

ABSTRACT

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PLACE, AND PLACE-MAKING IN
GRAND THEFT AUTO V

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With the emergence of videogames came an exodus to the digital worlds created within them. To understand this shift is to understand the human needs they have come to fulfill. One of these basic human necessities is having a sense of place. Here *Grand Theft Auto V* becomes one game in a slew of game titles to foster this need.

DRIVING AROUND LOS SANTOS: SPACE, PLACE, AND PLACE-MAKING
IN GRAND THEFT AUTO V

By

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Dedication

For Michele Rice.

Acknowledgements

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Videogame Timeline

1940 Edward U. Condon designs a computer for the World's Fair. It plays the traditional game NIM. The percentage of games the computer wins is 90%.

1950 Claude Shannon establishes protocols for a chess-playing computer. Alongside Alan Turing they eventually create the program.

1952 A.S. Douglas creates OXO, also known as Tic-Tac-Toe, on the Cambridge ED-SAC computer. This was developed as part of his research on human-computer interaction.

1954 Programmers at New Mexico's Los Alamos laboratories develop a blackjack program on an IBM-701 computer.

1955 The U.S. military designs a game entitled *Hutspiel*. This game was meant to resemble a war simulation between NATO and the Soviets, blue and red characters respectively.

1956 A. Samuel demonstrates his computer checkers program on the IBM-701 computer. This demonstration takes place on national television. The program would eventually face a checkers master and win.

1957 Alex Bernstein writes the first computer chess program on an IBM-704 computer. The program was advanced enough to determine specific moves, 4.5 moves ahead of time.

1958 *Tennis for Two* is introduced on the oscilloscope by William Higinbotham. This game would serve as a major developmental precursor to popular games such as *PONG*.

1959 *Mouse in the Maze* is created by MIT students on the MIT TX-0 computer.

1962 *Spacewar!* is invented by MIT student Steve Russel. This will later serve as the inspiration for the first coin operated arcade game, *Computer Space!*

1966 Ralph Baer develops a written prototype for the first television based video game system.

1967 Baer patents his interactive t.v. game *Odyssey* which would later be released by Magnavox.

1971 Dan Rawitsch, Bill Heinemann, and Paul Dillenberger create the Oregon Trail.

1972 Baer's Magnavox *Odyssey* is released. Nolan Bushnell and Al Alcorn develop *PONG*--an Atari based table tennis game. *PONG* will become one of the most played arcade games.

1973 The arcade video game industry starts to take off--many companies start to form and begin video game production.

1974 Midway's TV Basketball becomes the first arcade game to use human figures instead of blocks or vehicle shapes.

1975 Atari introduces the home version of *PONG*. Atari's *Steeplechase* becomes the first 6-player arcade video game, and *Indy 800* becomes the first 8-player game.

1976 General Instruments produces the technology necessary for a video game to be placed on a single chip, the AY-3-8500.

1977 Atari releases the Video Computer System (VCS)—the Atari 2600. In Japan, Nintendo releases its first home video game, Color TV Game 6.

1978 Taito's *Space Invaders* is introduced in Japan. From 1978-1979 over 60,000 *Space Invaders* machines would be introduced in the United States.

1979 The Intellivision is released by Mattel. The Intellivision was deemed more sophisticated than the Atari 2600 and had better sports based games. *Galaxian* is released by NAMCO and becomes the first RGB based game to be entirely coded in RGB. *Puck-Man* is released by NAMCO in Japan.

1980 *Puck-Man* gets renamed to the more commonly known *Pac-Man* and is released in North America. Atari's *Battlezone* is the first arcade game to include a true 3-D environment. *Star Fire* is the first cockpit based game and the first arcade game to utilize the high-score table.

1981 Nintendo releases *Donkey Kong*, which would lead to the introduction of popular culture icon Super Mario. The arcade game industry becomes a \$5 billion dollar industry in the United States.

1982 Disney releases *TRON*—a game that integrates contests from the film as well. *Q*Bert* is also released during this time. The video arcade market begins to crash.

1983 The video arcade game crash from '82 starts affecting the home arcade market. Nintendo releases the FamiCom. Atari releases their game *Star Wars*. *Mario Bros.* gets released.

1984 The arcade crash is still occurring. Russian mathematician Alexey Pajitnov creates and releases *Tetris*.

1985 The FamiCom system gets renamed to the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) for its release in the United States. The system becomes one of the major contributing

factors to the breaking of the industry crash of '82. *Super Mario Bros.* gets released for the NES.

1986 *The Legend of Zelda* is released in Japan for the FamiCom. Sega releases the Sega Master System (SMS). This year marks the introduction of the educational gaming market, starting with the extremely popular *Reader Rabbit*.

1987 Cyan's *The Manhole* becomes the first game for computer to be released on CD-ROM. *Maniac Mansion* gets released by LucasArts and is the first game to utilize the point-and-click interface.

1988 *Super Mario Bros 2* is released as is the infamous *John Madden Football* which would launch one of the highest grossing video game franchises.

1989 The Sega Genesis home console system is made available. Atari releases the Lynx—a 16-bit handheld game console. Nintendo releases the GameBoy, coming packaged with the ever popular *Tetris*.

1990 Maxis releases SimCity, which also serves as a precursor to a popular PC game franchise. *Super Mario Bros 3* is released and Squaresoft's *Final Fantasy* series is finally released in the United States. In the U.S. Solitaire starts to get bundled with Windows 3.0.

1991 Nintendo releases the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES). Capcom releases *Street Fighter II*. Sega releases *Sonic the Hedgehog*.

1992 *Mortal Kombat* gets released by Midway. Sega releases *Virtua Racing*. *Dune II* gets released, one of the first iterations of a real-time strategy game.

1993 The World Wide Web finally lives up to its name and goes “worldwide.” *Doom* gets released by id Software and popularizes the first-person shooter game genre.

1994 Blizzard releases *Warcraft: Orcs and Humans*, a real-time strategy game that introduces players to Azeroth, starting a large following of players to the brand. Nintendo releases the game *Donkey Kong Country*. The Sega Saturn and the SONY PlayStation get released in Japan.

1995 The SONY PlayStation and Sega Saturn get released in the United States. *Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy’s Kong Quest* gets released by Nintendo. Blizzards goes on to release *Warcraft II*.

1996 Nintendo 64 appears in Japan and North America. Nintendo also releases the Virtual Boy—a portable game system that has 2 separate screens for each eye that creates a 3-D image. Digipen Institute of Technology becomes the first school to offer college degrees in videogame design and development.

1997 Europe and Australia see the release of the Nintendo 64 console. The Tamagotchi by Bandai gets released. Nintendo releases *Mario Kart 64* and the first massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) *Ultima Online* is released to the public.

1998 *Dance Dance Revolution* is released by Konami and introduces a new way of videogame interaction. The Nintendo GameBoy Color becomes a staple of the portable market. Rockstar Games releases *Grand Theft Auto*.

1999 Sega releases their newest console the Dreamcast. Following *Ultima Online*, a new MMORPG *EverQuest* emerges on the market.

2000 SONY releases the PlayStation 2. *The Sims* is released by Maxis.

2001 The Nintendo GameCube as well as the Microsoft Xbox are released. Sega drops out of the home game console market.

2002 *The Sims* becomes the best-selling home computer game of all time. Microsoft starts its infamous Xbox Live Online gaming subscriptions.

2003 *Star wars Galaxies*, another MMORPG gets released to the public. The NES and SNES are no longer being produced by Nintendo.

2004 The PlayStation Portable (PSP) gets released by SONY in Japan. Nintendo re-leases the NintendoDS (the DS stands for dual screen). *Halo 2* gets released by Bungie. The MMORPG *World of Warcraft* is released.

2005 The PSP gets released in North America. The XBOX 360 hits the market. *Guitar Hero* gets released starting a new market of interactive gaming.

2006 The Nintendo Wii emerges on the market alongside the PlayStation 3.

2007 *World of Warcraft* reaches a whopping 9 million active subscribers worldwide.

2009 Nintendo releases the Nintendo DSi and SONY releases its PSP Go.

2011 Nintendo released the Nintendo 3DS utilizing current 3D technology—reliving its Virtual Boy days with more success.

2012 SONY releases the PlayStation Vita (PS Vita). Nintendo releases the WiiU.

2013 Microsoft releases the Xbox One amidst a sea of controversy over privacy while the PlayStation 4 is also released.

2014 Blizzard announces their newest expansion *Warlords of Draenor* for WoW. WoW continues to hold the reins as the world's most popular and most subscribed to MMORPG. Nintendo decides to stop all online gameplay for their Wii and DS systems.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the course of the last four decades videogames have become a large part of the everyday human experience. Arguably, four decades is a very short time to say that videogames have influenced culture greatly; however, they are, have, and will continue to do so through generations to come. The videogame industry has surpassed original expectations starting with *Tennis for Two* in 1958. It has even become a large competitor to other dominant visual media. Though videogames are a competitor of these other media industries, they have continued to collaborate with them to create multifaceted, diverse, dynamic, and innovative large-scale projects. The gaming industry as a whole has amassed a total of over 170+ million active players as of 2012 (Wolf 2007). With a number this high, the influence of games is on another level than film and television.

My interest in this project stems from a somewhat selfish desire while receiving my Bachelor's to be able to play videogames for the rest of my life and write about them. I also somewhat imposed a black box effect on myself. I had a small understanding of why consoles worked and how games were produced but I didn't care; I cared more about how they affected people and why they were such a large part of the consumer market. I was also more interested in the ways in which race and gender were being utilized (or not) within gaming worlds. What I ended up with was an ethnographic study researching how *World of Warcraft* could be considered a public sphere

(or not) and how did women situate themselves within the game. I was working on what I would consider a smaller scale—looking at the smaller picture.

Now, my interests in videogame studies are more architecturally based. Graduate school has not stifled my interest in the deployment of race, gender, and sexuality; rather, has influenced me to move to the bigger picture. I argue that to understand these categories of race, gender, and sexuality, we must be looking at the ways in which players understand and experience place.¹ I argue that language, mapping, and console design guide these experiences. The immersion into digital places creates meanings and thus creates or recreates physical memories and associations. It is here where studying space, place, and place-making becomes crucial to understanding the social and cultural implications of these games.

It is through this lens that I step away from an aspect of gaming that is emerging as a growing area of specialty: psychological studies examining the ways in which youth culture is being affected by interactive violence. A phrase that I utilize throughout this text and in my every day when discussing videogames is “correlation does not equal causation.” I say this because there is no definitive study that has proven either side of this argument and it is essentially creating a culture of fear attempting to stifle

¹ Studying race, gender, and sexuality in the context of place-making would be highly interesting, it unfortunately falls beyond the scope of this research.

the gaming industry. My approach to games and games studies is not overly positivistic; rather I believe in approaching this research in a more holistic way, which provides both qualitative and quantitative data to the field.

Games have the potentiality to become positive aspects in a player's life. I argue this because, as players, we accept the challenges and missions that we are faced with. It is this choice we consciously make that proves to be one aspect of filling basic human needs. It is a human need to be challenged and rewarded for our successful completion of challenges. This is only one aspect of games that makes the study of games so interesting to me. We choose to play games that are constantly challenging us and frustrating us because we have a fundamental need to succeed or get better at something and we enjoy getting rewarded for it!

I also approach videogames in a very specific and different way from typical game studies research. I see videogames as something that is not virtual but *real* and is imbued with an air of *realness*. I argue that throughout much of the literature on games, this factor of the phenomenological is absent. Combine the ways in which games can be positive aspects in people's lives, my urge to describe videogames *through* their realness, and a myriad of other interests, and we have the spark that began my interest in understanding the positioning of space and place and the experience of such within videogames—thus “Driving Around Los Santos County: Space, Place, and Place-Making in *Grand Theft Auto V*” was born. The main question became how do games have an effect on the player and how contemporary research surrounding games can reinsert the body into scholarship with an emphasis on the ways players react both physically

and emotionally to events occurring within a game. This research serves as a critique of scholarship within the field of games studies as well as other disciplines that have taken an interest in videogames and digital technologies.

Typically, many texts within game studies start with an introduction to video-game history. This history is not necessarily present here, for very specific reasons. This is not a text about the history of videogames but rather their influence and the bodily experience of players. Rather than starting historically, in Chapter 2 I start with a conversation on play, the importance of games to meaningful human experiences, and an explanation of not only the videogame industry as an economic powerhouse but as a disseminator of knowledge. It is this last aspect of gaming that comes full circle to play. Games are teaching a myriad of topics through unintentional (in some cases intentional) pedagogy. I address specific categories such as race and gender as potential areas of learning in games, but they are not limited to only these two.

In Chapter 3 I work to formulate not a singular definition of space, place, and place-making, but form a more exhaustive take on them. I look at the ways in which these concepts have been defined and subsequently deployed in the literature. I also take this time to look at the ways in which each can be applied to videogames and how they can help become a new methodology in studying the effects of videogames.

Chapter 4 is an in-depth analysis of place-making deployed in the videogame *Grand Theft Auto V*. I start here with a brief introduction to the series as a whole and

dive into the developed narrative for *GTAV*. I then break place-making into three different categories for analysis—these categories are not meant to limit how place-making gets positioned within the digital, but rather serve as an introduction.

Methodology

In order to successfully research all that was required for this project I immersed myself in the digital world of *Grand Theft Auto V*. I needed to spend a minimum of 40 hours with the game and several dozen hours playing after that just to gain the experience I needed to talk about space, place, and place-making within *Grand Theft Auto V* as well as other games that have relevant uses throughout this text. Though I had a familiarity with the *Grand Theft Auto* series, it was not a major part of my own gaming history; a part of this research became about me learning the history as well as learning to play.

The research for this project was not conducted over the course of a 40 hour work week. I attempted to recreate the gamer experience: multiple long winded gaming sessions that were broken up over the course of a month. I also attempted to intersperse my relationship with *GTAV* with other games that I was also playing at the time. Though I have completed the game, I have not yet achieved all that I would like to have achieved within the game—so much content with not enough hours in the day.

Most of my research was performed as a single-player in the environment of my choosing, engaging in both single and multi-player gaming modes. Arguably it is necessary for a player to work through the campaign mode to get a better grasp of how

cars drive within the game as well as a better understanding of game mechanics before embarking on the multi-player experience. I also decided that I would spend a majority of my time with the game by myself because this is how a majority of players are playing this game and spending hours upon hours attempting to complete every achievement and every in-game mission with a gold star (I settled in most cases for what I was given; I wasn't looking for the achievements).

A large part of this research was remembering how to play the game as well—which loaned itself to some interesting experiences within the game. As I stated I had some relationship with the game before stepping into this project; however, it was not part of a larger repertoire of games that I had amassed over the years. This learning of game mechanics is a large part of researching games in general, a point I address later on in the text. It wasn't surprising that my immersion into the game didn't come until I had fully learned the controls and wasn't fumbling around with the controller. I should say that I purchased this game for both the PlayStation 3 and my computer and arguably I would have been more comfortable working with my computer keyboard and all its peripherals. A part of this project was to step outside of the comfort zone and approach this game from a different perspective. The difference between the two experiences could be another paper in-and-of itself.

Throughout the text I am also performing a textual analysis of both the console itself as well as *Grand Theft Auto V*. I am gathering data to understand how players are making sense of videogames and why videogames have influential potential in other fields such as geography, mapping and design, etc. It is through my experience that I

attempt to interpret videogames, specifically *GTAV*, to see how players are making sense of not only the game but the world around them. It is not about how many people are playing this game, what age they are, what their gender identities are; rather this is an exploration into the experience of a game and how it could lead to better understandings of space and place studies.

Subsidizing my hands-on and somewhat autoethnographic and textual approach to game studies was an interdisciplinary literature review. Not only did I need to look at scholarship within game studies itself but I needed to venture out. I looked at disciplines including, but not limited to, geography, urban studies, planning and development, linguistics, and the design of everyday objects. These texts provided the foundation for my analysis of the deployment of space, place, and place-making within games

Terminology

It's important to note that throughout this text I do not use the common binary virtual and material. Rather I favor the terms digital and physical. Ideally I would choose not to use a binary at all *or* create my own terms to utilize throughout the text. However, one cannot create language out of nothing, with no inspiration from somewhere or someone. Derrida would argue that all that is created is created through a history, an already preconceived idea or series of ideas of what already exists, and I

would have to agree with him here, especially when it comes to binaries (Derrida 1981).² Though I agree, there has to be something to describe what I am referring to.

Using the term virtual holds the implications of being not wholly actualized, not fully complete or put together. The virtual is also defined as not physically so—only through the help of a computer can it be realized. What I find challenging with the term virtual are its synonyms: simulation, artificial, make-believe. This position of the virtual is troubling because it positions the human experience within these spaces and the feelings people get because of them, as fake, not real, imagined, and illegitimate.

I began working with digital specifically because of its antonym, analog. At first I was excited to use this term but then I learned that this word is actually quite restricting in the ways in which it can be used and how it can be used. Upon further consideration I decided to use the term “physical” in favor of analog. Researching the term a bit further I came to see it as a way of looking at the human experience, non-restricting, encompassing an infinite number of possibilities, while digital was restrictive because of its limited language of binary and only being able to process a series of 0s and 1s. The two terms are, in my understandings; perfect terms to help me in my exploration and research into space, place, and place-making within videogames.

² Derrida writes more of binaries and the unequal relationship that is presented in “Plato’s Pharmacy.” It is here where he discusses that even to break these binaries, new terminology cannot be created out of nothing.

Chapter 2: Let's Play—Why Videogames Matter

Any study on play naturally begins with Johan Huizinga and his seminal text *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element*. Though the studies start there, this is not to say that Huizinga's work is the apex of play studies. There have been many critiques of *Homo Ludens* and other works of Huizinga's regarding play and the 'play-element.' In this instance it is fair to acknowledge their critiques and see where Huizinga starts and they end up—this is a large portion of this chapter.

Within this scholarship of play the concept of obscuring the line between work and play needs to be addressed as well. These concepts illuminate the ways in which videogames are not only an escape but also a tool in which learning occurs—the type of learning that occurs here can be categorized as non-traditional.

This chapter is meant to explore the ways in which play gives meaning to the human experience to ground the argument that videogames matter beyond the traditional understandings of videogames as creating cultures of violence. Videogames have had a large cultural impact outside of being an economic powerhouse. When videogames hit the market they became the first medium to successfully combine moving images, sound, and user driven content in terms of interactivity through input (Wolf 2008, 21). Arguably this introduction changed the market entirely. Since their introduction globally, videogames have acted as a driving force behind the home computer market as well, considering it has approximately four decades worth of influence.

Mark J.P. Wolf suggests that videogames be studied through four different lenses: graphics, interface, algorithm, and interactivity. Each category gives insight into the ways in which videogames have become a large portion of consumer culture. Though these categories are necessary for the study of videogames it is important to note that they are notoriously harder to study than any other forms of media. Even with their similarities to television and cinema they need to be approached from different angles and methodologies. The study of videogames, even with categories of research, requires the researcher to be interacting with the medium on a level that is not engaged with by film and television. When studying film and other visual media, often the researcher is engaging through watching; it is not enough for a researcher who is interested in studying videogames to gameplay, rather they have to be involved, engaged, and interacting with the game itself. Some games require over 40 hours of time being dedicated to the main story itself with hours after being dedicated to completing the game one-hundred percent or finding “easter eggs”³ within the game. Studying videogames also requires, depending on the game, a specific set of skills to advance. It is these idiosyncrasies of videogame studies that make the act of doing, or in this case *playing*, a part of the research itself.⁴

These idiosyncrasies of (video)game studies make the study of play and defining what games are even more important. It is easy to analyze films and television

³ An Easter Egg is usually an inside joke placed within a videogame that players can stumble upon while playing. Sometimes they need to be actively searched for sometimes they are part of the game itself. The first Easter Egg contained within a game was in *Video Whizball* in 1978.

⁴ For more information see Mark J.P. Wolf's *The Video Game Explosion*, 2008

shows, but when it comes to actually engaging with the narrative beyond watching and listening to it—truly becoming one with the game and its characters—the act of researching becomes harder. It takes skills to get beyond the tutorial, it takes time to complete the game(s), it takes patience, and it also takes dedication.

Play

In *Homo Ludens: A State of the Play-Element in Culture*, the act of play for Johan Huizinga is an integral part of the human experience. Play became an adaptation and an evolutionary trait that presupposes humanity itself. It is here where the similarities between the human and animal are most known. Play is not just something that occurs on the physical level; rather it is something that occurs psychologically and is a necessity for both mind and body. Play is something that is not learned—it is inherent in every being.

Play is the most serious part of the everyday lived experience of humans. There is a specific type of learning that occurs within play. Through play we are unconsciously learning about our surroundings and how to interact with others. It allows for us to push the boundaries socially and learn not only our limitations, but society's limitations as well. Through play we are also learning what acceptable behavior is in the everyday human experience.

It is Huizinga's work on sport that becomes most important here to the study of videogames. Sport becomes a way for people to maintain a sense of individuality, moving beyond brute force and physicality. It is a combination of mind and body working

together to meet some sort of goal. For play to occur someone must choose to engage with it; if there is no choice there is no play. Videogames don't require force and physicality, but they do require mind and body to work together to complete the goals, missions, and achievements within the game. For example, when a player's hands do not cooperate and do not press the buttons they need to succeed it becomes a frustrating experience—thus requiring a combination of both mental and physical skills. It is this combination that complicates the study of videogames.

A player cannot be forced to play videogames; if that becomes the case it no longer becomes play, and they are no longer games. You are no longer learning and your human experience becomes tainted. In both the physical and digital, play is something that “is a free and voluntary activity, a source of joy and amusement” (Caillois 2001, 6). This idea of joy and amusement comes into play in moments of frustration as well. The question then becomes, are we freely choosing to engage in the game? If not we must step away from it and approach it at another time. Play should remain tied to qualities of “spontaneity, detachment, artlessness, and joy” and remain a “culture-creating activity” (Anchor 1978, 83).⁵

From Huizinga's original text on play, there has stemmed a lot of writing not only holding his work in high regard, but critiquing as well. A critique that I think worth mentioning is Huizinga's ideas regarding activities that are both playful and serious.

⁵ In a similar vein to race, gender, and sexuality though interesting, a close analysis of community within videogames and videogames as a community creating activity, are beyond the scope of this research project.

Carlo Antoni and Roger Caillois have argued that this idea, a playfully serious activity, creates an argument that is simply illogical—how is it possible for activities to be “simultaneously playful and serious, and how [are] they compatible yet distinguishable from the play structures in which they find expression” (Anchor 1978, 87)? This is where notions surrounding the breach of work and play arise. You are learning, working, and playing. It should be understood that this triad is not experienced actively or consciously at the same time. It is in this instance that I find the critiques to be misconstruing the original intention. Play is intended to be the most serious aspect of the human experience and we are supposed to be learning about what is *acceptable*. It would be impossible for play to not be separated from serious activity. All serious activities, according to human need, must be interwoven with aspects of play and vice versa—without this relationship there is no learning or challenge, which precedes any drive to move forward.

The idea of meaningful play becomes prevalent at this point in understanding play. By engaging in games, an activity meant entirely for *fun*, players are engaging and learning skills through active interaction. Some of the skills that players must acquire are social, mechanical, and communication based.⁶ Players, regardless of the game, are encouraged to follow and break the rules of engagement—here again we see

⁶ It is this set of skills that makes studying videogames the complicated field that it is. These are not skills that can be learned in a few hours.

learning and pushing boundaries and limitations. Good game design, physical or digital, encompasses experience and meaningfulness.

To add to Huizinga's work on play, play must not come from the games themselves but the interaction of the players with the game, its world, and its rules. As Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman argue,

Meaningful play in a game emerges from the relationship between player action and system outcome; it is the process by which a player takes action within the designed system of a game and the system responds to that action. The meaning of an action in a game resides in the relationship between action and outcome.

(Salen and Zimmerman 2005, 60)

In its essence meaningful play is dependent not only on the interaction between players but also the systems in place within the game itself. Players must be willing to think outside the box and manipulate the game to their benefit—there also needs to be clear rewards for players to realize this benefit.

These benefits become apparent in the types of meaningful play that emerge, descriptive and evaluative. Descriptive play encompasses the ways in which players act as well as the actions that they take within the game. These two categories also encapsulate all actions and outcomes within the game, their meaning within the game and whether or not they are informative to the player—also known as discernibility and integration respectively.

Within videogames, meaningful play becomes an important aspect of their success. A player, in order for them to learn what's necessary for successful progression through the games, must perform actions that mean something. The outcomes of actions must mean something as well. The results of these actions and outcomes must hold continuous meaning that must be deployed in the larger game narrative. It is here again that we see the importance of play to the human experience.

It is the results of these actions as well that must be marked clearly, explicitly, and be discernable by *all* players involved. *Grand Theft Auto* is a good example of this. Your actions are made clear by sirens blaring in your general vicinity, your player map flashing red and blue, and wanted stars being shown on the top right of your screen. Integration becomes the way in which these player actions have both immediate (being wanted by the cops) and long term effects (changing the ways you can interact with that part of town) on the game narrative.

Both categories of meaningful play analysis may also affect the ways in which players interact with each other as well. In the *GTA V* multiplayer environment, if a player has a negative interaction with you they may place a bounty on your head. This allows for others to kill you and receive money. The immediate actions are positive, you receive money. The long term effects are plenty—will you play with them again? Are you going to go on a witch hunt and steal their money? Are you not going to invite them to missions worth large sums of money?

These categories of analysis are what makes play and meaningful play inherent in videogames and (video)game studies. Game design is another large aspect of play.

The designs of the game are not only crafting play but also the player experience. Design in this aspect means the ways in which the game designer(s) create player context. This context defines the ways in which the meaning of the game and the player gets constructed.

The context of the game also brings us to the interactivity of videogames and its importance. Arguably this is the most important of the four categories of game analysis. Interactivity is a large part of play; without interactivity there is no play. Thus interactivity is somewhat dictated by the design of the game; however, if we recall our original definition of play, play must maintain spontaneous and *not* designed; it must happen naturally. It is this interactivity that creates the happiness factor and satisfaction of human needs.

Games, Play, and Work

An interesting aspect of the study of play is not only how games get defined but also how they blur the line between work and play, leisure and labor. Games create play; more specifically games create *spontaneous* play (Pearce 2006). Within games there must be a set of rules, goals, obstacles, and in-game rewards or penalties for progression through the game. These categories of division are also known as goals, rules, feedback system, and voluntary participation. Each game, regardless of digital or not, falls under these categories—goals are outcomes the player or players are working towards achieving through the game and its progression; rules are the boundaries or limitations that are placed upon the player(s) during this game progression; the feedback

system is the reward or rewards given to the player both in-game and console, as well as informing the player how close they are to completing their goal or series of goals; and finally voluntary participation, the foundation of all games and play, requires that all players be engaging in the game on their own accord (McGonigal 2011).

Within contemporary videogame culture this is the achievement or trophy system for successfully completing goals within the game. These are made visible to friends and fellows players on the system. It is this aspect of gaming that sets apart games like *Dungeons and Dragons* from *Grand Theft Auto* or even *World of Warcraft*—these combine achievement systems with the traditional idea of players having a choice about *how* they're going to play games. Though it should be understood that videogames dictate to players how they are going to navigate the area with their character or avatar; the combination is an illusion of freedom within the digital space.

Emphasizing the role of boundaries in the human experience is the ways in which games are naturally designed with them. Action occurring outside of these boundaries results in penalties imposed on a player or multiple players. If a player goes outside the playable area, in most games, the player will be warned and if they do not heed the warning, they will accrue a death (which in some instances may be considered points against the team). These boundaries, though hindering exploration of maps sometimes, are necessary for all games to exist.

Roger Caillois writes of the cheater to emphasize the ways in which rules must be respected, though manipulated for player benefit. He argues

If the cheat violates the rules, he at least pretends to respect them. He does not discuss them: he takes advantage of the other players' loyalty to the rules. From this point of view, one must agree with the writers who have stressed the fact that the cheat's dishonesty does not destroy the game. The game is ruined by the nihilist who denounces the rules as absurd and conventional, who refuses to play because the game is meaningless. (2001, 7.)

Again we see how these rules, regulations, and boundaries are necessary for play as well as meaningful play to occur. They also suggest that without those, games will not be played because they have no meaning. All play though spontaneous must have meaning, harking back to Huizinga and play as a learning experience. These learning experiences can be either conscious or unconscious.



Figure 1: Vanilla Skyrim versus Modded Skyrim (HD). Source: <http://binarymessiah.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/10383-2-1330476628.jpg>

Even already established rules and protocols for game spaces can be manipulated, especially within videogames. With a background in programming, communities

of game modifiers (or modders) have emerged to “modify a game engine’s rules and assets to suit their special gaming interests and create new forms of games based on existing ones” (Nitsche 2008, 28). There are excellent examples of this community forming around the game *Skyrim* (see figure 1).

With this we add another level of play to the list: emergent play. This gives us the categories of play, meaningful play, and emergent play. Emergent play is community driven. It takes a grassroots approach to gaming. What happens here is a new level of interactivity and experience. There will always be defined and designed rules for proper gaming; however, this doesn’t mean that people won’t cheat, break them, or modify them to their advantage. The code becomes not a limitation but a stepping stone to great play.⁷

Games, and in this context videogames, are not something that is unproductive as is commonly assumed. Videogames involve three different types of play which in turn gives us three different ways of learning, types of learning deeply affiliated with the human experience. Games also have the ability to blur the line between work and play or leisure and labor as mentioned earlier—“the boundaries between play and production, between work and leisure, and between media consumption and media production are increasingly blurring” (Pearce 2006, 18). Celia Pearce raises the question of not only what constitutes productive play but also how productive play can inform

⁷ For more information see Henry Jenkins “Quentin Tarantino’s Star Wars? Grassroots Creativity Meets the Media Industry”

game design as a whole. So now play has become not only something that inspires the user but also the industry itself. Players are actively engaging with the game and thus pushing the boundaries of the game and learning. Play allows for designers to see where the limitations of the games are and learn for themselves.

In his work on the blurred line between work and play, Shaka McGlotten argues that this blurring, or in his words breaching, of work and play is vital to pedagogy and could become a beneficial tool in the classroom. Here play becomes something that brings the unconscious to the conscious—actively engaging with the game in a way that we are analyzing and reading it as a text. His work in “Breaching Barriers Between Work and Play” stems from his work in his course “Computers and Culture,” a course that utilizes *World of Warcraft* as a learning tool to better understand various aspects of the physical world. For McGlotten game environments “are frequently more adept at cultivating a compelling interest to participate in many educational settings” (McGlotten 2012, 126). *World of Warcraft* in his course became a tool that informed (and arguably continues to inform) course readings and vice versa.

Here games like *World of Warcraft* become helpful pedagogical tools in the classroom, bringing learning to the forefront of their purpose as play, joy, and amusement. Similarly, *Grand Theft Auto* serves as my entrance into ‘non-traditional’ learning and play. Videogames have become a large part of everyday culture and everyday life. Within the context of play, games, and work, they become both a productive and educational escape.

Videogames are texts that create a model for the study of digital scholarship. Steven E. Jones, in his article “Performing Social Text: Or, What I Learned from Play *Spore*,” writes that texts and videogames are not only performances themselves but also prompts for performances. They should also be understood in terms of social systems and how they can lend themselves to understanding and learning everyday behavior and experiences. To make this comparison between the verbal/textual and videogames it must be made clear that both are social objects; they require a specific type of social interaction. Videogames and dialogue become an example of improvisational performance—though there are certain guidelines that need to be followed (social cues or scripted in-game rules) for the most part, each happens in a free-flow form that develops based on person-to-person and person-to-environment interaction (or character-to-character / character-to-environment).

The Videogame Impact

Play is only one aspect of the impact of videogames on society. Videogames are not only something that people play but are highly complicated systems that are becoming more popular than the film industry. It’s important to emphasize again the dedication that goes into videogames, not only on the player’s side, but also on the production and design side as well. The industry is constantly at the forefront of technological innovation and is constantly pioneering new and innovative ways to immerse the player in the game experience. Take for example *Dead Rising 3*, a zombie based survival game that as part of gameplay forces the player to make gestures with the

controller as well as use voice recognition technology, through the Xbox Kinect, to say phrases such as “over here!” to taunt zombies throughout the game. What these taunts do is force the zombies to move in such a way that allows the player to successfully navigate the map.

Here I want to move away from technological innovation and play, and acknowledge impacts the videogame industry has had on contemporary American culture. One of these impacts is on the economy. In 2012, it was estimated that the gaming industry had grossed approximately \$20.77 billion. This total includes game sales, console and hardware sales, and gaming accessories also known as peripherals. To break this number down even more, Americans spent approximately \$14.8 billion on games alone—including but not limited to computer games, video games, and “subscriptions, digital full games, digital add-on content, mobile apps, social network gaming and other physical delivery” methods (ESA 2013, 10). This leaves an estimated \$4.04 billion in console and hardware sales and \$1.93 billion in accessory sales.

The influence of such numbers extends beyond just the gaming industry. We must also take into consideration the sales of newer technologies to support emerging games, which ultimately impact the sales of televisions and internet access. The gaming industry as a whole is a large influence on other markets, as well as a large competitor, again emphasizing the fact that it is becoming a bigger industry than the film industry. Though it is a competitor, the industry prides itself on collaborating with other industries, for example, the music industry. With these two industries combined concerts and conventions are emerging onto the scene and becoming a large part of ‘nerd culture.’

Another large part of the videogame industry is who is actually playing videogames as well as what games they are playing. Here is where traditional stereotypes are broken down—we learn that gamers are not statistically more likely to be male and in their teens. The Electronic Software Association (ESA) in their annual study of the industry as a whole has stated that among those who were surveyed the average age of gamers based in the United States, is 30 years old with the average gamer having played for 13 years. What is even more interesting to note is that among those surveyed 45% of those identified as female and 62% are playing with others. Both statistics are important; what is more important is the findings that people are more likely to be playing with others online rather than alone combating another stigma that is placed upon individuals involved with games—we are all social loners.

In “Why Games Studies Now? Gamers Don’t Bowl Alone” Dmitri Williams engages this stigma by critiquing Robert Putnam’s seminal text *Bowling Alone* and his idea that the United States was suffering from a steady decline in social capital, which is only gained from being a member of a community or communities. Robert Putnam vehemently argues that the media, primarily television, are the reason for this decline in social capital and engagement with community. This argument extends to videogames. However, if 62% of gamers are playing with other people and are active members in these online communities as well as convention communities the argument of social decline and decline in social capital is a moot point. Videogames are *not* socially isolating cultural objects, rather the complete opposite.

Another aspect of videogames is the way they have commonly been approached in scholarship—videogames as a negative aspect of culture. Expanding on social isolation it is commonly argued within studies on games is the violence which they supposedly promote. Take for instance *Grand Theft Auto*, which is commonly seen as a game promoting and glorifying violence against several different races as well as women, a violence that gets pushed into the physical realm. Yes, there is scholarship that suggests that violence in the media and especially interactive media such as videogames perpetuates violence in the physical, yet there are just as many studies refuting this claim—correlation does not equal causation. My work attempts to step away from this glorification of violence and seeks to look at the ways in which videogames are influential in people’s lives, an aspect that is often overlooked in games studies.

Henry Jenkins argues that there are eight myths derived from the study of videogames. These are myths that have flooded the scholarship creating a toxic cycle of (mis)information. I agree with Jenkins here when he states that the myths are as follows:

the availability of videogames has led to an epidemic of youth violence, scientific evidence links violent videogame play with youth aggression; children are the primary market for videogames; almost no girls play computer games; because games are used to train soldiers to kill, [and] [thus] have the same effect on the kids who play them; videogames are not a meaningful form of expression; videogame play is socially isolation; videogame play is desensitizing. (Jenkins in Mortensen 2006, 399)

These myths need to be constantly checked and rechecked in contemporary game studies.

Games have a positive aspect to them and this is something that should be noted. Constantly we see violence associated with videogames but never pedagogy and learning. Whether that is conscious or unconscious learning does not matter, they still have this ability. In many instances videogames have over exaggerated representations of racial and gender stereotypes. David Leonard argues that the effect of videogames as well as their appeal has not been studied as “sophisticated vehicles inhabiting and disseminating racial, gender, or national meaning” (2003, 1).

Race for Leonard is something that has not been actively explored within the gaming industry. For Leonard videogames have the ability to produce and reproduce cultural ideologies of the dominant class—to emphasize his point of contention the videogames *Grand Theft Auto III* and *NBA Street* become his points of reference. These games for Leonard exemplify the ways in which African Americans are portrayed as bodies of strength and aggression while white bodies are portrayed as being mentally superior and not needing brute strength. Leonard clearly states that race matters not only in the construction of stereotypes but also in “legitimizing widely accepted racial assumptions both in the workplace and in leisure pursuits”—leisure pursuits in this instance would be videogames (2003, 1-2).

Paul Barrett in “White Thumbs, Black Bodies: Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Fantasies in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*” discusses the ways in which the body, specifically the African American body, gets marked as something strictly corporeal

and thus subhuman, especially within the contemporary neoliberal framework. What this representation of African Americans does is remove any agency these bodies would have. Through this lens the African American body and culture becomes a commodity, something to be consumed for the dominant culture. Barrett emphasizes this by stating explicitly that “politics, whether in the form of Afrocentrism or gang collectives, are marked as outfits and appearances: the histories and ideas that underlie these cultures are of no significance” (2006, 100). Black culture becomes inextricably linked to a life of crime, shooting, violence, and hyper-masculinity, thus creating an apolitical authenticity that is a result of a neoliberal framework in which the state does not help its peoples outside of protection and in some instances a false sense of safety.

Both Leonard and Barrett are making an argument that games are tools for negative cultural learning, though this can be spun to say that players are being made aware of the improper treatment of these groups of people. During this same thought process is also a raising of awareness towards the violence against these groups as well. What this harkens back to is McGlotten’s writings on how to use *World of Warcraft* as a pedagogical tool to raise awareness of topics such as imperialism, racism, and classism. One must be made aware of a problem before becoming actively engaged in trying to fix it. I’m not saying that this is always the case, what I am saying is a game has the ability to raise social awareness.

Videogames provide a way of learning outside of the classroom. With game design there will always be a position of the other, the natural outsider, looking again to ideas of colonial and imperial histories. Going back to *World of Warcraft* “the more

Western, or possibly First World, Alliance fights the more non-Western, or Third World, Horde” and while each faction is represented as being equal or similar in their own narrative the Alliance will always be seen as the good guys, arguably because of the way that they look, speak, and come equipped with a natural talent for learning and consuming knowledge.

Arguably videogames are reproducing stereotypical representations of race and who is good and who is bad. With this in mind scholars have argued that it is these representations that are going to lay the foundation for social improvement. It is the videogame industry that will become a happiness industry—videogames for educational and social change (McGonigal 2011). Game designers are starting to produce work that plays on basic human needs; however, there are still some that are producing games simply for fun and entertainment which, on a very basic level, is still a human need.

Chapter 3: Space, Place, and Everything In-Between

Though space and place has been the subject of much discussion across disciplines, with each discipline having their own stake in coming to conclusive definitions, it plays an important role in game studies. Understandings of space and place help guide conversations about the larger social and cultural impact of videogames. Without this knowledge of player immersion within these games a complete and thorough understanding of larger social and cultural constructions is not possible. This work argues for a foundation in space, place, and place-making which would allow for games studies to grow and progress as a discipline.

Based on prior works within these areas of study, there have been many attempts to formulate a single working definition of both “space” and “place;” however, these two terms are varied in their content and usage enough to warrant a compilation of definitions with a consistent thread running through them (Dourish, 2006; Allen and Schlereth, 1990; Soja, 1996). From my approach to this scholarship, I believe that neither word will find a single definition suitable for use nor will they find one that is entirely separate from each other. Any definition of space must include its transformation into place. Space guides peoples’ everyday actions and interactions while place is the reasoning behind why we do what we do. Furthermore, places give meaning to space—space provides the outlet for the activities involved in place to occur. It is often found in scholarship surrounding space and place inhabitation. Places are inhabited by people and because of this, socially acceptable (or not acceptable) behaviors are

learned. A prime example of this is the ability to be naked in your bedroom and not at work. It is the sense of place that reassures us our actions are safe to perform in certain settings.

In doing work within space and place studies ideas surrounding place-making become more and more apparent. It is the study of space and in particular place that makes the importance of studying place-making even more apparent. Without a foundation in place, understanding how place-making occurs and how it can be deployed does not exist. The study of place simultaneously allows for the understanding of already existing places to be explored.

This chapter explores the ways in which space, place, and place-making get defined in several different areas of scholarship. I begin by discussing Henry Lefebvre and his definitions of space, which naturally leads into theories surrounding place. Finally I review place-making and how it has been theorized including both material and digital place. This chapter spends most of its time concerned with place and place-making while only giving a brief background on space as it only lays the conceptual framework for the latter two.

Spaces

When discussing space one must look naturally to the work of Henri Lefebvre and his seminal text *The Production of Space*. In this text a majority of his time is spent working through and developing a complete definition of space. Lefebvre emphasizes throughout the text that a working history of space is inextricably linked to a history of

production. For Lefebvre space is not neutral, rather it is both abstract *and* concrete—terminology that harkens back to Marx’s work on abstract and concrete labor.⁸

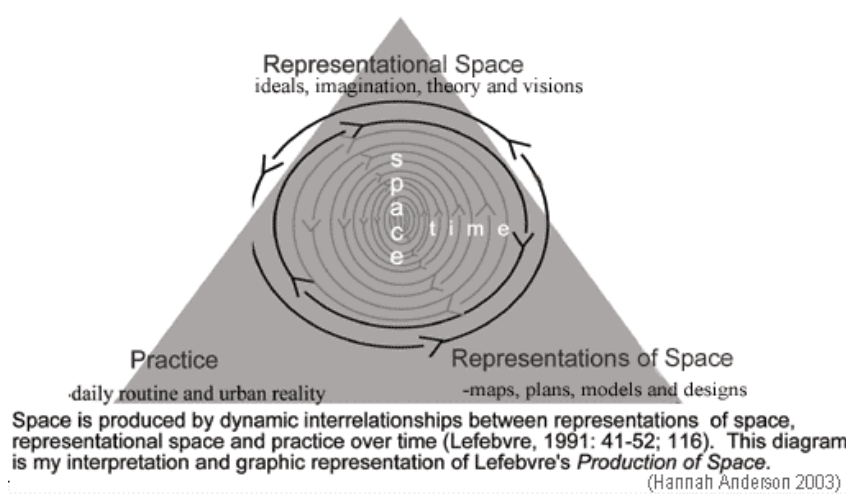


Figure 2 Lefebvre's Spatial Triad. Source: <http://hannahwinkle.com/ccm/Lefebvre.htm>

Lefebvre’s work in *The Production of Space* is inherently tied to Marx and the Marxist tradition, which is made evident in this work. Lefebvre attempts to come to a more complete understanding of space, and particularly “social space”. His writings here encompass both concrete and abstract everyday human experiences, activities, and events. Lefebvre argues that space is tied to production, the basic structure of class struggles, and the power of the state over those it governs. A part of the creation of space is the argument that the production of urban space is related to the social reproduction of society and capitalism—it is this line of thinking that define Lefebvre’s

⁸ Lefebvre does not only state that space is abstract rather he break space up into other categories as well (natural space, social space, etc); however, his work relies heavily on the abstract and he spends most of his time in the abstract.

modes of spatial production; representational space, representations of space, and spatial practices (Lefebvre 1991, 38-39). Lefebvre specifically argues that the division of space is inherently tied to the social, political, and economic turn of the century as defined by the capitalistic philosophy. It is his work in *The Production of Space* that attempts to unite these categories of space

Lefebvre's developed triad states that space can be categorized in terms of representations of space, representational space, and spatial practices (see figure 2). Some often refer to his triad as the conceived, perceived, and lived spaces or perception, imagination, and experience respectively (Allen and Pryke, 1994; Liggett, 1995; McCann, 1999). Though represented through a triad, it should be understood that all types of space are reliant on each other for their existence and continued development. The three categories or types of spaces are as follows: representations of space, representational space, and spatial practices.

Representations of space are defined as the abstract space in which those who design spaces exist—the continued construction of space is heavily reliant on this piece of the triad. Designers can be defined in this instance as those who physically plan the layout of the space as well as those in power/control over the space. This type of space is not lived but rather conceived. In terms of videogames this is the type of space that would involve the developmental stage of the game, *not* the programmers, those who bring the space to life.

Representational space is where lived bodily experiences occur. Though this piece of the triad is reliant on the body, the body does not actively experience it; rather

it is the *objects* that make this space. This is the type of space that gets created by game programmers, those who are physically creating the game space that players will interact with. It is here that the “work of ‘artists, photographers, filmmakers, and poets may be representational spaces that, through their use of symbolism, construct counter-discourses and thus open up the possibility to think differently about space” (McCann 1999, 172). *Spatial Practice* is the realm of the everyday lived experiences that create a social space. This space is the culmination of design, symbolism, and experience—it has been argued that this is the most important piece of Lefebvre’s triad.

Space is also defined by its inherent connection to time. A person cannot experience space without a notion of time and vice versa. The relationship between space and time is made possible through the ways in which bodies move. Through this analysis it should be made clear that not everyone will be made aware of space and time in the same way nor will they be able to “elaborate a spatio-temporal world” in the same ways either (Tuan 1979, 199). However, bodily experiences of tension and ease will be similar, if not exactly the same. Space is something that is lived, experienced, and perceived.

It is not only Lefebvre’s concepts of space and how space can be broken up that is relevant to digital representations. Spaces are also experienced in games through the player’s engagement with the map. The map mediates any feeling of being lost and relieves any feelings of confusion in a new space.

Not only are people experiencing space through the ways in which their bodies are moving, but also through what they are seeing, hearing, and their orientation to the

world. The map becomes orientation for the player. The player can only become immersed when they have integrated the character's movement with the character's senses. It is this immersion, combined with Lefebvre's triad that makes space realized in the digital.

The map forces the player to become a part of the city and thus move through the city in very specific ways. I would argue that through this navigation a fundamental aspect of space is occurring: the transformation into place. Through Michel de Certeau's understanding of the city as political and something defined by its navigation it is here that this navigation is given meaning (de Certeau 1993). This meaning in physical cities gets defined through the ways in which people deploy strategies and tactics. In games, the meaning of navigation gets complicated. It gets complicated because players are often given the freedom to navigate the space as they so choose as well as histories not being created by the players but rather the designers as well. However, it is about the individuality, not communal thinking, of the player and how they deploy their own strategies and tactics of the space that gives it meaning.

Places

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines place via categories of definitions—(1) a public or residential square or (2) senses relating to space or location. Much of the work on place has troubled the geographic centric categories of definition by expanding

the potentialities of the world itself. A sense of place is considered to be a human necessity, a necessity that orients us towards the rest of the world. It is within these definitions that a geography-centric study on place becomes most clear.

Place is also helpful in defining hierarchical structures. It can be used in terms of defining one's rank within a social order while also connoting time. It is obvious that the definition changes based on the context in which it is used—knowing your place, when did the event take place, etc (Agnew and Livingstone 2011). Much of the use of place in this context is highly culturally based.

While place may contribute much to geography and hierarchy, it lends itself to the study of videogames as well. Understanding place means understanding how players are connecting with games and why they are consistently playing them. Within videogames we are seeing the deployment of place as well as the experience of place play out. I argue in the latter portion of this project that this deployment is seen through design, mapping, and language—concepts that get explored through not only the existing scholarship but also through my experience with *Grand Theft Auto V*.

Place is something that guides human behavior and human interaction. While space encompasses human activity and having no bearing, place affects and is affected by the human experience. Human activities are not limited to social behaviors but include economic and cultural activities as well. It is here that the relationship between the way we interact with place and the ways in which we play become clearer. Through place and play we learn socially acceptable behaviors, what boundaries are and their limits, and repercussions for abnormal or taboo behaviors.

To understand this parallel between place and play, an understanding of place must come equipped with meaning, a fundamental aspect of place studies. Similar to play, places give people the opportunity to “visualize, memorize and thus stabilize constitutive human goods such as the sense of belonging, social integration, purposes that give meaning to life (values) and the sense of self” (Hunziker et al. 2007, 51). Both place and play form a roadmap for socially acceptable behavior; they also give us an outlet to act out these behaviors. The boundaries created suggest that any action or behavior taken, that is acted outside of the “designated areas,” gets treated as bizarre or out-of-the-norm.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, several studies in videogames have argued that they are violent and are the cause of a rise in youth aggression. However, correlation does not equal causation. Arguably, these games are setting boundaries for the practice of the everyday human experience. Looking at *Grand Theft Auto* and murder as an example of this, players are given consequences for their unlawful actions. For example, within seconds of committing a crime, let’s say murder; players are wanted by law enforcement and are subsequently chased by the cops. While the violence within the game may be high and you may be able to shoot hookers and steal their money, the game is full of consequences for actions that are against the law. The game makes it clear to replicate the boundaries of not only the city but of the justice system as well. In relation to play, and its inherent emphasis on boundaries, it is here

we are learning the basics of (il)legality within the confines of a game meant entirely for fun.⁹

It should also be noted that within the narratives of *Grand Theft Auto*, the boundaries and laws of the street are also emphasized—this emphasis allows for place to be experienced as well. Players may decide to steal a car within a specific district of town and instigate a turf war between the local gang and the player character. This type of interaction not only determines our boundaries and the ability to push them, but also how place effects how we feel and act. Place has the ability to change our relation to not only ourselves but to others as well. The human relationship to their community and subsequently to places can be strong enough that when the community and place changes, individuals change as well.

Objects located within places define their physical settings; however, they are not considered a property of them. The meaning imbued on these objects and on the physical settings is simply a product of human interaction and intervention. Meanings here aren't stationary either, they are constantly in a phase of transportation and transference. Within physical settings objects are also the foundation for private or personal places. The concepts of private (or personal) depend on the culture in which place is

⁹ I emphasize here that within *Grand Theft Auto* you will not always get caught by the cops, you can hide and run away from them and never be wanted for the same crime(s) again.

being studied. The culture determines what places will be private and deeply meaningful to individuals within it—each place has very individual meanings. These places have the ability to be entire rooms or objects within a particular setting.

Take for instance the Electronic Arts game series *The Sims*. The game is set up that the player designs a home for their Sim, sometimes based off of the player's preferences and sometimes the Sims preferences; either way the Sim has a home and it is filled with stuff. The Sim then begins to live their simulated life and the player along with it; through this process the player and Sim form a relationship and meanings not only to each other but to the objects they've purchased as well. When something breaks or gets stolen the reaction is not a passive one but rather a sign of both aggression that it broke or was stolen and sadness, thus changing the Sim's overall well-being.

Places are also understood as the result of historical and social processes. Through these processes, combined with understandings of how objects create place, the development of meaning in places occurs. Putting this into perspective, not only are objects defining factors of physical setting but they also have the potential to be places themselves. For example, Tuan writes that his rocking chair can be considered a place due to the significance it has to him and how those around him know its significance as well. These private places have the potentiality to be recreated—places can be represented in a picture and still draw on similar memories and emotions.

What's important to note here is that these private places are not evident to everyone who may stumble upon them. They may only be recognized by the individual or those associated with him or her. Edward Relph suggests that this may be because

“there may indeed be no common knowledge of them; rather they are defined by special and particular significances for us and may be remembered rather than immediately present” (1976, 37). A person’s childhood serves as a good example of this. What the memories do is lay the foundation for a person’s experience of place moving forward. The argument then becomes, videogames are an area in which places are recreated, not at the forefront, and change the player’s experience of a game entirely due in part to their connection with ‘object a’ or ‘shopping center b.’

Places are also linked to time, though in a different way than space. If spaces are contingent on their relationship with time and how bodies move within them, places are dependent on the passing of time. Through time, places change physically as does their meaning. While bodies are navigating through spaces, places are constantly getting recreated. Places will never maintain the same meaning or look; they are an ever changing entity. Relph (1976) acknowledges this connection with the passage of time by saying that places are in flux and thus cultures and individuals are constantly growing and declining alongside them. Places are fluctuating and going through a cycle of birth, life, and death.

In “Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach,” Tuan emphasizes the importance of language as a place-making tool, a tool he argues gets overlooked in favor of other methodologies, especially within geography. Geography represents a point of contention for Tuan because it embodies a system that has removed the human element from place and the production of place. This is to say that the effect that speech has on place and the production of places gets lost in favor of a

more non-human element, natural progression of place. Speech becomes a human interaction that makes things real it makes the nonexistent existent.¹⁰

Speech plays a central role in the creation of places and the place-making process. It represents an empowerment—“naming is power—the creative power to call something into being, to render the invisible visible, to impart a certain character to things” (Tuan 1991, 688). Herein lies the beauty of speech and the human experience. Speech directs the experience of place in a very specific way. What was not there one day is there the next. While there is such beauty in this type of creation, speech also raises questions surrounding privilege in the naming culture; who gets to call things into being? Who gets to give meaning where there is otherwise none? Who gets to give names to the nameless? It becomes evident here that the power of the dominant class within a culture is at work. Not very often are those within a culture who are voiceless getting a say in this process.

If Tuan is suggesting that places can be created by language then the question that should be raised is, how is it possible for games to create place in the same fashion? Looking towards an example that Tuan gives is the naming of “Mount Misery.” To simply call it a mount does not give it distinction, rather “Mount Misery” as a name gives it a history and thus meaning. Language within videogames does similar work. To create a successful game one must create an environment, an environment that

¹⁰ It is worth noting that within material culture studies Tuan’s argument regarding speech is highly contested. Scholars within the discipline have argued speech is not necessary for the creation of place due in part to the way humans interact with objects in the everyday and through this learn without language or speech.

makes players want to come back, and one of those ways is through naming particular areas in the game. This not only gives the player a sense of where they are geographically, but a history of the world they are experiencing.

In *World of Warcraft* it was, and still is, imperative for the designers to give names to every area within the game. These areas also define boundaries for the players. Boundaries here are defined not only geographically but socially as well. There are two factions within the game, the Horde and the Alliance, within them their own races. The Alliance is defined as having valiant humans, stalwart dwarves, ingenious gnomes, spiritual night elves, mystical draenei, and bestial worgen; while the Horde is defined as having battle-hardened orcs, cunning trolls, hulking tauren, cursed forsaken (or undead), extravagant blood elves, and devious goblins. These titles are important to note because they define the types of cities or towns they inhabit and how they are experienced. Players know where their faction is welcome and where they are not based on the titles of the cities and towns which they are entering. If a member of the Horde enters an Alliance aligned city, they will more likely than not be attacked by non-playable characters (NPCs) as well as higher level Alliance players.

Places are also understood as something that has the potential to create or foster the sense of community. Alvin Toffler (1970) writes that western society has placed an emphasis on the feeling of home in areas that are filled with people of similar interests regardless of place. This understanding leads to a solid introduction on digital places.

Digital places must be engaged by the player—the player must give meaning to the meaningless space that has been designed and constructed; sound familiar? Nitsche

argues to this point stating that “through the active work of the player, through comprehension and interaction, the masses of polygons can transform into places” (2008, 192). Both digital and physical places require those inhabiting them to be actively engaged with their surroundings and be actively creating meanings within them. Places need to be addressing identity as well, both physically and digitally. Through these actions digital places are created as are their individual meanings.

Starting with identity it is imperative that players create digital personae in which they can traverse the world. Digitally, the place and personae are not entirely created by the history and narrative that has been designed for the player but rather how the player *interacts* with the story, the history, the land, etc.; this is what creates place here. Each player interaction within the game starts the place-making process—“if a player has developed a consistent identity in the online world of *Everquest*, then the virtual space of *Everquest* has become a ‘place’ for this particular player through the process of identity creation” (Nitsche 2008, 193).

Multiplayer games are a common example of the transformation of the digital space into the digital place; however, single player games do just as much transformative work. Players are invited to take on the personae of one or several different characters, depending on the game, that will navigate through the narrative. Though the character’s story may already be preprogrammed to go in a specific direction, it is the ways in which the character interacts with the space that presents the user with a unique character identity. Not every player will play the same character in the same way nor will they play it necessarily in the way in which it was programmed.

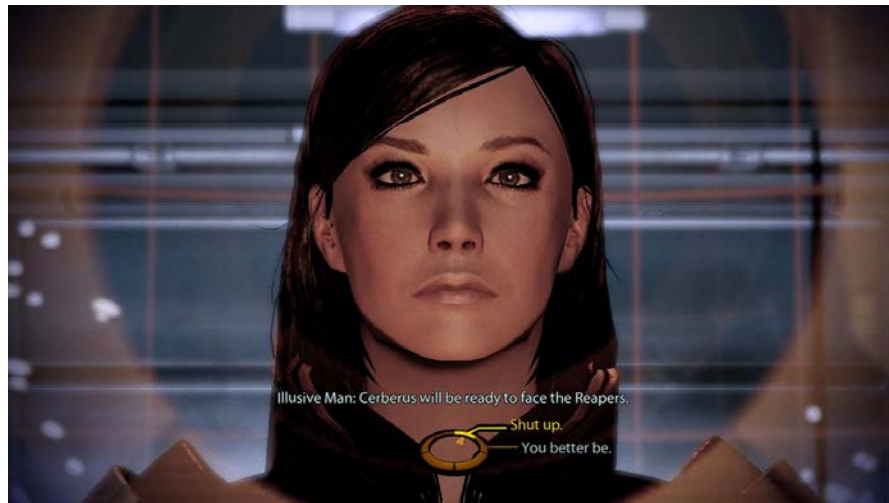


Figure 3 Mass Effect. Source: <http://vghvi.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/mass-effect-femshep.png>

Take for example the game *Mass Effect*; players are encouraged to create their own character, within certain limitations, of course, and draft a narrative of their own, in a create your own story type fashion (see Figure 2). In the figure the female character, also known as Female Shepherd, or FemShep, is having a discussion with “Illusive Man” and the player is given the option to either tell them to “Shut up” or “You better be.” Whatever answer the player chooses will change the way the story progresses in the game. What this also will change is future dialogue with not only “Illusive Man” but also other characters throughout this game. The player must decide how they want to be perceived in the game world. It is through the creation of their own identity that players become immersed in the game environment.¹¹ This immersion, as stated in several points throughout this paper, is important in the development of place.

¹¹ Though this is not the only way that players get immersed, this is one of the most important factors—players must locate themselves with or as their character.

Place-Making

In the same way that places are actively created and recreated, place-making is an active process—an active process that cannot be separated from place just as much as place cannot be separated from space. Place-making is synonymous with the ways in which humans engage or interact. Place-making is the literal act of place creation and sense of place. For Kalay and Marx, place-making “therefore, is a process of creating conditions that afford, or encourage, the emergence of a particular sense of place” (2005, 7).

The Project for Public Spaces (PPS) works with place-making as an application, not only a theory. They work off the philosophy that a city fares better when the community (or communities) is built with the help of its members. Great places must foster social interaction and the ability to network, while not forcing communities and these social networks to form—they must develop naturally. Place-making means creating cities that were meant for people not simply capitalistic goals.

The PPS has established a list of what place-making is and what it isn't regarding urban design and city building. Place-making *is* community-driven, visionary, function before form, adaptable, inclusive, focused on creating destinations, flexible, culturally aware, ever changing, trans-disciplinary, context-led, transformative, inspiring, collaborative, and social. Place-making *is not* imposed from above, reactive, design-driven, a blanket solution, exclusionary, monolithic development, overly accommodating of the car, one-size-fits-all, static, discipline-driven, privatized, one-dimensional, dependent on regulatory controls, a cost/benefit analysis, project focused, and a

quick fix (https://www.pps.org/reference/what_is_placemaking/). Though helpful in some aspects, not all of these characteristics of place-making are relevant for understanding how digital places get created.

Kalay and Marx intercede here to create eight categories of place-making which are relevant to *both* the material and digital realms. The categories are as follows: events, presence, relative locations, authenticity, adaptability, variety of experiences, transitions, and memorable. These categories, in addition to the breakdown from PPS, become helpful in understanding the ways in which place-making occurs in digital spaces.



Figure 4 Grand Theft Auto V Oriental Theater (left) and the physical Grauman's Chinese Theatre (right). Source: <http://img.gawkerassets.com/img/193mgepgiloakpng/ku-xlarge.png>

Place-making in digital spaces relies on both transformation of digital space and livability—with the exception that livability becomes *immersion*. Immersion in digital environments is the ways in which the player or user becomes engaged with the larger

narrative as well as how the player relates to objects within that world. Immersion is an important aspect of why players continue to play specific games and keep coming back to the game itself (Yee 2002).¹² Nitsche uses the example of virtual reality exposure therapy¹³ centers that expose patients to virtual environments that are meant to evoke specific emotions. This type of treatment relies heavily on this idea of presence. One example of this type of therapy is using virtual reality to treat posttraumatic stress disorder. What the virtual reality technology did was recreate specific environments of disaster to expose the patients to; the therapy is meant to expose patients to those environments to work through specific fears and anxieties. The idea of presence is important here because without it, the virtual reality exposure therapy doesn't work. There is no patient engagement if they don't believe it.

This aspect of believing is important in understanding the experience of place within videogames. The player must believe they exist within the created world (e.g., Los Santos). A large portion of this is creating and/or recreating topographies that would be familiar to the player. Specifically, in the case of *Grand Theft Auto V*, California gets recreated down to the smallest streets and the largest buildings. These recreations inspire much of the narrative and interaction that occurs between the player, the chosen character (Franklin, Michael, and/or Trevor), the narrative, and Los Santos.

¹² Nick Yee writes that motivational factors for play in online games are achievement, social, immersion, and escapism.

¹³ Though I do not use virtual throughout this text I am using Nitsche's language directly for this example.

Some notable recreations are Grauman's Chinese Theatre also known as Oriental Theater (see figure 4), Los Angeles International Airport also known as Los Santos International Airport, and Hollywood Walk of Fame also known as Vinewood Walk of Fame.

Chapter 4: Exploring Concepts of Place-Making within *Grand Theft Auto V*

The *Grand Theft Auto* series (also known as GTA) emerged onto the scene in 1997. The *Grand Theft Auto* franchise started as a 2-Dimensional franchise developed by DMA Design and evolved rather quickly into a series of highly acclaimed 3-Dimensional games, and eventually moving to High-Definition. As of 2013 there have been ten standalone games and four expansion packs that have been released for consoles, PC, portable gaming systems like the Game Boy Advance or PlayStation Portable, and mobile devices.

The game itself is based on an open world design. In *Grand Theft Auto* an open world design allows for the player to traverse the map and either follow the narrative or not. Furthermore, the game play in *GTA* is not dictated by achievements and mission success, though it is necessary to progress through the narrative arc in each game to unlock the full potential of each city. The company president of Rockstar has said in relation to *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, but still relevant to *GTA V*, that “[their] goal was to develop the key themes of *Grand Theft Auto*: freedom of choice and ability to do things closer to their logical conclusion; a bigger world, with much more to do in it; and much more interactivity between you and the environment, between player and lead character, and between characters within the game world” (Miller 2007, 411).

In each game the player takes on a character persona that defines their relationships with other characters throughout the game. While each character that the player

takes on throughout the series is different, the general narrative remains the same. It is fair to say that each game sets up specific race relations through ideas of gangs and gang violence. Within Los Santos proper there are approximately 20 gangs that are present. Each gang is represented by a different race and class status. Each gang is implemented into the narrative and through the narrative it is inevitable that the player character will be involved in the gang violence. Each gang is relative to a specific area within the county and can be instigated at any time, not just through missions (e.g., by stealing a car in their neighborhood).

In *Grand Theft Auto V* the player takes on the persona of three different men experiencing different classes and races with very similar career paths—professional criminal. Their stories become linked to each other in very interesting ways. The narrative for Franklin (a.k.a “F”) is very similar to C.J.’s from *GTA: San Andreas*; a young African American male wanting to leave his community and work his way up to a better life. A better life in this context is defined by working higher end, skilled, and still highly illegal jobs. Along this journey with Franklin we are introduced to Mike, a middle-aged white male living in the most luxurious area of Los Santos, who has retired from a life of crime by faking his own death (he gets back into the crime life working alongside Franklin). We are also introduced to Trevor who is a middle-aged balding white male who has a history with Mike; when we are introduced to him he is still pursuing a life of crime, specifically making meth.

I was given the opportunity to play as these three different characters throughout the game. Through this opportunity I realized that their stories didn’t necessarily

matter to the reasons why I was playing the game, only to the overall narratives and objectives of the game itself. Through a lot of self-reflection and looking at the games that I have enjoyed in the past and the games that I currently enjoy—*World of Warcraft*, *Everquest*, *Grand Theft Auto V*, essentially massively multiplayer online role-playing games and other sandbox/open world genre games—I find myself falling under the category of “adventurer” or “explorer.”¹⁴ I like to push the boundaries of the games in which I play while also working towards figuring out how things work within the game. I am an avid easter egg finder and try to enter every home, storefront, or thing with a door. I enjoy being immersed in a world that is unfamiliar to me that will eventually become familiar.

In contrast, one genre that I greatly dislike is the horror game genre (which has become more and more popular over the years). The immersion into these games really messes with my head and changes how I play. I can no longer mosey around a city or a mall rather; I am forced to be on edge and quickly scramble around to collect the items that I need. While some may enjoy these types of games for the cheap thrills, edge of your seat suspension, and over the top scare tactics, these games prove to be a great source of anxiety and place a great deal of pressure on me as a player. It is here where my play ceases to be fun and becomes a chore—to reiterate a point I made earlier, I cannot be forced to play a game or be made to feel like it is a task, if this becomes

¹⁴ For more information see Richard Bartle’s “Virtual Worlds: Why People Play.”

the case it no longer falls under the category of play, it is no longer a game, and it is no longer a learning experience.

When playing *Grand Theft Auto V*, I got enjoyment out of pushing the limits of whichever character I was playing. I wanted to know what shrubs I could and could not jump over, what strategies and tactics I could deploy, what would be of benefit to me, etc. It was the realization of how I played that led me to some other conclusions—it didn't matter what character I was playing because I was playing the game the same way. The character's story didn't matter to me and how I progressed through the game. Sure, it mattered to the overall narrative and I needed to complete certain missions to be able to explore certain areas throughout the game but, it didn't matter to my adventure, to my gameplay.

I find much amusement in simply exploring a map. This is evident in the games I play, as I stated earlier. I want to explore and see what's out there. I enjoy not being tied down to missions and constantly having "something to do." For me missions bog me down. I will be the first to admit that I also love achievement hunting, but I find easter egg hunting and mapping out the intricacies of a game to be more interesting than any other aspect of games. Through my own play and through active researching regarding eggs in *Grand Theft Auto V*, I came across a few that I found particularly interesting because of their crossover with other games released (these games are not necessarily linked with Rockstar Games or the *Grand Theft Auto* series).

My favorite egg within the game is a reference to the Dead Rising series and “Zombrex.”¹⁵ Zombrex is a drug within Dead Rising that prevents the inevitable transformation of humans into zombies (a.k.a zombification)—within *Grand Theft Auto V* a commercial stating “prescription drugs like Zombrex are more popular with junkies than actual sick people,” while also making it known that “Weazel News is confirming your prejudices,” a knock at conservative talk radio hosts.

I find interest in what the developers have put out there and their constant references to popular culture. Though little, the eggs make the game more enticing because the more I encounter, the more I want to find. They recreated cities for a reason and in some instances have created an entire world for people to explore. It is this profound love of exploring that I have invested so much time (some would say too much time) in open world/sandbox games.

Grand Theft Auto as a series has raised much controversy regarding violence, specifically the ability for players to interact with the violence in the narrative. Looking back at both Barrett and Leonard it is evident that *Grand Theft Auto* presents a problematized racial narrative that arguably perpetuates highly discriminatory stereotypes of minorities, especially African American and Latino men. There have been issues raised regarding its portrayal of other groups as well including, but not limited to, Italian-American and Caribbean-American groups. It is realizing how and why we play

¹⁵ Though I greatly dislike the horror game genre, I quite enjoy the lore that surrounds this series in particular.

that challenges these notions of *Grand Theft Auto* as a series that produces youth violence.

I argue that this research becomes important because if place is produced by how we play, and everyone playing the game differently, this changes the way we read meaning into and from the games we are playing. It is this understanding of immersion that changes how we read the violence, the racial stereotypes, and gender. If we all played the same, it would be more than fair to say that each individual was having a group experience and thus experiencing violence in a group mentality; however, I cannot emphasize enough the drastic differences to which we play, encounter, and experience narratives within games across a spectrum of genres, including the *Grand Theft Auto* series. It is this difference that makes sweeping generalizations regarding violence, especially youth violence

Given the background of *Grand Theft Auto* series and its relative consistency narratively, an in-depth analysis of the entire series is not necessary nor would it be efficient. Thus the intent of this chapter is to explore the most recent deployment of *GTA*, *Grand Theft Auto V*, and the different ways places get created in the game. I have divided this section into three categories: place-making through console design, place-making through mapping and design, and place-making through language. Each section defines the category while also providing examples of each within the game world.

Designing the Experience

A part of this research surrounds ideas of the console and how the console defines place and the experience of place. What this means is we must look at the affordances and constraints of everyday objects and the ways in which they serve as extensions of the self. It is this extension that leads to a more cohesive and consistent immersion into the world itself. The two aspects of console design are object based experiences of place as well as memories of places—looking back to ideas proposed by Relph and Tuan.

Donald Norman questions the idea of good object design and how we know how to use an object simply by looking at it. He states that well designed objects provide context clues to their usage (e.g., scissors). Norman argues that “a good conceptual model allows us to predict the effects of our actions” and that “without a good model we operate by rote, blindly, we do operations as we were told to do them. We can’t fully appreciate why, what effects to expect, or what to do if things go wrong” (1988, 13). The device itself must communicate how it is to be used and the only way for an object to do so is through its appearance. A part of this good design/bad design dichotomy is its affordances and constraints.

Affordances refer to “the perceived and actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used” (1988, 9). It is because of affordances that people know how to use an object e.g., doorknobs, chairs, balls, and controllers for a specific console. Constraints refer to the ways in which objects are designed to be impossible to use erroneously. This is what

determines whether or not something has been designed well or poorly. Norman argues that affordances are possibilities while constraints limit what can be done with the object.

To go back to the example of the scissors I referenced earlier, scissors are an example of good design with visibility and ease of use. Norman argues that the visible structure of scissors allows for a user to have no issues with their intended purpose, and use, even if they have never used a pair of them before. In reference to their design, he writes, “The holes are clearly there to put something into, and the only logical things that will fit are fingers. The holes are affordances; they allow the fingers to be inserted. The sizes of the holes provide *constraints* to limit the possible fingers: the big hole suggests several fingers, the small hole only one” (1988, 12). While the scissor represents a good design model, the digital watch does not—specifically one that has multiple buttons and no clear representations of its use. Yes, it is meant to tell time, that is its primary goal; however, which button is intended to set the time, and what do the other buttons do if not set the time?

Affordances and constraints become beneficial in understand the seamlessness of use in terms of console controllers. Controllers must be designed in a way that is ergonomic as well as forgettable. A large part of game immersion, especially for the way I play games, is believing that there is nothing between the player (me) and the game (*Grand Theft Auto V*). I argue that this seamlessness of use allows for the player to become immersed in the game world. When using the controller players are working through extensions of their selves. What this allows for is seamless immersion of player

into game. This immersion is facilitated by the combination of mapping and design, language, and console design thus creating a very individualized experience of place. Each category enables the player to relate to the game differently, invoking different memories and experiences, which shape the way they play.

Grand Theft Auto as a series has gone through numerous development phases that have produced the game for several different consoles and platforms. What this does is create a historical reference to place and the ways in which the player has interacted with their environment. This also creates a way for the player to grow with the game through the different consoles and controllers. Interestingly enough here the evolution of the console controllers hasn't deviated from the original design too much, thus not changing the experience drastically—what has changed are the graphics that exist within the game, creating a more immersive environment.

My experience using the PlayStation and playing *GTAV* on the Playstation3 has not changed from when I played on the PlayStation 2. I say this because the controller hasn't gone through significant enough design changes to create an environment in which my experience is not immersive; again I reference here the ways in which being immersed creates an overwhelmingly strong connection to digital place, especially through identity and the game surroundings. Arguably this is an important aspect of console design, being consistent, taking on an “if it ain't broke don't fix it” mentality.

While doing the work necessary for this research it came to mind to attempt to play the game on a different console using a controller that is designed much differently

from the PlayStation controller. I corralled my friends who own the game on the console to sit down with me for a few days and play *Grand Theft Auto*; they happily obliged. I don't think that they knew what all of this entailed.

I will be the first to admit that while the controller itself had not gone through drastic changes, I did, and it was the continuity and seamlessness of use that allowed for me to be able to get into the game quickly. Had PlayStation opted for a reboot of the controller I probably would not have approached this research in the same way. What became frustrating were the times in which my fingers got ahead of me or when I was reminded that the controller wasn't actually a part of my body and forced me to make mistakes throughout the game. I cannot express how many times I tried to drive a car throughout the game and instead of turning the car lightly; I would ram it into a wall, as if I hadn't made that turn a ton or travelled that entire street before.

The controller serves as my first entry point into *Grand Theft Auto V* through the ways it serves as an extension of my body and thus allows for an immersion effect—essentially I had to forget that my body existed as something in the physical and could experience being uncomfortable and achy. What I also needed to do was create a space that allowed me to be comfortable. For the size of my television and the size of my game room/office my couch is exactly 6 feet from my TV which allows for me to see everything that is happening on my TV without having to overextend my neck to see what is going on.

I also found myself in an interesting position when I would play at friends' houses, whether this was *Grand Theft Auto V* for research, or just to hang out and play

some games. I say that it is strange or odd because I immediately am uncomfortable. Two things come to mind here (a) their controllers are not *my* controllers and I don't want to go through the trouble of syncing them with someone else's system and (b) all of *my* stuff is not there. The first point is pretty simple to explain; everyone breaks in the controller differently, thus giving it a different feel. I treat my consoles and their peripherals like they were my children—dusting every week, cleaning of the controller from sweat, etc. Also, I have very specific grips on my controllers, making them immediately feel differently from controllers that lack them (I am constantly pushing for other people to invest in them since they make gameplay a bit smoother).

The second point has a lot to do with how my office/game room is set up. I have my couch a very specific length from the television, not only for convenience but because I have poor eyesight, the television itself is not too small that I can't see but not too big that my eyes are straining because of high definition (again, related to my poor eyesight and hyper-sensitivity to bright light). What these minor changes do is change the way I play, bringing me out of my environment, and changing the ways I experience the physical place that I am currently a part of as well as the digital place.

What is happening at this very early stage in my emergence into the game is the beginnings of play, specifically *my* play. A large aspect of becoming immersed in *Grand Theft Auto V* is learning the boundaries of the game and what can and cannot be done for myself. I need to know the limits of the game before I can be actively engaged with the content of the game itself. This area falls under several of Mark J.P. Wolf's lenses of videogame study—interface, algorithm, and interactivity. It is also here where

I deploy Huizinga's work on mind and body coordination. Originally meant to describe sport, it is necessary for cohesive play, and thus my successful completion of the goals, missions, and achievements that have been laid out for me as the player. If my mind and body do not work in tandem with each other I cannot successfully move forward in the game—I must believe in its entirety that the controller is an extension of my body and will not interfere with this completion and this can be described through controller mismanagement or how comfortable or uncomfortable my body is or may become.

Mapping and the Cityscape

Within the *GTA* series the open-world cities that players navigate are based off popular cities in the United States with the exception of London. For example, in *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Grand Theft Auto IV* the main city, Liberty City, is based off of New York City with landmarks of similar design as well as street maps for user navigation. In “High Art/Low Life: The Art of Playing *Grand Theft Auto*,” Soraya Murray explores not only the narrative that takes place within the *Grand Theft Auto* series but also the ways in which *GTA* has created both spaces and places for users. Murray argues, “by learning how to effectively navigate a simulated body within this manifestation, the quality of place comes to life” (2005, 92). Place gets created through the ways in which our senses must be active—image, tactility, and sound must all be utilized in order to successfully navigate these (re)created cities.

Along these lines constitutional and representational orders of the city are helpful. Along with constitutional and representational orders, the addition of experiential order provides insight into the design of cities both physically and digitally. What makes the cities in *Grand Theft Auto* legitimate are the ways in which they are designed. Similar to Schweizer's analysis of *Saints Row: The Third's City*, what makes *Grand Theft Auto* as a series excel at the development of their open world city is not simply recreation value but the ways in which they utilize the requirements of Douglas Allen's constitutional order of the city.

According to Allen, the four constitutional requirements of cities are streets, boundaries, public places, and monuments. Streets allow for people to navigate, move, and communicate with each other while also developing a layout for the city. In terms of design it is imperative for cities to have streets for players to navigate because they are the foundation of urban world creation, rather than simply being representations of cities. Boundaries begin to define cities, especially digital cities, more than streets. Again it becomes evident that boundaries within videogames are deployed in different ways and thus create and recreate place. Boundaries exist within the programming, the development of the city, as well as boundaries or rules that trigger in-game events that the character must interact with to continue throughout the narrative.

Public places play a role in situating people, physically and digitally, within their community—"we become aware of our role as citizens and our relation to others in *public places*, which is why it is significant for games to provide us with the illusion that other people use the world" (Schweizer 2013, 3). Within *Grand Theft Auto V* it is

imperative for players to believe that they are not playing a single-player game.¹⁶ What this does is create public places for the player to interact with. Through these interactions the characters are given side missions and are actually engaging with their surroundings. These side conversations are giving the player grounding in that reality. It is imperative that the game encourage side missions as well as dialogue both with and without the player character. These interactions not only emphasize our role in the game as characters, but situate us as citizens within the game. It is this interaction that moves us past the peripheral barrier and allows for us to engage with the digital content.

Lastly monuments provide people with a historical reference. Monuments allow for people to establish community identities. It is here that two references can be made. First, to Yi-Fu Tuan and the idea that places do not necessarily have to be inhabitable but rather, they can be objects that hold specific meanings for individuals, groups, or communities. Second, we must think back to ideas surrounding the recreation of monuments and buildings within *Grand Theft Auto V*. Within the narrative the player needs to interact with these places and objects, thus recreating memories and histories associated with them.

Grand Theft Auto, in all its iterations, has created and recreated cityscapes that have allowed for free-play that encourages players to navigate a designed layout and

¹⁶ Players have the option of multiplayer but for the most part single player is the most popular mode of play.

learn the flow of the city. In many instances this free-play allows for much social critique and allows for the (re)creation of associated meanings. The reconstruction of buildings, landmarks, and even a mapping structure in the series is important in place-making and the experience of place. The consistency of the cityscape from reality to game allows for the transference of meaning and thus the creation of place through mapping. We can look at the meaning of different buildings and how they can affect the place narrative. Even if players do not have a working understanding of the city of Los Angeles (Los Santos), the ways in which it has been recreated with some artistic freedom allows for the player to perceive of a Los Angeles within the context of *Grand Theft Auto V*.



Figure 5 Partial map of *Grand Theft Auto V*. Source: <http://orc2.com/images/thumb/9/93/Libuildingmap.jpg/600px-Libuildingmap.jpg>

It is also through the map and our newly constructed understandings of place where space starts its transformation into something of value. Space becomes place when we endow it with specific meanings. Players are no longer passive in their experience of the city—they actively understand the city so that they can quickly and easily advance throughout the game. Los Santos County becomes a place for players because they have transformed it from “undifferentiated space” into a place “[endowed] with value” (Tuan 2001, 6).

One night I decide to step out of my safehouse and get in my white Bravado Buffalo, Sports edition and drive down my street (Hillcrest Avenue), down a series of streets—taking Northcrest Ave, to Hillcrest Ridge Access Rd, to South Mo Milton Rd, to Cockingend Rd, down the picture perfect hills of Dunstable Dr.—a path I’ve taken several times before. On my way I decide to steal a car, a beautiful car might I add. One I’d only be able to afford if I played the stocks right. It’s a white Grotti Carbonizzare, Sports edition. I pop in my GPS one of the local customs shops, Los Santos Customs, to deck out my new ride. When I get there I opt for the Ultra Blue paint job, for the super low cost of \$400.00 and go on my merry way.

Speeding down Meteor Street, in a car that handles like a yacht, I accidentally run over a pedestrian. Of course it had to be right in front of a police car. I hear the sirens and look at my Heads-Up Display (HUD)¹⁷, one star warning and red and blue

¹⁷ The Heads-Up Display plays an integral role in player navigation throughout many 3-D games, especially games that rely on first-person angles. This is where players see character representation (dots, triangles) and have a live action view of their location within the game—an active GPS for players.

flashing map. Shit. I don't know this area at all. I'm not familiar with West Vinewood enough that this is going to be even remotely a smooth ride. Here goes. I have no sense of direction. I hit a taxi cab, which is slowing my getaway down too much for my liking. My wanted level is at three. At this point I am frantically, yet successfully, threading the needle between cars and trying to avoid cops on my anxiety ridden trip through the city. Just when I think I made a clean get away, I slam into a light post, causing my brand new, albeit stolen, car right into a lamp post. This causes me to flip my way into the \$1 Saver corner store. With this accident comes a swarm of police cruisers and SWAT helicopters. Before I know it I hear the music drop and "WASTED" flashing on my screen. I emerge outside the Police Station. I had successfully made it all the way down to Vespucci Boulevard (what is essentially the beach). Time to start over.

Starting over meant that I lost my car and some money. An aspect that I am *not* okay with, considering the amount of cash I dropped on that car and the trouble I went through to get it. Whatever. I find another car and start driving. This time I'm driving around a bit more frustrated and a lot slower. Due to some faulty finger maneuvers on my controller I accidentally shoot off my gun. CRAP. Questions start running through my head, scrolling across my mind like a marquee in Times Square. Did I shoot anyone? Did anyone notice? Okay, I didn't harm anyone. Good. What?! I'm wanted by the cops—why does this always happen to me. I drive straight towards the Pacific Ocean, which means off-roading on Vespucci Beach (again). There is no way the cops are going to find me here; apparently I was horribly mistaken. I think to myself "Shit,

where do I go now?” Time to hop on Greenwich Parkway and make a b-line for Los Santos Customs. Pop it in my GPS and I am on my way. I follow the purple line, which has marked my path from the beach to the customs shop, apparently finding every cop car in Los Santos on my way. Oh well, here’s to hoping my beat up car can make it in one piece. I make it to the shop thinking the coast is clear. Alas, I was wrong again—it’s not enough. I can hear them yelling outside and telling me to get out of my vehicle. So I exit the shop and take off like a bat out of hell. I make it to the canals of the city hoping they won’t follow me; of course they do. I pop in the safehouse on my GPS and hope this is enough to shake the cops. After ramming into cop cars and almost sinking my car, it’s about to blow.

It is at this point I get out of my car and in doing so, I know I’m in for a fire fight. I can’t help it. The cop car looks so tempting with its blaring sirens and perfect frame, so, I steal the car. I make it a mile down the road before a cop gets off a good shot, flips my car, and *WASTED*. Adventure over. It’s moments like there where I am entirely grateful for my map and points of reference. Even though I was unsuccessful in my getaways, without the map and a deeper understanding of the city, I would have been completely lost. However, through this unsuccessful navigation I have been creating place. I now will remember the \$1 Saver and the horrible crash I had there—it has become a landmark of the city.

When the game launches it will give you tips and tricks for the game, one of them being “Too Easy? Turn off the HUD and GPS tracking for a more immersive experience.” I’m sure this had popped up so many times before but was only noticed

because I was doing this research, and I chuckled a bit. My immersion is based entirely on GPS tracking and my HUD. I find it necessary in both the digital and physical aspects of my life that I need a map, I am directionally challenged. I still need my GPS to navigate certain parts of my town. It's too hard to keep track of every little side street and highway entrance. It is little nuances to the game that continue to suggest that play is a highly individual experience and players will experience immersion differently, thus experiencing place and space differently as well.

Grand Theft Auto V has designed a city that allows for the game to become a third place, it is neither home nor work. Within this third place there are very prescriptive memories that foster a sense of imagination, potentialities, and possibilities. Though frustrating, I enjoy driving around Los Santos trying to strategically lose the cops, even if sometimes it's unsuccessful. If we look to the original definition of place as being founded in geography, combined with the ways in which it guides the human experience, the design of Los Santos County and the larger San Andreas area become important. Boundaries of the city define how players are navigating with their characters and where they are going. Any action taken outside of the boundaries is strictly punished. For example, players cannot jump out of cars, jump off of buildings, or even jump over specific defining factors of the city without either (a) being "wasted" or (b) having their health diminished drastically or, in my case, accidentally firing off your weapon because of mishandling leading to traumatic run-ins with the cops (a point which I touch on later in this section, because not only are boundaries defined by the game design but also through the use of language).

Places within *Grand Theft Auto V*, designed around the city, are also viewed through the lens of the personal or private. I as a player cannot directly decorate my safehouse, based on which character I have active, I am only eligible to save in a very specific spot (unless I choose to quick save). For example, when I was first introduced to Trevor I was only eligible to save in his trailer out in Sandy Shores. When I continued to progress through Trevor's narrative I was then given the ability to enter and save at a safehouse in Los Santos proper. Though they are located on the map, if we think of these cities as being populated by others, which is an important aspect of interactivity and immersion, no one else knew about these private places but me, nor do they know what's in them and what the things within them may mean to the character I was playing. This aspect of *Grand Theft Auto V* can be referred to as felt value. It is through these safehouses that characters' "needs such as those for food, water, rest, and procreation, are satisfied" (Tuan 2001, 4). Players may not be doing all of these things actively; however, it is the already existing ideas of what a home means that lead players to construct them as places where these needs would be met.

A large part of the experience of place within the city is the realness factor. Throughout this section a common thread has been sewn; places must exhibit some form of realness within the digital. This realness is exhibited in the following ways, persistence, physicality, and interaction (Castronova 2005). Though persistence is not necessarily relevant in all game environments within *GTAV*, the multiplayer environment does exist and it is a part of this realness. These criteria according to Edward Castronova are what create places within the physical and digital. Arguably what these

criteria do is remove the body from a strictly corporeal existence and remove its ability to become immersed in digital environments/worlds and be effected by it. These criteria create presence, an important aspect of place-making within games, not just *Grand Theft Auto V*.

Moving forward, language becomes a large part of this realness as well, potentially adding another criteria to the list set forth by Castronova. What these criteria do is create a world endowed with meaning not only because it is recreated from a physical city or location but also because they legitimize the digital as a space that is not imagined. It is a non-imagined place specifically because I, as a player, am able to interact with recreated monuments from California and create memories of them. Though I have not visited the Hollywood Walk of Fame, I have very fond memories of the Vinewood Walk of Fame—I have crashed my car into a light post, ran cops around the block a few times, and even accidentally jumped out of my car wasting myself. My *only* experience of the Walk of Fame is through digital mediation; however, because I know this place actually exists, it lends itself to my immersion into the game.

Language through Los Santos

Looking back at Yi-Fu Tuan's argument that speech and the process of naming becomes a powerful place-making tool, it can be argued that within *Grand Theft Auto V*, specifically Los Santos County, the names of the areas within the county become ways for players to identify who is located within those cities and begin to associate

meanings with them. Not only does it situate the player with who is present in that specific area but also what dominant identity and culture is present.

Naming within the game may not even necessarily be referred to as the towns within the county and the greater San Andreas area. It can become a part of the ways in which players themselves are referring to areas within the game. So if they are not referring to them by Sandy Shores, they are referring to them based on their own meanings and associations they have gathered through the narrative and completing missions. The fact that these places have been given names lends itself to its existence within the game and as a part of the actual physical geography of California.

Players also may be associating areas in the game with their physical counterparts. For example when playing the game with a colleague of mine they kept mentioning their associations with the places in the physical. So not only are places being created by in-game associations with the landscape of the city, but also through physical associations of the city. It is this aspect of place-making and the experience of place that carries over from understandings of mapping and design. It is this combined with the layout of the city that create place for players.

I engaged with *Grand Theft Auto V* through not only the forced narratives that all players must go through to get to the end but, through the ways in which I was bounded by the game design. The map allowed for me to understand the limitations of both my character and specific objects within the game. I needed to utilize the map in more ways than one. *Not* only was I using the map as a GPS but also as a way to determine where I would be able to find specific characters within the game. When

trying to deploy some of de Certeau's concepts of strategies and tactics (e.g., jumping over hedges to gain a shortcut advantage during timed missions), I was met with much resistance by the game design. Slowly but surely I was becoming more familiar with the areas and what each area meant to my active character.

Traveling through certain areas meant having to prepare myself for potential gang interactions and ultimately gang violence on my character.¹⁸ For example, if I had Trevor as my active character and I wandered onto Grove Street, a part of the territory of the Ballas, and happened to have my gun out from a prior mission or steal a car, I would be attacked. This attack does not always necessarily mean gun violence, but it does mean that I need to be careful as to where I try to "find" a car to help navigate the city more. This experience changes drastically if I have Franklin as my active character. As a member of the Ballas rival gang, the Families, I am unwelcome in their territory,¹⁹ which means navigating *around* this specific area while I am advancing through Franklin's narrative. It is here where the map, my integration, and the meanings those individual characters bring to each place within the game, effect the meanings I create throughout the game.

¹⁸ In some instances; however, the gang will come to the aid of my character. If I play as Franklin and am wanted by the cops and enter "The Families" territory, a gang this character is affiliated with, they will help get the cops off my tail.

¹⁹ Their territories include Grove Street cul-de-sac, Davis Ave, Brouge Avenue, Covenant Avenue, and Paleto Bay.

Language is also understood here beyond concepts of naming. Stepping away from Tuan's argument that naming is a form of place-making, language can mean dialect as well. The ways in which dialects appear within different settings is a large portion of how place gets experienced as well as the ways people interact with them. In areas located near Vinewood, Morningwood, and Richman, conversations revolve around capitalistic ventures, coffee shops, and shopping. These conversations are meant to be somewhat comedic and play off physical stereotypes.²⁰

I found listening to pedestrians and character responses to my playing absolutely hilarious and changing. It adds to the realness factor and immersion to believe that there are people actually in the game that you can interact with and are having their own conversations. For me, it became more appealing to hear the conversations (though they become like a broken record after a while) of non-playable characters and watch their movement than it had been in previous versions of GTA. It was not uncommon to hear outlandish quotes such as "I'm on the Paleolithic diet! Try to get involved," "dude! Have you seen that 2 girls 1 cup video?! Never again bro." Conversations like these are reminiscent of popular internet culture memes. At the same time pedestrians are interacting with each other they also interact with your main character sometimes acknowledging them by their first name.

²⁰ In *Grand Theft Auto V*, more so than any other GTA game, players can interact with pedestrians, not just eavesdrop on conversations. The main character at the time will determine how the conversation/interaction will go.

At one point in the game, I became involved in a conversation in which Michael and Trevor (who, throughout the game, has become one of my favorite characters for a myriad of reasons) are having an argument and it surrounds Trevor being a hipster:

Michael: You're gentrifying. Soon, the skinny jeans will show up, then the skinny lattes, and then the bankers. And you'll be somewhere else starting the cycle all over again.

Trevor's response to this is that of pure anger and disbelief, he finds the term to not only be degrading but highly offensive. It's conversations like these that changed my experience of playing Michael, Trevor, and Franklin. This was due to the ways in which characters interact with not only one another but other non-playable characters and their surroundings.

A part of understanding language within Grand Theft Auto V is experiencing language outside of traditional notions of language. Here, I argue that non-traditional aspects of language are the radio stations and soundscape of Los Santos. Similar to the ways in which language defines the dominant culture, the music and sounds associated with specific areas contribute to the ways in which we assign meaning to neighborhoods in Los Santos. The radio stations combined with the names of each area within Los Santos County proper and dialects are what create place-making through language.

Players are encouraged to customize the radio stations of their experience. The only catch? Only certain radio stations are available within certain neighborhoods. What is being played in downtown and South Los Santos will not be the same as Vinewood, Rockford Hills, or Morningwood, nor will it be the same as those available in

the more country aspect of Los Santos, Sandy Shores. Transitions in Grand Theft Auto V occur seamlessly. Traveling through Los Santos, players will experience a bit of static and a new radio station when transitioning out of one radio neighborhood and into another.

In a study that focused primarily on *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* and their deployment of music, Kirl Miller (2007) states that the game fosters the ultimate tourist experience and allows for the player to control their relationship and identification with the playable character through several different aspects, but most importantly the radio and the music made available to the player. Miller makes it clear; however, not all radio stations are playing music. Some stations are focused highly on social and political commentary which contributes also with the identification of place within the game narrative.

Language in this instance is a different deployment of place-making. It is not the intention of creating place surrounding specific communities but rather a positioning harkening back to Kalay and Marx—the creation of a particular sense of place. Players are not only stepping into a replicated architectural project meant to foster community and social networks; they are stepping into a quasi-crafted experience in which they are encouraged to create their own experience and develop their own meanings of the different aspects of Los Santos. The language of the radio does not affect or effect the playable character at any point throughout the game, making the radio all about the player and player immersion.

Similar to Miller's study with San Andreas, Los Santos deploys advertisements that serve as a way for the player to remember a specific physical memory and/or associate and replicate it in the digital. The political commentary engages the player in not only Grand Theft Auto V politics but serves as satire on critical aspects of physical politics. Each political commentator will be different and address different aspects of Los Santos life.

More so than in last games, the radio stations are linked to locales within the game. Arguably the first relationship between music and local was Radio Espantoso, a Spanish-language station, in Vice City. In *GTAV* the relationship is made more evident. In Sandy Shores, located on the border of Los Santos County and Blaine County, the main radio station is Rebel Radio 101.9 and it plays non-stop Country music. The radio language is important to the ways in which players experience the place of Sandy Shores. The game is designed so that players are gaining a fuller experience of what it's like to be "in the country." Sandy Shores is filled with the typical stereo-types of who lives in the country and the music hosted here provides a more encapsulating experience for the player.

Speaking towards place and childhood memories or a sense of nostalgia, Miller writes explicitly that the 80s soundtrack associated with Vice City does not necessarily bring back actual memories but representations of what is perceived to be the 80s. The music here may also create a sense of place that is not associated with the violence on the screen but rather changes the mood of the game entirely. Players are not being asked

to adhere to specific understandings of Los Santos; rather they are creating and potentially recreating their own understandings of what a city is meant to be or what the country is meant to be through the language of the radio. In relation to Vice City, Miller states “in a game whose plot is largely oriented around contract killings, an ‘80s pop soundtrack and ads that skewer Reagan-era conspicuous consumption provide a welcome counterweight to stylized brutal violence” (2007, 413).

Moving forward the argument then becomes the language of the radio becomes tailored to the larger social cultural commentary that is going on throughout San Andreas. Players are encouraged to make associations with the main character, CJ, and thus the radio stations are on a constant shuffle of hip-hop, reggae, and other genres that are stereotypically associated with urban black culture (Miller 2007). This theme is relatively similar with GTAV. Players are meant to connect with Los Santos and the playable characters; however, it is complicated by the fact that there are three main characters for the player to choose from at any given time. Thus the radio becomes not only a character identification tool but a place identification tool. The radio stations must mimic stereotypical place associations not group stereotypes.

Players have the ability to choose corresponding music for their character choice as well as the place they are currently in, but they also have the option of subverting what it means to be in a specific place or inhabit a specific character. Through my experience with GTAV I began playing without the music and it ruined a lot of the experience of driving around—I never drive with the radio off; why would I do it in an immersive environment like *Grand Theft Auto*?

I arguably did two things in GTAV that were similar to what other players did, plan my music according to the activity within the game and plan it according to where I am. I like to tailor the music to where I am within the game. If I am driving around Sandy Shores not engaging in intense missions, I turn on Rebel Radio or Blaine County Radio—this is an unwinding period. Interestingly enough I listen to two similar stations on my way home from work unwinding from my day; SiriusXM Progressive Talk Radio or SiriusXM High-way. If I am about to engage in a high intensity mission I will put on Channel X (Punk Rock) or Soulwax FM (techno, electronic, house).

While doing a bit more digging into the ways the radio works within *Grand Theft Auto V*, it came to my attention that while playing Trevor there will be times where he will change the radio station himself—only if he doesn't agree with your music choices. When this event happens, Trevor will shake his head, as if to shake it in shame and say "I can't stand this music." I found this interesting because not only were we able to customize how we experienced specific places, Trevor is programmed to create a specific place for you, the player. His actions, though not necessarily common place for my gameplay, force the player to experience Trevor as a specific type of person, consequently changing the ways the player themselves navigates. It may even force the player to turn the radio off if the radio stations become bothersome.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

What are we to take from all this? Starting with a point that I made in my introduction, my interest in this project came from a desire to understand the ways in which players experienced place. The three categories that I broke down here—console design, mapping and the cityscape, and language—are the lenses through which I decided to explore this. Place and the experiences of place are important for future understandings of race, gender, and sexuality—all topics that are on a larger scope than this project entailed.

This research utilized textual analysis and personal immersion, giving a twist to autoethnographic research methods to come to a few conclusions. Space encompasses all everyday activities; however, it holds no meaning. Place on the other hand is meaningful. Exploring videogames and place-making I came to the conclusions that it would best serve this project to break down the experience of place into console design, mapping, and language.

Grand Theft Auto V became the game that I explored these categories through because it served as the perfect example of the highly individualized modes of play, because it is an open world game, there is much room for change within it. Again I emphasize here that the way that I play games, as one who explores, is different from how my friends would play the game. It is this individualization of play that works towards a better understanding of play and how we learn from it. Because play is something so personal the meanings we receive from games is also highly personal. These

meanings are input into the game not by the designers (though they help set up a specific structure), but by the player themselves. Affordances and constraints explored the phenomenology of the console; mapping and the cityscape explored the experience and navigation of the city; and language played off of the customizable user experience. Each addressed how place gets created in a digital environment such as *Grand Theft Auto V*.

At the time of my proposal and further research, *Watch Dogs* (also written as *WATCH_DOGS*) was in the process of being developed and released. Due to the timing I could not include the game in this paper. *Watch Dogs* is an open world stealth game, taking place in Chicago, which was released by Ubisoft in May of 2014. Unlike *Grand Theft Auto V*, *Watch Dogs* allows for the player to choose between being a vigilante or criminal hacker, through a reputation system that has been designed into the game. In a similar vein to *Grand Theft Auto V*, players are required to complete a series of missions to understand Aiden Pearce's (the main character) history and why he is trying to hack into Chicago's central operating system. While *Grand Theft Auto* has its own construction of the spaces it's representing, *Watch Dogs* has the pretense of giving players Chicago as it is. It is this point that makes the somewhat goofy and silly aspects of open world games stand out as unnatural. I would be interesting in researching the player experience through *Watch Dogs* and how it does or does not relate to this study on *Grand Theft Auto* and the potential social and cultural implications of *Watch Dogs*.

I mentioned early on the importance of studying space, place, and place-making, to get a better understanding of the social and cultural implications of games.

Though not addressed in this research directly, these social and cultural implications define the way in which I approached and how I believe research in this field should be addressed in the future. Astra Taylor, in her book “The People’s Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age,” very early on states we must not “respond to troubling disclosures and other disappointments with cynicism and resignation when what we need is clearheaded and rigorous inquiry into the obstacles that have stalled some of the positive changes the Internet was supposed to usher in” (Taylor 2014, 9). Though here she is talking about Silicon Valley executives and their clichés about “changing the world”, I believe it is here where the importance of space, place, and place-making, become more apparent. Before we can start to pass judgment about whether or not games are good or bad (e.g., creating an overly aggressive and violent youth culture) we must first understand how players are relating to these games. This research serves as entry point “A.” Through space, place, and place-making, we are seeing the foundations laid for a more encompassing discourse surrounding digital immersion.

Studying *Grand Theft Auto V* and games like it have a wide range of social and cultural implications inherent in their structure. In the context of this paper, though laying the foundational work for a more in-depth analysis of race, gender, and sexuality, it is evident that *Grand Theft Auto V* (and arguably the series) serves as a mirror to society and it is not always in a good and/or beneficial way. *Grand Theft Auto* and games like it continue to perpetuate dominant stereotypes, and although these stereo-

types are evident and displayed in other consumed media, it is more active in the videogame industry. The prolongation of these stereotypes is especially important to understand through the lens(es) of immersion/presence, interactivity, and play, concepts that change the ways we receive information—these are all categories that have been addressed throughout this research.

For future work in this field I would engage in as well as encourage others to conduct ethnographic research to expand upon the ways in which players experience place. Rather than looking at one person's experiences, it would be more beneficial to the field to understand how others are experiencing place creation and determine whether or not they think it is important for games studies to go down this route. It would be here that a more human element would be added to the mix—voices speak volumes, not a single voice.

For me, the implications of this research lie in my original interest in videogames; stepping away from a narrow lens of studying videogames and violence, while also exploring the ways in which games are a part of the everyday human experience, a way they create meanings, and also create communities. Working with the topic of community and videogames as a community creating activity was beyond the scope of this research project; however, I think future research should include the ways in which community(ies) get created online. Drawing on the ways in which place and place-making are defined throughout this text, they are inherently linked to community and the sense of community for the person, both digitally and physically. These communities are getting pushed by fundamental human needs to socialize and group. Out of the

scope of this research it is fair to say that through experience of place and immersion, communities form around videogames and prove to be a social factor.

It is also through the context of videogames where play as a pedagogical tool becomes apparent. Play is something that teaches us boundaries of the human experience. Play also teaches us how to navigate through social cues and cultural understandings of the everyday. It is also through play where we become social beings. It is also here where topics such as race, gender, and sexuality would become part of the larger social and cultural implications of videogames, especially within games such as *Grand Theft Auto*. The *Grand Theft Auto* series has created a world that alludes to specific stereotypes surrounding the aforementioned categories and their pervyance throughout contemporary American society.²¹ This work would focus around play as a pedagogical tool but also how the immersive environments of play allow for a larger social commentary.

I explored games as a singular entity with one player; however, videogames are not socially isolating events. If play is a major aspect of videogames and we learn through play, it is fair to say that we cannot learn on our own during play (this is not the case for all types of play). There must be other people or the illusion of other people inhabiting these worlds, as stated earlier. Thus this immersion leads to an increase in videogames being viewed as a social platform rather than a medium that allows for

²¹ Though there have been expansion packs to the games as stated earlier in the text, the main focus of the series is within the United States and thus a critical analysis of culture within the U.S is a fair statement.

greater social isolation. I argue that through an understanding of space, place, and place-making a culmination of topics can be addressed—mainly because of the ways they situate larger social and cultural constructs within the United States. These two topics—social isolation/community along with social and cultural constructs—were not directly addressed here, it is important to understand where the future of this research lies.

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