world is bright yellow, as if a lighter version of the blood red sky of Hell. Jenny tells Jackie that this is their moment to be together—a singular moment in the ultimate place of sanctuary before Jackie must wake up and resume his life in a changed world. There are two possible interpretations of the placeness of this scene. On the one hand, the ending establishes the space that prompts the greatest sense of happiness, security, and familiarity in Jackie: place can be found anywhere so long as he is with his love. However, this romantic ending seems to be at odds with the rest of the game. After all, Jackie's places had previously been public, dark, and urban. Is this dream world Jackie's manifestation? Or Jenny's? It provides a comforting contrast to the violence of the rest of the game, yet it poses the threat of returning to that world once the dream is over. Perhaps, then, it the last thing that the player sees before the credits roll that best represents the sense of place developed during the game: a screen of total darkness.

#### ENDNOTES

142 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1960), 12.

143 For tactics to subvert familiar spaces are discussed, see: Iain Borden, "Tactics for a Playful City," in *Space Time Play*, ed. Friedrich

von Borries, Steffen P. Walz and Matthias Bottger, 332-334 (Basel: Birkhauser, 2007), 332-334.

144 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 67-84.

145 Tuan, 8,

146 Tuan, vii.

147 Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 2008), 76.

148 Augé, 2008, 86.

149 Marc Augé, *In the Metro*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 28.

150 Augé, 2002, 9.

151 Augé, 2008, 81.

152 Alexander R. Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

153 Pearce, 27.

154 Tuan, 6.

155 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 117.

156 Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1999).

157 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 144.

158 Celia Pearce, *The Interactive Book* (MacMillan, 1997), 25.

159 Oldenburg.

160 Michael Nitsche, "Mapping Time in Video Games," in *Situated Play*, Proceedings of DiGRA 2007 Conference (DiGRA, 2007), 145-151.

161 Nitsche, 149.

162 Tuan, 68.

163 Ian Bogost and Dan Klainbaum, "Experiencing Place in Los Santos and Vice City," in *The Culture and Meaning of Grand Theft Auto*, ed. Nathan Garrelts, 162-176 (McFarland Press, 2006), 165.

164 de Certeau, 97.

165 de Certeau, 97-98.

166 Augé, 94.

167 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 14.

168 Ryan, 107.

169 Celia Pearce, "Narrative Environments," in *Space Time Play*, ed. Friedrich von Borries, Steffen P. Walz and Matthias Bottger, 200-205 (Basel: Birkhauser, 2007).

170 Oldenburg, 14.

171 Oldenburg, 166.

172 The Playstation 3 version of the game has more embedded media than Xbox 360 version, so not all of the examples can be seen in the latter.

173 Tuan, 161.

174 Tuan, 99.

175 Tuan, 85.

Bibliography

Augé, Marc. *In the Metro*. Translated by Tom Conley. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

—. *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*. Translated by John Howe. London: Verso, 2008.

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1994.

Bogost, Ian, and Dan Klainbaum. "Experiencing Place in Los Santos and Vice City." In *The Culture and Meaning of Grand Theft Auto*, edited by Nathan Garrelts, 162-176. McFarland Press, 2006.

Borden, Iain. "Tactics for a Playful City." In *Space Time Play*, edited by Friedrich von Borries, Steffen P. Walz and Matthias Bottger, 332-334. Basel: Birkhauser, 2007.

de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Berkley: University of California Press, 1988.

Galloway, Alexander R. *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Cultur*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Gotz, Ulrich. "Load and Support." In *Space Time Play*, edited by Friedrich von Borries, Steffen P. Walz and Matthias Bottger, 134-137. Basel: Birkhauser, 2007.

Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1992.

Lynch, Kevin. *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1960.

Nitsche, Michael. "Mapping Time in Video Games." *Situated Play, Proceedings of DiGRA 2007 Conference*. DiGRA, 2007. 145-151.

—. *Video Game Spaces*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2008.

Oldenburg, Ray. *The Great Good Place*. New York: Marlowe & Company, 1999.

Pearce, Celia. "Narrative Environments." In *Space Time Play*, edited by Friedrich von Borries, Steffen P. Walz and Matthias Bottger, 200-205. Basel: Birkhauser, 2007.

—. *The Interactive Book*. MacMillan, 1997.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. *Narrative as Virtual Reality*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.