Aya of the Beholder: An Examination of the Construction of Real-World Locations in Parasite Eve

Chris Alton

York University

Abstract

The ways in which virtual environments are constructed and perceived is rarely a direct one-to-one experience. Using the foundational example of Square's *Parasite Eve* (1997), I examine the ways in which real-world locations and approximations of such are represented within video game worlds. I examine the methods through which video games can create spaces which evoke the conceptual idea of a given place, both through audio/visual and interactive means, without constructing a one-to-one simulacrum of the location. Thus, the player actively contributes in the transformation of an actionable virtual space into an actualized lived place.

Taking a multi-disciplinary approach, my discussion draws on cinematic semiotic theory, by way of Christian Metz, in association with Wittgenstein's examination of language as a foundation from which to proceed. These concepts are then incorporated into a broader discussion of theories more focused on video game studies, such as Laurie Taylor's Lacanian approach to the video game avatar and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow, to illustrate how video game locations may leave out large portions of their real-world referents and yet still be identified as said referents by the player. The choices for what to include/exclude are also examined from a socio-political perspective, allowing reflection on what is considered necessary for a representation of a real-world place.

Keywords

Space; Game Worlds; Parasite Eve; Semiotics; Affect

Welcome to Videoland

Much ink has been spilled both within academia and the video game industry about the nature and creation of spaces in video games. Industry-focused books such as Marc Saltzman's *Game Design: Secrets of the Sages* (1999), Bob Bates' *Game Design: The Art & Business of Creating Games* (2001), Neal and Jana Hallford's *Swords & Circuitry: A Designer's Guide to Computer Role-Playing Games* (2001), and Tracy Fullerton's *Game Design Workshop: A Playcentric Approach to Creating Innovative Games* (2008) all have chapters devoted to the ways in which aspiring video game developers may approach the task of creating interactive spaces in an efficient and enjoyably playable manner. Academic writing is likewise focused on the nature of virtual spaces as a site for interactivity, with examples by Diane Carr (2006), which will be discussed presently, Edward Castronova and associates, who focus on the online/MMO sphere (2009), Craig A. Lindley, who looks at game space as it relates to game time (2005), and Fullerton's previously mentioned effort (as it is equal parts academic and practical) all illustrating the clear importance of examining these simulated environments.

However, there is a clear preoccupation in both spheres specifically focusing on the examination of these virtual spaces as purely gamic constructions rather than as experiential environments. In other words, the focus is more on the functionality of the spaces through which the player moves, rather than on the creation of places which exist in their own right. While certainly a valid ontological concern for the still-young field of video game studies, this primacy attributed to spaces over places is a notable deficiency. This oversight is especially evident when the factor of real-world simulation is involved, as this particular topic is rarely engaged or even acknowledged. Even when the issue is touched upon, as with the deconstructions of Rockstar Games' *Grand Theft Auto* series, it is still an examination of how fictional locations (Liberty City; Los Santos; Vice City) serve as satire and commentary rather than as a real city open to lived experience (See: Frasca, 2003; Miller, 2008).

There are notable exceptions, such as Aubrey Anable's work on Rockstar's 2005 video game adaptation of 1979's *The Warriors* (2013), but that article focuses more on the ways in which the game brings over and nostalgizes the movie's commentary on the New York of 1978 rather than creating a notion of contemporary New York as the developers, themselves, see it. This is not to say that such examinations are not important, as they offer an insight into how historical events and perspectives may be represented in interactive texts. Instead, it is merely to show the distinction between adaptation and contemporary perspective. To this end, an examination of the ways in which Square's *Parasite Eve* (Square, 1998) offers the player a conception of New York

(more specifically, Manhattan) is an excellent way of exploring the ways in which real-world locations are constructed, presented, and experienced as gamic spaces and concrete places within video games.

Space vs. Place, and the Equation for Hyrule

While arguing for the difference and equal importance of spaces vis-à-vis places may appear like merely splitting hairs at first glance, it is a necessary distinction to make. Joaquin Siabra-Fraile illustrates the importance of delineating these concepts in his discussion of the construction of Hyrule in the original *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo, 1986) for the Nintendo Entertainment System (2008). Siabra-Fraile argues, via Wittgenstein's discussion of the 'language game,' that Hyrule as constructed in the game (as opposed to the paratexts Nintendo published in conjunction with the game) is as much a place as it is a space (Siabra-Fraile, 2008). This is because not only does the world of Hyrule allow movement and interaction on the part of the player, but it also follows consistent rules tied to, and amongst, each of the objects, items, characters, and conditions for player actions present in the game. This interconnected set of rules and conditions creates an understanding of the concept of place within the player, much like the individual aspects of a language combine to create meaning (Siabra-Fraile, 2008).

To phrase it in different terms, moving through a space designed solely for player-functionality is fundamentally different from being placed amidst a cohesive place of elements which/who adhere to a common set of known principles interacting with each other as well as with the player, rather than simply waiting to be acted upon. This notion can be carried across genres and platforms throughout the medium's history. For example, while the initial appearances of enemies on-screen in the original *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo, 1985) may be triggered by the player's position on the screen, their subsequent movement and interaction with the environment is not dependent on the player's actions. These enemy behaviours may continue even after the player has caused the screen to scroll forward, leaving the enemy itself off-screen yet still actively interacting with the environment (as anyone who has been hit from behind by an errant ricocheting Koopa shell can attest). These actions operate on internally consistent rules which may function even without direct player interaction. Therefore, the world of the game consists of more than just what appears on-screen at any given moment. In opposition, a game like Tetris is wholly designed around a singular, unexplorable, on-screen void of a space where the only non-player-directed influence is gravity, so far as it can be called 'gravity' in such an abstract environment. This concept of establishment of place, and the distinction that arises from it, are important for examining how video games have long tended to represent real-world environments.

Establishing the Digital Landscape

The notion of using real-world places as virtual spaces within video games is certainly not a new one. As far back as 1982, players have been presented with virtual representations of environments from everyday life, such as Japan's Fuji International Speedway in *Pole Position* (Namco/Atari, 1982) (see Sellers, 2001). However, full one-to-one simulacra of real-world locations had not been successfully achieved and offered to players until the advent of the open-world game and, more specifically, Team Bondi's recreation of 1947 Los Angeles in *L.A. Noire* (Rockstar Games, 2011). While games like *Second Life* (Linden Lab, 2003) may purport to offer real-life spaces, these places are wholly player-built constructions, carrying the same level of oversight as, for example, a Wikipedia page, leading to a questionable simulacrum at best.

Even in the instance of *L.A. Noire*, this recreation was constructed, not from personal experience (which would, admittedly, be incredibly difficult, if not impossible, given the time disparity between the period of the game's setting and the time of the game's development), but from "over 180,000 photographs from period newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Herald Examiner*, and *The Daily News*," along with "massive, hand-drawn maps created in the '40s by President Franklin Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration, as well as early aerial photography of the area" (Helgeson, 2010). Additionally, most of the buildings are merely facades that the player is unable to enter or explore, meaning that even this meticulous recreation is incomplete. For example, a player may pass the famous Bradbury Building in-game, and is encouraged and rewarded for doing so, but is unable to enter the structure. This is the case, despite the assertion that "[w]hile not willing to say that it's 100 percent accurate, [production designer Simon] Wood feels that the streets of *L.A. Noire* are as close as humanly possible to the actual L.A. of the time" (Helgeson, 2010).

Given the divide between the early integration of real-world locations into video games and this meticulous, albeit still incomplete, recreation of Los Angeles of a specific time period, the question then becomes how the idea of the real world has usually been represented/simulated for the player across the medium's history. To be sure, technological limitations for various console/hardware generations are certainly a factor, but these considerations are not the totality of the issue. An important factor to consider is the fact that, as D. N. Rodowick points out, unlike film, which offers indexicality to photography and location presentation (2007), real-world environments within video games are entirely created and determined by the whims, perceptions, and desires of the game's developers. This malleability both fits neatly within Rodowick's assertion of the digital as a whole being more painterly than indexical (Rodowick, 2007), while at the same time standing uniquely apart from his theory by way of being a representation of environment

which may be manipulated by both the creators and the users (players). This dual manipulation requires idiosyncratic ways of dealing with the real world in a gamic space, leading to determinations by the developers about what is and is not included in the representation/simulation, as well as what that says about the developers' perceptions of these locations.

Looking over the *PlaneScape* from a *Silent Hill*

In order to discuss how these real-world locations are presented as interactive spaces, an examination of how virtual environments in games are constructed and presented is first necessary. Diane Carr's previously referenced examination of the ways in which gamic spaces are presented to the player is most helpful at this juncture. In her discussion, she compares two very different games: *Planescape: Torment* (Interplay, 1999) (An open-ended, exploration-focused, role-playing game) and *Silent Hill* (Konami, 1999) (a linear, narrative-driven, survival-horror game). Carr notes that the ways in which the worlds are presented to the player are directly influenced by the expectations placed on the player by the game and its designers, and by the genre categories into which the games fall.

Planescape: Torment, as a role-playing game, is more concerned with exploration, tactical combat over visceral experience, measurable player-character growth, and establishing the atmosphere of the dark fantasy world in which the story and the game are set. Thus, the game is presented to the player via an expansive overhead view which allows for a greater sense of the surroundings and, therefore, the world encompassing the player (Carr, 2006). *Silent Hill*, on the other hand, is concerned both with a more immediate fear experience and creating a sense of unease, oppression, and helplessness within a seemingly normal environment, all while driving the player forward along a narrowly linear progression path. As a result, the game presents its environments from a much more confined, indeed claustrophobic at times, behind-the-avatar view (Carr, 2006).

Additionally, the design of the environments themselves mirror both the viewpoints offered to the player and the intentions of the respective games. As *Planescape: Torment* is focused on establishing a cohesive world and encouraging exploration, the terrain is more expansive and open to player interaction and free movement between locations (Carr, 2006). *Silent Hill*, on the other hand, features narrow corridors, streets, and alleyways, with the appearance of an open environment but nonetheless designed to restrict the player into following the linear path of the game's pre-ordained events (Carr, 2006). Carr's notion that designer focus on player actions and interactivity takes precedence over the establishment of place/environment is an important consideration. This is even more the case when considering the recreation of real-world spaces.

Silent Hill is also relevant to the discussion for another reason, however. As Keiichiro Toyama, the producer and director of the game states:

> I looked at what sort of horror people were looking at and enjoying and found that the modern horror theme was the one that was getting the most acceptance. What I found was that a lot of modern horror was based around a real-world situation or setting. I wanted to build on these concepts, starting with any Midwestern American town and building the horror image upon it. (Toyama, 1999)

To this end, the developers included what Joe Rybicki refers to in *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine* as "a number of (often humorous) look-alikes of real-life places and things" (1999): locations and brands that resemble and refer to real-world places and items without explicitly depicting them. For example, there is an "8" branded convenience store which is a clear substitute for the "7-11" chain of stores, as the logo uses the same font and the sign uses the same colour scheme (fig. 1). In essence, what the developers (and Rybicki) are describing is the incorporation of semiotics into the game space. Signifiers, such as the aforementioned "8" store or a generic "Jelly Beans" logo designed to resemble that of the "Jelly Belly" brand, are used to evoke real-world objects, locations, and ideas in the player's mind in order to give the sense of a proper place within the game environment, without constructing a replica of a real-world town in its entirety.

Figure 1. "8" store in *Silent Hill* (Konami, 1999). Screenshot.

Metz, Croft, and Almost (but Not Quite) Venice

Christian Metz' discourse on semiotics within cinema, while admittedly addressing an entirely different medium, is still useful in this situation. While not entirely unheard of (see Vella, 2016), the application of cinematic semiotics is usually to characters, rather than the mise-en-scène or environments in which they appear. In service of the latter,

Metz points out the following in his discussion of location construction in the cinema:

> In the cinema [...] a whole semiotics of denotation is possible and necessary, for a film is composed of *many* photographs […] photographs that give us mostly only partial views of the diegetic referent. In film a "house" would be a shot of a staircase, a shot of one of the walls from outside, a close-up of a window, a brief establishing shot of the building, etc. Thus a kind of filmic *articulation* appears, which has no equivalent in photography: It is the denotation itself that is being constructed, organized, and to a certain extent codified. (Metz, 1974)

Essentially, what Metz is arguing is that film (and photography, for that matter), by necessity, uses a series of signifiers in order to articulate ideas of specific objects, spaces, and places for the audience/viewer. In his example, the house is constructed in the viewer's mind by presenting shots of various aspects of the structure in a particular sequence, in order to create the idea of "house" without actually presenting an entire house, in and of itself. As Frasca illustrates in his discussion of representation (ironically echoing Baudrillard's discourse on simulation), "[o]bviously, representation is never exhaustive: there will always be some characteristics that will not fit [...] In other words, representation is always an incomplete task" (2001).

This theory of semiotics, when adapted to a discussion of gamic spaces and writ large, illuminates how the idea of real-world locations may be represented and incorporated into interactive spaces within video games. For example, in *Tomb Raider II* (Eidos, 1997) there is a series of levels which take place in Venice. The levels themselves clearly do not mirror the actual layout of the city or even individual buildings, nor do they offer any pretense of doing so. The game cues the player to the idea of the place, however, by including a series of (arguably stereotypical) signifiers for the city. The level contains narrow walkways which give way to waterways navigable by small watercraft; certain architectural styles and flourishes designed to be evocative of a (perhaps) post-card idea of the structures in the city itself; marble statuary and reliefs spread throughout the environments intended to give a notion of Italian history and romanticism. All of these signifying aspects of the space are present in contrast to the levels' design and layouts catering specifically to the objectives and ability-set assigned to the player-character (Lara Croft) and, by extension, the player.

Once again, Metz provides perspective on how the game's designers are able to manage this paradox of space and representation. Metz offers a distinction between the use of aural language and filmic language which proves applicable:

> To "speak" a language is to use it, but to "speak" cinematographic language is to some extent to invent it. The speakers of ordinary language constitute a group of users; film-makers are a group of creators. On the other hand, movie *spectators* in turn constitute a group of users. That is why the semiotics of cinema must frequently consider things from the point of view of the spectator rather than of the film-maker […] The situation has a rough equivalent in linguistics: Some linguists connect the speaker with the message, while the listener in some way "represents" the code, since he requires it to understand what is being said to him, while the speaker is presumed to know beforehand what he wants to say. (Metz, 1974)

The distinction Metz is making is between aural language on the one hand, being both used and received by people as a necessarily two-way communication system, while film is a fundamentally one-way flow of information, from film-makers (creators) to audiences (users). Without getting into the potentially thorny issue of how this concept relates to or conflicts with reader-response theory, Metz' use of the terms "creators" and "users" is easily transferred over to the realm of video games.

Therefore, in the *Tomb Raider II* example, rather than making a meticulous recreation of Venice, after the fashion of *L.A. Noire*, the designers (Metz' creators) created a space which served the mechanics and immediate goals of the game while also conveying the idea of 'Venice' in order to engage the player (Metz' user) on multiple cognitive levels. This echoes Siabra-Fraile's discussion of how a space of objects may become a space of places (2008), in that these levels are an obstacle course for the player/Lara Croft, but also establish the *Tomb Raider II* version of Venice. It also illustrates Carr's point about the construction of the space catering to the specific intentions of the designers; in this case, both creating an engaging interactive environment within the game's mechanics and creating the feeling in the player's mind of being in Venice.

Parasite Eve's Manhattan

With these concepts in mind, the ways in which *Parasite Eve* presents the notion of 'Manhattan' to the player may now be explored. *Parasite Eve* is a particularly good example for examining this issue, not only because it offers a synthesis of game types, but also because many of its techniques for establishing the gamic world utilizing real-world referents are still in use to this day. *Parasite Eve*'s overall design falls halfway between Carr's dual examples of *Planescape: Torment* and *Silent Hill*. The game carries role-playing game elements, such as inventory management, modification, and customization, a character

experience system, and semi-turn-based, strategic, grid-based combat.[1] The game also, however, offers fixed camera angles and the survival-horror atmosphere and immediacy of games such as *Silent Hill* or the early installments of the *Resident Evil* series. While the game does allow for free movement between locations, it is not the free overworld movement of *Planescape: Torment*, nor even of any of the *Final Fantasy* games (see fig. 2).

Figure 2. Navigable overworld (as seen from an airship) from *Final Fantasy IV*. Screenshot.

Instead, what *Parasite Eve* offers the player is what might be termed a caricature of Manhattan Island. When the player wants to move from one significant location to another (as opposed to changing, say, rooms or paths at a given location, as will be discussed later), the game displays a rotatable polygonal map of the island, complete with patrol helicopters circling the borough, with key locations highlighted and explicitly named (figs. 3, 4).

[1] In *Parasite Eve*'s case, the grid does not take the form of a Cartesian plane, as in games such as *Final Fantasy Tactics* (Square, 1998), but of a polyhedron which dictates weapon range.

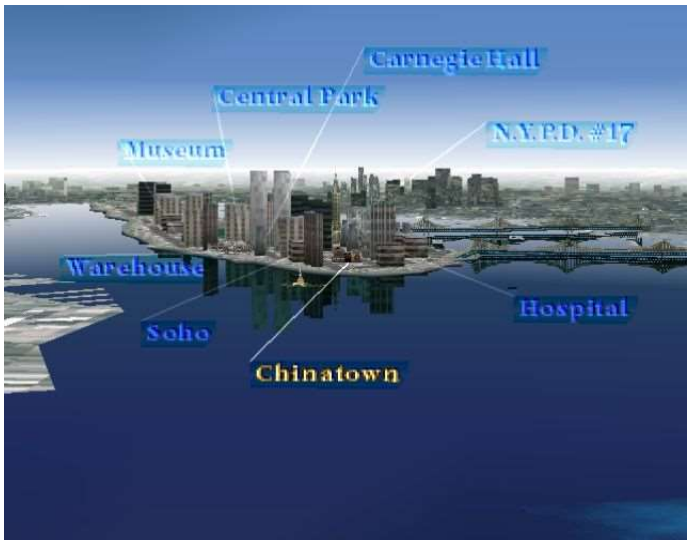

Figure 3. *Parasite Eve*'s depiction of Manhattan. Screenshot.

Figure 4. A different angle of Manhattan from earlier in the game. Screenshot.

The most evident aspect of this model is that it most certainly is not to scale. Several buildings are exaggerated; others are excluded; sections of the island are either excluded or minimized into insignificance (Harlem, for instance), and even the aforementioned helicopters would be monstrously gigantic if taken as depicted. The point of this model, however, is exactly the opposite of providing an accurate depiction of Manhattan for the player. Instead, what this 'overworld' map is doing, much like the earlier *Tomb Raider II* example, is establishing the idea of 'Manhattan' as economically as possible using semiotic shorthand. As illustrated by figures 3 and 4, the player is not only offered famous Manhattan locations such as Carnegie Hall, Central Park, and Soho as playable spaces, but the World Trade Center is the most clearly

discernible landmark on the island,[2] followed by the Brooklyn Bridge and, depending on the camera angle, the Statue of Liberty, clearly visible in the background just off-shore.

Even before this overworld map is presented to the player, however, the game goes out of its way to prime the idea of Manhattan in the player's consciousness. The previously discussed overworld map is presented to the player only after approximately an hour's worth of the game has transpired.[3] The very opening of the game proper presents the player with a pre-rendered cinematic,[4] which acts as a preface to the upcoming story/events.[5] During this short montage, the player is shown the following images in relatively quick succession: a close-up of the Statue of Liberty, with the World Trade Center in the background; traffic on the Brooklyn Bridge, including a subway train; a series of cityscape dissolves which lead to Rockefeller Plaza (as represented by the famous bronze statue of Prometheus which resides there); finally, a series of dissolve shots of Carnegie Hall, within which the game itself begins. This series of shots serve the same purpose as the opening shots of any film scene: establishing location for the audience. Only, rather than just establishing a smaller, more immediate location, these few brief shots firmly illustrate that the game is set in the real-world: Christmas 1997 (as the decorations in Rockefeller Plaza indicate) in Manhattan. It is a simple task at this point to draw the parallels between Metz' earlier example of the filmic construction of the idea of 'house' and the ideas of 'city' or, more specifically, 'Manhattan' being put on offer here by the game's developers.

Interestingly, it is also clear that the game is intent upon establishing a sense of place for the player long before any sense of interactive space is offered. This notion flies in the face of the assertions made by the various authors mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, as many of the locations depicted in the opening cinematic, such as the Statue of Liberty, are never used as actual gamic environments. Instead, these scenes are shown solely to give the sense of place for the player, showing these locations as lived spaces inhabited by people, despite

[2] It must be kept in mind that *Parasite Eve* was released in 1998, three years before the attacks which would eradicate the towers from the Manhattan landscape.
[3] This estimate is based on my most recent attempt to get to the overworld map from the start of a new game. Obviously, due to the interactive nature of the medium and the fact that, unlike film, players may experience the same sequences at different time intervals, this estimate is not a concrete assertion.
[4] A non-interactive movie clip which, instead of using the game's graphics engine, is presented via high-end CGI.
[5] Note that the cinematic being discussed is the one which plays after a new game has been started, not the attract mode cinematic before the game's title menu appears on-screen.

these same people either fleeing or being killed by the time the player actually starts to play the game.

Abstraction, Omission, and Scenes from a Park

All of these elements are clearly designed to give the player the feeling of Manhattan without going into excessive detail, but the most interesting aspect of this depiction is what the designers felt could be omitted from this landscape while still maintaining that 'Manhattan' conception. As mentioned before, Harlem is minimized into insignificance, as are Broadway and Times Square, yet Chinatown is not only highlighted but made a playable (if abstract in its own right) area. At this point, it is important to acknowledge that, while Square is a Japanese developer, *Parasite Eve* is a collaboration between Japanese and American creators. As *Electronic Gaming Monthly* indicated in their cover article for their May 1998 issue, the scriptwriter/main designer for the game is Japanese developer Takayuki Tokita, but the main environmental artists are Americans Steve Gray and Darnell Williams (*Electronic Gaming Monthly* Staff, 1998). What this means is that, while Tokita may be forgiven for omitting these significant sections of New York, as he hails from a foreign country, the presence of American developers on the project suggests an intentionality behind the decision. While I could not find evidence as to the reasoning behind this omission, the fact that both Harlem and Times Square were in the process of gentrification may have had something to do with the decision.

The arguably biggest visual omission is perhaps one of Manhattan's most famous landmarks: The Empire State Building. This absence is made understandable, not during an initial playthrough of the game, but in the second-playthrough called 'EX mode.' This mode contains the true ending to the game, housed in the previously inaccessible, but nonetheless present and visible, Chrysler Building (a proverbial can of worms which will be examined presently). Given the shorthand used to create the overworld map of Manhattan, having two similarly-styled, immediately recognizable towers in close proximity, one playable and one not, would only serve to confuse the issue (in fact, looking at fig. 4, there is a generic office building on the Empire State Building's location). Indeed, each available location on the map of Manhattan clearly distinguishes itself from its surroundings, whether by way of size, different architecture, or lack of significant surroundings/modeled topography. Therefore, in order to maintain a consistency in the world-building, the Chrysler Building could only appropriately stand out with the Empire State Building's absence.

Looking at the way in which each of these individual accessible locations are presented, some interesting techniques become apparent. The first aspect is how the actual moment-to-moment gameplay areas are constructed. The individual locations are not seamlessly flowing experiences. Instead, they are a series of still, landscape-like, pre-

rendered images presented from a singular, unmoving perspective or camera angle, a technique pioneered by the original *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996) (see fig. 5). Each of these images has invisible yet distinct entrance/exit points and paths through which the player can navigate, corresponding with the salient features of the depicted landscape. A series of these still images are then stitched together via these entrance/exit points, and, much like Metz's example of the creation of the idea 'house' via film, this accumulation of single shot locales becomes one of the game's major locations. Because of these evocative fixed camera angles, and the implied notion of montage that comes along with this style of environment construction, Square gave *Parasite Eve* the tagline "the cinematic RPG" (*Electronic Gaming Monthly* staff, 1998). This cinematic approach carries with it some concepts to be unpacked.

Figure 5. The entrance to Central Park Zoo in *Parasite Eve*. Note the difference in image style between the pre-rendered background and the polygonal player-character (bottom-centre). Screenshot.

Getting Around the City

There are two unique aspects to this form of location construction which bear further examination. The first of these aspects is the way in which the game primes the idea of one cohesive location within the player's mind. When the player selects a desired location from the map of Manhattan, the camera then zooms in for a rotating close-up of the polygonal model of the location (see fig. 6). Once the player confirms the choice of destination, then the game transitions to the series of single-screen pre-rendered environments mentioned above for the moment-to-moment gameplay.

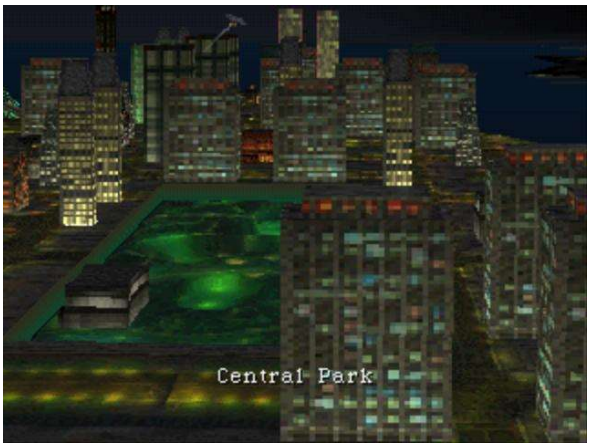

Figure 6: Polygonal representation of Central Park. Screenshot.

This transition structure serves two purposes. First, the fade-out from the close-up of the polygonal representation of the location to the fade-in of individual landscape images with which the player directly interacts enforces the notion that each of these still images are encompassed within the polygonal model, creating the idea of a unified whole or a concrete physical place. This enforcement acts similarly to the way in which Siabra-Fraile argues that cohesive object rules do in creating a place out of an interactive space. Each of the locations in the game has a similar structure, and, as such, the notion that each space is part of the overall location comes to be acknowledged through this internal consistency. Simultaneously, these spaces conform to Metz' semiotic construction theory by linking the autonomous single screen spaces with the polygonal representation via the idea of a place, despite there being no clear ties between the two, outside of the juxtaposition of their presentation to the player.

Secondly, as a further extension of both Metz' and Siabra-Fraile's theories, the entire structure of the location selection process reinforces a cohesive place. There is a progression inherent in destination selection which firmly solidifies the idea of a singular location. Much like Metz' description of how to express the idea of 'house,' the player is shown Manhattan, followed by the individual desired location in close-up, which is followed in turn by the pre-rendered entrance screen featuring the player-character/avatar (NYPD Detective Aya Brea). That the player goes through this sequence for all of the major locations in the game not only ties the pre-rendered images to the close-up polygonal model, but ties all of these spaces together into one cohesive place: New York/Manhattan.

Central Park...?

The individual locations themselves also offer a unique presentation of real-world places. As mentioned before, the moment-to-moment environments are pre-rendered, single-screen spaces which are stitched

together. The implementation of these environments also falls between *Planescape: Torment* and *Silent Hill*. Because of the game's dual conceits of being a role-playing game and a horror experience, the perspective for these pre-rendered environments vacillates between more expansive angles, allowing for broader landscape presentation, and more intimate, intensely confining camera angles, proving Carr's points for both experiences at once. However, there is another aspect to these locations which encompasses several of the theories already discussed.

While the game does use several generic locations,[6] such as a warehouse and a police station, famous real-world locations such as Central Park and the American Museum of Natural History are also utilized. What is intriguing about the presentation of these famous locations is the way in which the aspects which are accurate and the aspects which are fabricated are incorporated and juxtaposed. Central Park is an excellent example of how the game mixes reality and fantasy within the same environment. During the player's time in Central Park, they are given cause to roam the entirety of the park in search of the main adversary of the game (the super-powered monster, Eve), including Central Park Zoo and the Concert Bandshell.

Upon comparison with the full official map of the park,[7] it becomes apparent that the layout of Central Park Zoo as presented in the game is in fact accurate, even fifteen years later. The same may be said for the Bandshell in which Aya once again encounters Eve. However, the majority of the rest of the park is not accurate, and merely resembles the winding paths present in the actual space. The physical proximity of the Zoo to the Bandshell is considerably different from how the game has chosen to depict it, as well. The real-world versions of these locations are almost on opposite ends of the park, while in *Parasite Eve* they are practically adjacent, in order to accommodate both the player's travel time and the monsters the player encounters, based on escaped animals from the zoo.

Additionally, despite there being several egress points from the park in real-life, there are only two within the game. This modification reinforces Carr's observation of environment being subsumed to gamic action, as the player is overtly being led through the intended game actions set in the park. A similar observation may be made about the American Museum of Natural History. The layout of the building in the game mirrors the layout offered on the museum's official website.[8] As the exhibits have changed significantly within the past fifteen years, a

[6] And, in the case of St. Francis hospital, transposes environments from other parts of the state (http://www.stfrancisheartcenter.com/utility/about/locations.html)
[7] http://www.centralpark.com/maps/group/maps
[8] http://www.amnh.org/plan-your-visit/interactive-floorplan

one-to-one comparison is not possible, but the underlying floor-plan for all levels of the building is accurate. The way in which this space is subsumed to gamic action is in the strict control and designation of which doors and elevators the player is allowed to access at a given time. In both instances, however, there are enough true-to-life facets of both locations present to serve as signifiers, evoking the idea of both places.

Location, Perspective, and Lacan

There are anomalies to this approach within the game, however. As previously stated, for example, Chinatown is greatly minimized, having been turned into a single navigable street which terminates in a dead-end. The greatest anomaly of all, though, is the previously discussed Chrysler Building. This environment offers eighty-six floors for the player to explore and encounter increasing challenges (as opposed to the seventy-seven floors in the actual building).[9] All the floors, except for the lobby, fail to mirror their real-life counterparts, and, much like the *Tomb Raider II* example, offer no pretense for doing so. Instead, the game dynamically generates each floor by randomly selecting and combining a series of pre-rendered hallway segments. This random generation is intriguing because not only does this practice not follow the real-world location whatsoever, but the floors are also not forced to conform to the building's overall physical structure, or physics at all, for that matter. Elevators would need to move horizontally as well as vertically; several floors would, by necessity, jut out far past the lines of the building; staircases would be labyrinthine, Escher-esque constructions. Moreover, no two players will experience the exact same layout in the Chrysler Building, since, as the floors are created dynamically, the building takes on an amorphous quality not shared by the real-world location or any of the other locations in the game. This amorphous quality may be considered a jarring break from the established rules for locations established by the game, and yet, the actual experience of playing through the Chrysler Building does not feel out of place.

There are two theories by which these paradoxes of space and place construction may be reconciled and the experience of playing through the Chrysler Building explained as a coherent part of the overall experience of the game. The first of these theories is offered by Laurie Taylor, in her examination of the player's relation to space-movement in first-person shooters (2003). Using a Lacanian perspective, she states the following:

[9] Heather Cross, "Chrysler Building Visitor's Guide" in About.com, under "New York City Travel," http://gonyc.about.com/od/attractionslandmarks/p/chrysler_building.htm

> In video games, the player-character or player position in the game responds based on the player's input through the interface. The player plays seeking the goals of the player-character and plays from the player-character's vantage point and so the player begins play based on shared traits with the player-character. These shared traits allow for identification. The player's narcissistic connection to the player-character occurs when the player embraces the player-character not just as having some traits in common with the player, but as being *part of the player*. This narcissistic acceptance is necessary for the player to enter into the game space as a part of the game space and for the player to traverse the medium of the screen. (Taylor, 2003, emphasis in original)

Taylor, operating from a Lacanian perspective, is pointing out how Lacan's mirror state is emulated via player/player-character dynamics, and that this schism is reconciled via narcissistic means.[10] Taylor goes on to point out the moment of crisis that these ideas generate when a first-person shooter player sees a reflection of the player-character while looking from the self-same first-person perspective. However, her notion of narcissistic reconciliation is useful here for examining the dichotomy between accurate and fictional aspects of presented real-world spaces.

Parasite Eve is played from a third-person perspective, and, while the player may identify with Aya Brea, there are clearly two distinct entities at play. The player controls Aya's actions but is also clearly separate from her, as is visually reinforced. However, because of this unity of action, there is a synthesis of player and player-character, as stated by Taylor, facilitating an entrance into the space and, by extension, the world of the game for the player. The implication of this idea is that, given the amount of accurate real-world aspects in locations such as Central Park or the American Museum of Natural History, the fictional aspects are acceptable in the same way that the player both is and is not Aya Brea. These locations are both the real-world versions of themselves and, at the same time, the *Parasite Eve* versions of these locations, reconciled in the same way as, and due to, Taylor's player/player-character schism. Once the player/player-character reconciliation takes place, the player is unquestioningly immersed in the space of the game, allowing for the reconciliation of the real-world and fictional elements of those spaces. Doors that open one way in one single-screen space show as opening in a different direction on the next screen; the real-world locations of the Bandshell and Zoo in Central Park

[10] In which an individual experiences a schism upon realizing that the image is the mirror is a reflection of the self, but is not the self or a different person, turning that representation of the self into an outside object.

may be located adjacently; the Chrysler Building becomes a labyrinth for the player to overcome.

Flowing through the Chrysler Building

This explanation details the way in which the locales which use real-world elements function but does not address the problem of the Chrysler Building's random, physics-defying layout. The answer to that dilemma is, in part, explained by the immersion already mentioned by Taylor. This immersion is an aspect incorporated into Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow (1990). The basic idea of Csikszentmihalyi's theory is that, when engaged in a pleasurable activity, a person enters a state of concentration and satisfaction which causes a loss of self-consciousness and time awareness. Basically, the person gets 'wrapped up' in what they are doing, to the exclusion of all else.

In this regard, the Chrysler Building of the game starts to come into focus. The Chrysler Building is offered as a reward of sorts for playing through the game once. Offering the dual incentives of an additional challenge and the game's true ending, the Chrysler Building utilizes all the skills that the player would have accumulated up to that point. With the player already immersed within the game's mechanics and world, it stands to reason that, while actively accepting the challenge offered by the Chrysler Building, there would be an attendant lack of questioning about the randomly generated experience. Therefore, the Chrysler Building of the game is acceptable both because it is the *Parasite Eve* version of the structure and because the challenge and state of flow achieved by the player while facing the trials of the building supersede any inconsistencies which would arise in the mind of an outside observer. This notion can be writ large across the whole of *Parasite Eve*'s Manhattan. The absences discussed earlier can be reconciled because it is the *Parasite Eve* version of Manhattan, and because the player is focused on moving through that version of the place in service of the game experience, questions about what is omitted and why are left to the side during play.

Thank You for Visiting

Through these disparate techniques and theories, the Manhattan of *Parasite Eve* coalesces into a unified whole which can readily be referred to as 'New York' by players. This 'New York' is not a one-to-one representation of the actual city but is the *Parasite Eve* version of the location. Despite this difference, it is, for the player during the experience of play, as much New York as the actual locale. Techniques such as the ones used to establish *Parasite Eve*'s New York continue to be used, even in open-world games, such as the Manhattan offered in *Spider-Man 2* (Activision, 2004). Despite offering a fully navigable version of Manhattan, it is still not a one-to-one simulacrum of the city. There is traffic, and major landmarks are represented, but the city has

been made to "half-scale" to "make it ideal for our swinging system" (John, 2004). This design decision can be seen in evidence even in Sony/Insomniac's take on the Spider-Man video game experience in 2018. This continued use illustrates that it is not technological limitations at the heart of the issue, but the ways in which the core feeling or idea of a place may be expressed according to the developers' designs. That these designs may be informed by implicit ideas and biases, and that these decisions may erase the lived experiences of certain portions of the population, is something that needs to be considered and examined in each experience rather than simply accepted as part of the game's version of these locations.

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